Echoes of Memories

Where Memories Still Breathe

One Life • Many Milestones • Countless Memories

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This edition draws on family accounts and personal memories shared by the author. The passages about the time before his birth and his earliest childhood should be read as accounts handed down by his family.

Preface · One Day I Looked Back

Some journeys begin to make sense only when we stop looking ahead and turn to look back.

Sometimes, after many years, a familiar face suddenly comes to mind. And with it comes a question: “Someone who once took up so much space in my life—where are they in my day-to-day world now?”

Then I remember another face. An old house. A step at school. A railway platform. A friend’s laughter. A reprimand from someone close. A hand placed on my shoulder without a word. And suddenly I realise that moving forward in life also means leaving a great deal behind.

Perhaps there comes an age when we ask for the first time: Has what I left behind really been lost to me? This book may have begun with that very question.

When I Was Busy Living

Who has time to make sense of life while living it? As a child, I waited for the next holiday. At school, I looked forward to moving up a class. As a young man, I looked to the future. Then came the worry of standing on my own feet.

Work brought responsibilities. The family grew. I moved from city to city, met people and formed relationships.

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Some dreams came true. Others changed shape along the way. And I kept going.

It scarcely occurred to me that some of the days I thought ordinary and passed through without a second thought would become the most precious pages of my life years later.

I was always looking towards the next milestone. Meanwhile, life was quietly building a world behind me, too.

The Day I Saw How Far I Had Come

Then one day I looked back. There was no special occasion, no celebration, no achievement to mark. I simply felt that I had come a long way. Something curious happened when I looked back. The first things that came to mind were faces, not achievements.

A few voices. A few places. Some utterly ordinary moments. I must have seen many important papers in my life. Results. Appointments. Formal letters. Decisions. Many of them I can no longer recall in full. Yet I still remember:

A hand on my shoulder. The sound of a friend laughing freely. Someone dear walking me to the door as I left home. Those few minutes of waiting at a railway station. The restless wait for a letter. Being told off for a mistake.

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And the moment someone believed in me when my own belief was beginning to falter. What, in the end, stays with us? A question lodged itself somewhere inside me.

What is a life really made of? The achievements we put in our biographies? The positions we held? Certificates? Property? Or those small moments for which there is no official record?

I had no answer then. I probably still do not have a complete one. But looking back, I did feel this much: many things that once seemed enormous now look small. And some I passed by as ordinary now seem immense. Perhaps time changes the meaning of events more than it changes the events themselves.

The Questions Change as We Grow Older

Once I used to ask myself: What will I become? How far will I go? How much will I achieve? Will my dreams come true?

Years later, those questions began to sound different. Now I sometimes ask: Who walked beside me? Who held my hand in difficult times? For whom did I manage to show up when it mattered? What difference did my presence make in someone's life? And the hardest question of all: Did I ever tell the people who made me who I am what they meant to me?

Perhaps it was somewhere among these questions that this book found its place.

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This Is No Great Person’s Story

I am not writing to prove that my life was exceptional. Much of what filled it is familiar to millions of people: home, school, friends, dreams, youth, love, partings, work, family, responsibilities, successes and failures.

Some decisions were right. Some were wrong. There are things I am still proud of and moments I can look back at now only to wish I had understood a little more then.

Perhaps the meaning of this book lies in that ordinariness. A life does not have to be exceptional for its story to matter. An ordinary life can hold countless extraordinary feelings.

These Pages Will Hold Shadows, Too

I do not want to dress up the past. Where there was laughter, there will be laughter. Where there was love, there will be love. Where there was success, there will be room for its joy.

And where I made a mistake, it will be called a mistake. Where there was fear, I will not disguise it as courage. Where a relationship was left unresolved, I will not give it a happy ending it never had.

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And where I was wrong, I will not invent a new defence years later. Looking back is more than remembering old days. Sometimes it means standing for a while before the person you used to be without offering an explanation.

Questions I Must Ask Myself

Did I give the people I loved enough time? Did a success cost me more than it needed to? Did a relationship fade simply because neither of us took the first step? Was there someone I should have apologised to?

Was there someone I still owed thanks? Did I understand what someone meant to me only after they had gone away? And in the rush of life, did I ever reach my destination only to realise that someone very dear to me had been left behind?

I do not have all the answers. I may still lack them by the end of this book. I have come to think that some questions are there simply to help us see ourselves a little more clearly.

The People Who Shaped Me

Many faces will appear on this journey. Parents. Family. Teachers. Friends. Classmates. Colleagues. Seniors. Juniors. And people who shared only a small part of my life but left a lasting mark.

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I want to understand what changed in me because I met these people, beyond recording when we met. One taught me discipline. Another gave me courage. Someone showed me what love means. Someone taught me how to wait. Someone how to get back up after defeat. Someone how to forgive.

And perhaps someone taught me nothing at all and simply stood beside me when times were hard. Sometimes that alone is enough to change a life.

We Do Not Make Ourselves Alone

Looking back now, I see more clearly how much goes into making us who we are. Our decisions shape us, and so do many other things.

The homes we grew up in. The voices we heard from childhood. The teachers who told us off. The friends who laughed with us at our own foolishness. The people who believed in us.

The failures we never chose. The partings we could not prevent. The small joys whose value we often recognised only after they had passed. A little of many people lives within each of us.

Perhaps who we become is something many relationships create together.

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I Will Not Put My Past Self on Trial

There is one thing I will have to keep in mind as I write this book. I do not want to judge my past with the understanding I have today. What seems obvious now may have looked very different thirty or forty years ago. I was a different age then.

The circumstances and resources were different. Society was different. We knew different things and feared different things. Even our dreams spoke a different language.

So I do not want to put my former self on trial in the court of the present. I simply want to meet him and ask: What did you want then? What frightened you? What made you laugh? What were you waiting for? Whom were you afraid of losing? Whom did you lose? And what was your greatest hope for the future?

Perhaps, somewhere in those questions, I will catch sight again of the person I once was.

A Conversation with Myself

This book will be a long conversation with myself, beyond any list of achievements. Sometimes smiling. Sometimes uneasy. Sometimes recalling the feel of a long-ago touch. Sometimes reconsidering a decision. And sometimes, perhaps, sitting quietly after a page has been written. Because some things take words to put on paper. Others take silence to understand.

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The Journey Is Still Underway

I am not writing this book from a place where I can see the whole of my life. The journey is still underway. This is the story of a person still becoming.

From the child whose world once stretched only from home to school, to the young man who thought the whole future was waiting for him, and then to the person who gradually learned that life's hardest tests do not always come with a question paper.

Some tests come with no marks. The person who takes them is simply changed.

Perhaps This Is Why I Had to Write

I do not know what conclusions I will draw about my life at the end of this journey. Perhaps I will reach none. But I do feel now that some doors should be opened. Some old roads should be walked again.

Some people should be met again, even if only in words. Some thanks are overdue. Some mistakes should be admitted. And some ordinary moments deserve a place I could not give them while living through them. Perhaps that is what writing is for: to understand for the first time what the past meant, even though we cannot bring it back.

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A Personal Request to the Reader

The first chapter proper is about to begin. Before it does, I would like to say one small thing. As you read my story, let your own life come to mind now and then between the lines.

If a familiar face comes to mind, let it come. If you remember a friend you have not spoken to in years, say their name to yourself. If some small thing about your parents suddenly comes back to you, stay a little while with that memory.

And if you see the face of someone to whom you have long wanted to say something, resist the urge to turn the page straightaway. If you can, talk to them. There will be time to read the book later. Some relationships do not always have that much time.

One last question Before you begin the first chapter, ask yourself just this: If tonight you could choose only five moments from all the years you have lived and keep them with you for ever, which five would you choose?

One of them might be a great achievement.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my revered parents, whose sacrifices, devotion, values and selfless love gave direction to every course my life took. They endured hardships of their own and never let their children's dreams shrink. They taught me patience in adversity, humility in success and humanity in every circumstance. Their quiet blessings and tireless efforts laid the foundation for my entire journey.

I also dedicate it to the little smiles that gave life new meaning. Their innocent laughter gave me energy on weary days. The small things they said eased every worry, and the countless dreams I saw in their eyes inspired me to do a little better each day. Because of them, life became more than a succession of responsibilities. It became something beautiful, full of hope, enthusiasm and fresh ways of seeing.

And I dedicate it to my wife, who stood by me as a quiet source of strength in every circumstance. When life became difficult, she stood firm with patience. When I was weary and unsettled, she gave me faith and courage. To walk beside me through every struggle, give me confidence in every decision and hold the family together with love and balance, all without expecting anything in return, means more than words can say. Her companionship on this long journey has felt like a blessing from God.

Without their love, blessings, sacrifices and unwavering support, this book would have remained an unfinished idea.

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Your affection, trust, support and good wishes have enriched my life.

This book is a humble tribute to the close relationships and cherished memories that have given my life meaning, inspiration and a sense of belonging.

I also thank, from the bottom of my heart, all the dear ones, friends and kindred spirits who came into my life and lit it with love, belonging and cherished memories through their selfless affection, good wishes, blessings and warmth. Their companionship will always be one of the priceless things I carry from this journey.

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We are equally grateful to the friends who shared valuable suggestions, recollections and ideas, helped verify facts and offered creative guidance. Over time, their contributions have enriched and refined the book and given it greater meaning.

We also owe a deep debt of gratitude to the people we came to know through friends with whom we studied during the years from 1966 to 2026. With time, they became an integral part of our extended family. Their affection, warmth, encouragement and trust brought new energy, direction and sensitivity to this journey through memory.

This book gathers my memories and reflects the selfless affection, support, trust and participation of all those friends, their families and the people close to us who helped make it possible, directly or indirectly.

I bow my head to you all in heartfelt gratitude.

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Gratitude for the Inspiration

I offer my heartfelt thanks to my junior colleague, Ms Ragini, who inspired me to write this book.

Her enthusiasm, faith and constant encouragement gave me the courage to put my experiences, thoughts and values into words.

She inspired me to give voice to feelings buried deep within me and held my hand throughout the journey with genuine support, trust and warmth. Whenever the words began to come apart, my feelings fell silent or I found myself hesitating, her affection, patience and encouragement gave me the courage to go on.

Without her affection, faith and dedication, these feelings might have stayed tucked away in a corner of my mind, and this book might never have reached your heart.

I will always hold her in my heart with respect, affection and gratitude.

Some bonds find their meaning in what we feel rather than what we say, and those bonds remain close to the heart for a lifetime.

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A Note from the Author

Every life is a unique story. Over the course of our lives, we gain experience, achieve things, face challenges and touch the lives of many people. Our memories may grow hazy with time, but when we preserve them in words, they can inspire generations to come.

Echoes of Memories is a record of your own story: your thoughts, struggles, achievements and the values by which you live. Its purpose is to encourage each person to write their own life story so their experience and legacy can reach future generations.

The chapters and questions invite readers to reflect on different aspects of their lives and write about them in simple language. Those lived experiences, gathered on the page, can become a priceless inheritance for families and society.

I believe every person’s life holds something the world can learn from. If we leave our own stories unwritten, future generations will miss out on many of our most significant experiences.

I hope this book helps you preserve the priceless memories of your life.

Let me say it once more: this will be more than my autobiography.

— Sanjay Kumar Rai

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Little by Little, I Began to Realise…

I was writing the story of my whole generation as well as my own life. This would be more than my story.

It Will Be the Story of Millions…

Who grew up with little but whose dreams knew no bounds.

Who were educated by hardship rather than by comfort.

It Will Be the Story of Parents…

Who put off what they wanted for the sake of their children's future. Who poured their share of milk into their children's glasses. Who paid school fees instead of buying new clothes for themselves. Who kept wearing the same sandals after having them stitched again and again. Who bought the children's festival clothes first.

Who added up expenses at the end of the month without ever running short of hope. Who saw overtime as a way to build their family's future. Who rose first in the morning and went to bed last at night. Who left their weariness at the doorstep. Who always smiled in front of their children. Who said after every setback, "It will be all right next time."

It Will Be the Story of Students…

Four friends sharing one textbook. Studying all night and going straight to the examination room in the morning. Sleeping in a hostel room,

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four to a fan. Making the pickle sent from home the shared wealth of the whole room.

Talking for hours over a glass of tea about changing the world. Riding a single bicycle two at a time, sometimes even three. Booking tickets for the holidays months ahead. Leaving home with a trunk, bedding and a few dreams. Reading a letter from Mother over and over.

Waiting impatiently for a money order. Feeling rich with ten rupees in a pocket. Hiding tears while saying goodbye at the railway station.

It Will Be the Story of Families…

Where the whole neighbourhood sat together to watch programmes on a black-and-white television. Where the Sunday film was the most eagerly awaited event of the week. Where the sound of the radio drew everyone in the house together. Where one telephone kept the whole neighbourhood in touch.

Who would sit on the roof and talk for hours when the power went out. Who put woven charpoys in the courtyard on summer nights and slept under the stars. Who thought getting soaked in the first shower of rain was a celebration in itself. Who could fit an entire life into handwritten letters.

Who spent days getting ready to have a photograph taken. Who knew the value of every frame on a roll of film. Who found joy in looking through a wedding album time and again.

It Will Be the Story of Daughters…

Who put their family’s needs ahead of their own wishes.

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It Will Be the Story of Sisters…

Who sent blessings along with the rakhi they sent their brothers.

It Will Be the Story of Brothers…

Who put off their own needs to see their sisters smile.

It Will Be the Story of Friends…

Who could meet years later and pick up the conversation where they had left it. Who were the first to arrive in hard times without needing to be asked. Who never let a friendship go wanting, even when their pockets were empty. Who treated each other's successes as their own victories.

It Will Be the Story of Loves…

That were never put into words. That remained safe for ever in the pages of a diary. That gathered the dust of time but were never erased from memory.

It Will Be the Story of People…

Who seemed ordinary to the world but were the whole world to their families. Who kept building homes while hiding the cracks in their own hearts. Who swallowed their tears so that those they loved could smile. Who gave all their lives and asked for very little in return.

Who grew old, while their concern for those they loved never did.

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