

# Bauji

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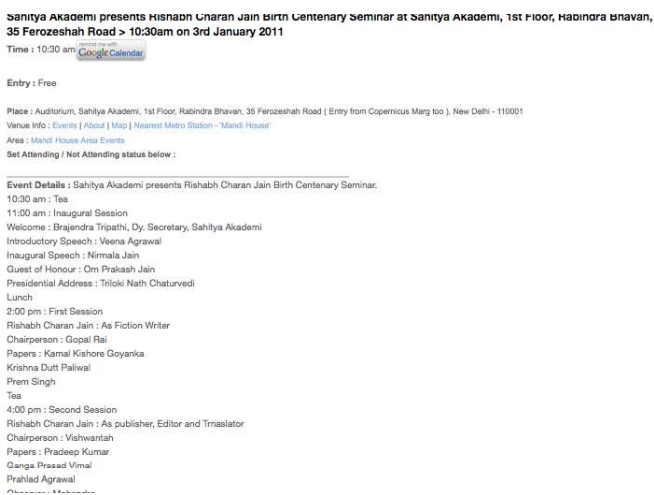
It was 2011. I was 12 years old. It was a freezing January in Delhi. I was standing in the lobby of Sahitya Akademi, watching my parents greet the guests. I was unaware of the significance of this day. It was the Birth Centenary Seminar of my great grandfather, Sri Rishabh Charan Jain. He was a writer, editor, publisher and distributor. He had made many significant contributions to Indian literature and films according to all the academicians and scholars who presented their papers during the event. But I was just a 12 year old sitting in the auditorium, huddled in my shawl bored out of my mind. I was there for my Dadi's (paternal grandmother), Veena Agarwal, introductory note. I knew she had worked very hard on it. I was excited to support her. I am told that it was a beautiful speech but I don't remember anything from it.

All I remembered was that I had seen my Dadi cry twice in my life. The first was when she lost her brother. The second time was while giving this speech, 26 years after her father had passed away. "My relation with my father was like that of a stranger." As I write this, it is 2020. Dadi is in Delhi as I interview her from Mumbai over the phone. "He (her father) was always very busy. He was in the prime of his career. So he never had time for us." Dadi continued unabashedly. "I felt like there was a void because I never received my father's love"

Rishabh Charan Jain was born on 1 January 1911 in Village Chirra, Haryana, to Hiralal Jain and Manhari Jain. He had six siblings and their family was from a rural setting, a theme that keeps recurring in his literary works. When he turned 11, he was adopted by Kisan Dei and Bisan Dei, two husband-less sisters. In those days, it was illegal to adopt a child without a man's guardianship. So Kisan Dei's in-law, Barrister Champat Rai Jain co-signed the guardianship of Rishabh Charan Jain, The family that adopted him was a sophisticated but orthodox Jain family. The barrister was an important figure in the Digambar Jain community and most of his law practice was in England. Due to this Rishabh Charan Jain was exposed to western life and literature. Later, life he married Shanti Devi and had two children, son Gyan Prakash Jain and daughter Veena Agarwal, my Dadi. "Till I was 13 years old we were rich." Dadi remembers. "We were the only ones with a car and a telephone in our neighbourhood. Radio was a new thing back then and we had it. On Sundays, all the children from the streets would collect at our place and we would listen to it. Since he wrote reviews on films in his magazine Chitrapat, we would get tickets to the latest films. My mother, my aunt and I would go to the theatres very often. There were days when I watched four films back to back. But I would fall asleep every time and get up only to watch the dance sequence."

Top Image: Rishabh Chandra Jain

Below Image: Sahitya Akademi's Notice cum Invite for the Seminar to Commemorate Rishabh Chandra Jain's Birth Centenary





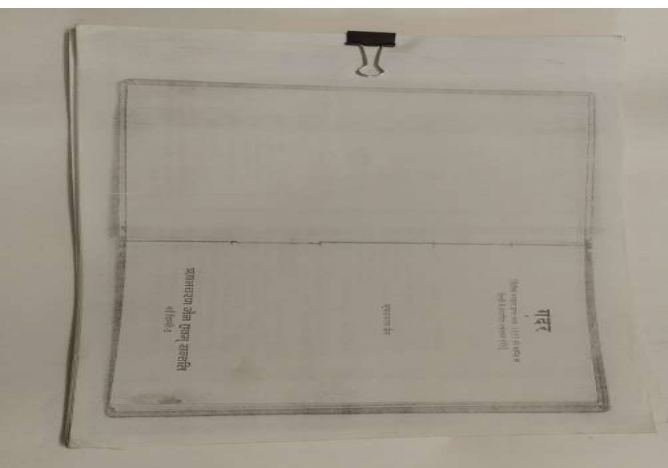
Rishabh Charan Jain rose to fame at a very young age. He is credited for being the first to introduce Hindi literature in Delhi. He wrote his first piece when he was 13. By the age of 36, he had written 31 books. He even began his own printing press called Roopvaani which was also the name of his English magazine. He published lifestyle magazines like Sachitra Darbar, started the first magazine on films called Chitrapat and worked in film distribution. He gave many famous writers their big break. He published Jainendra Kumar Jain's first book, Phansi, Gopal Singh Nepali's Umang, several books of Thakur Raj Bahadur Singh and more. He was a self-made man. He never relied on the wealth of his step father. His friend Premchand often criticised him for being a vyapari-lekhak - a writer with a business acumen. But he was staunch in his belief that no artist should have to beg for money. His art should provide for him. So he wrote a series of books on scandalous topics that highlighted the worst parts of the society, called Bajrgandhavali. They were so interesting, people learnt Hindi just to read his books. This allowed him to critique the society and also live a lavish life.

“Everything that I knew about my father was from other people who looked upto him. But Bauji was going through losses in his film distribution business. He and his brother decided to mortgage the house to Bharat Bank, so they could keep the press running. Unfortunately, they could not pay the mortgage and in court the judge ruled in favour of the bank. The press was sold at 15,000 thousand. We lost our house. I remember the day we were evicted. The bank officials had been coming to take possession of the house since many days. But in the absence of Bauji, they could not take over and he was rarely home. On this particular day Bauji was home. My brother was travelling, my mother and I were at a temple. The bank officials came and my father handed over the house to them. When we returned, we saw all of our stuff wrapped in curtains and tossed onto the road. Bauji had disappeared. The officials wouldn't let us in and we had no idea what to do. I don't remember how we got our things out of there or who came to help us. But I can never forget that feeling. It left a deep impact on my life forever.”



Top Image: Rishabh Chandra Jain and wife Shanti Devi (seated); son Gyan Prakash Jain and daughter Veena Agarwal (standing)

Below Image: Premchand, Rishabh Chandra Jain and Jainendra Jain (left to right)



Print out of the novel Gadar

This loss was too much for Rishabh Charan Jain to bear. It wasn't just the financial loss, but he had also had a huge emotional loss. His brother had betrayed him in the court case, his biological father abandoned him and his reputation was also destroyed. He started having a mental breakdown. "He would keep murmuring, "Barrister Champat Rai Jainio ke pegambar he" (Barrister Champat Rai is the messiah of Jains). He still wrote but he never finished anything. We became poor. I used to help my mother with knitting and tailoring so we could run the house. After Gyaan Bhai (Dadi's brother) finished studying, I asked him to start publishing Bauji's books. The rights had already been sold but we decided to give it a shot anyway. I sold my gold bangles to give my bother money for the printing. My father had written a book called Gadar on the 1857 uprising. It had been banned by the Britishers. That was the first book we printed." By the age of 19, Rishabh Charan Jain had two books, Gadar and Hartal that were banned by the British Government. Nobody had written about 1857 revolt until he wrote about it 73 years after the mutiny. In many ways, he was himself a rebel.

"I don't feel anger towards him. He was adopted at the age of 11. I am told that he would keep running away to his biological parents. They would send him right back. He must have felt betrayed by his family. That must have broken the sanctity of the parent child relationship in his young mind. Maybe that is why he had this kind of relationship with us. His guardian, Barrister Champat Rai was rich but he would never give money to him or my grandmother pleasantly. Even after his death, he did not leave anything in his will for him. He left me, my brother and my mother a part of his wealth, but nothing for him. He sold all the property before adopting my father because he thought he would lay claim on it. My father wanted to earn his own money and never rely on anyone. When I read his books today, I can recognise these experiences in the stories. As a person, he was a good man. After the winters were over, he never kept his winter clothes, he would distribute them to people in his office or amongst the poor near the Yamuna river. This was an act of Aparigraha - a philosophy of non-possession commonly followed in Jainism. I remember, he would take 1-2 rupees from Gyan in the morning and go out. By the end of the day he would distribute whatever he had left amongst the children he met on the way home. I would ask him to save his money instead of spending it all every day. He would reply by saying, 'Kal ki baat kal gayi, aaj ki baat aaj' - begin each day anew - a mantra which he lived by till his last breath."

## Notes

-- It is a respectful way of addressing one's father, particularly in the Hindi speaking belt of India.