

# MY GRANNY

BY BILLA BRAR

Fortunately for Granny, this docile wife of her pet grandson radiates warmth and happiness all around. Hence there are no after-effects, as Granny unhesitatingly instructs her granddaughter-in-law on the upbringing of her four-year-old son ("my great-grandson"), scolds her for stepping out of the house a little too often ("we never left the house when our children were babies") and blames her for the disappearing paunch of her darling grandson. "Our Sardars were so well

fed" she says That is when I have to remind her about dear grandfather's death. "Nanaji died of heart attack, Nani, because he was 50 kg, overweight." "Rubbish", says Granny. "We knew how to look after our men. We cared. Every evening we fried fish for them and cooked . . ." "Yes", I sigh to myself. "You cooked and cooked, while they just ate and ate till death did them part". This year, when I visited her,

the first query Granny asked was, surprisingly, regarding my writing. "What do these akhbar-walas pay you?" I told her. Granny nodded approvingly. Then, turning towards her grandson, she said: "And pray! why don't you also use your brains and write like her? Didn't we spend the same amount on your education?"

The grandson, who is an Income Tax Officer and has successfully conducted many a raid, merely grins. Like everyone in the family he has learnt never to question Granny's judgement on anything. "I changed your nappies", Granny often scolds him sweetly. "Now I shall live to see the day when your son, my great-grandson, wears sehra". Seeing doubt on some of our faces, she says: "Banti from my village did it. So will I. You all wait and see. I shall climb the golden stair".

## THE WISH

Yes, she might, for she happens to be one of those fortunate ones who are completely enveloped in love respect and companionship. I often think that it is our want and need of Granny which has made her fall in love with life all over again.

The only time Granny's serene world receives a jolt is when she remembers that I have no son. At the call of each confinement Granny would come bouncing to care for me. Much to my embarrassment, she would collect the ladies of her mohalla and say: "This time, you see, it has to be a boy. I will feed you all on "arya ka ladoo".

However, a few days later a crestfallen Granny would leave us saying sadly and wisely. "The trouble is, you both never seem to crave for a son. And you love and pamper your girls too much. That's why God gives you nothing but just that!"

The neighbourhood is not unaware of Granny's importance in the family. It has seen her step in and out of flag cars often. One day, an old villager knocked on Granny's door with his "dukh bhari kahani", Granny listened, taking in each and every word and, then merely said: "Get my walking stick." Wrapping her frail frame in "boski ka suit" and a pure white dupatta she led the old man to the concerned police thana.

## THE THREATS

She told the S.H.O: "Look, please don't harass an innocent and a helpless man. I won't let you do it. I know I am old but my son-in-law is a Governor, my grand-daughter's husband is a Police Kaptan, my grandson is about to become a Brigadier, another grandson is . . ."

"Bus bus, Mataji! You are my Mata — you are Bharat Mata." The S.H.O. had been shaken out of his seat and lethargy. Touching Granny's feet, he said: "Your izzat is my izzat. With you around, how can there be any be-in-safi". An hour later, Granny returned beaming with the villager by her side.

So that's my Granny, an embodiment of love and shrewdness, with a passion for righteousness. When I said goodbye to her this time, she pulled out a 100-rupee note from her pocket. "Take it", she told me. "Who knows the next time you come I may not be here". Pocketing the note I thought: "Live a little longer, Granny, for with you lives my childhood."



FOR me, Granny has not changed over the years. As far as my memory can take me, she has always had snow-white hair, a toothless mouth and a deeply lined face. When I think of her I think of the long span over which old age can sometimes spread.

I visit Granny every year. A few days of togetherness with her take me back to my long past childhood. I am once again a child eagerly listening to the anecdotes of Granny's "jawani-diwani" which she narrates to me with gusto and vigour. To both of us, it makes no difference that today I am married, past 30 and a mother of four.

I never saw my grandfather. He left this world before I could arrive. But Granny has fed me on so much about him that we are not strangers. His framed photograph hangs behind Granny's bed, and each time she looks there she takes a deep breath and says longingly: "If only he was alive today".

## OVERNIGHT AGEING

On quite a few occasions, I have tried to explain the futility of this wish of hers. You see, if grandfather had been around today he would have crossed his 100th year. Granny was more than 20 years younger than he. Married at 13 and a mother at 15, Granny spent 30 years of her life in Shanghai. She returned to be widowed soon after. That was when Granny became old overnight and has remained that way ever since.

Past 80, Granny has collected a lot of bruises and bumps along the way. But she still retains what we would call a fire-fighting approach to life. The painful experiences of the past have turned her neither meek nor rusty. Granny may need a stick to balance her old and weary bones, but one word from her sharp tongue is enough to unsettle the placid nerves of her grandson's wife, Nina.