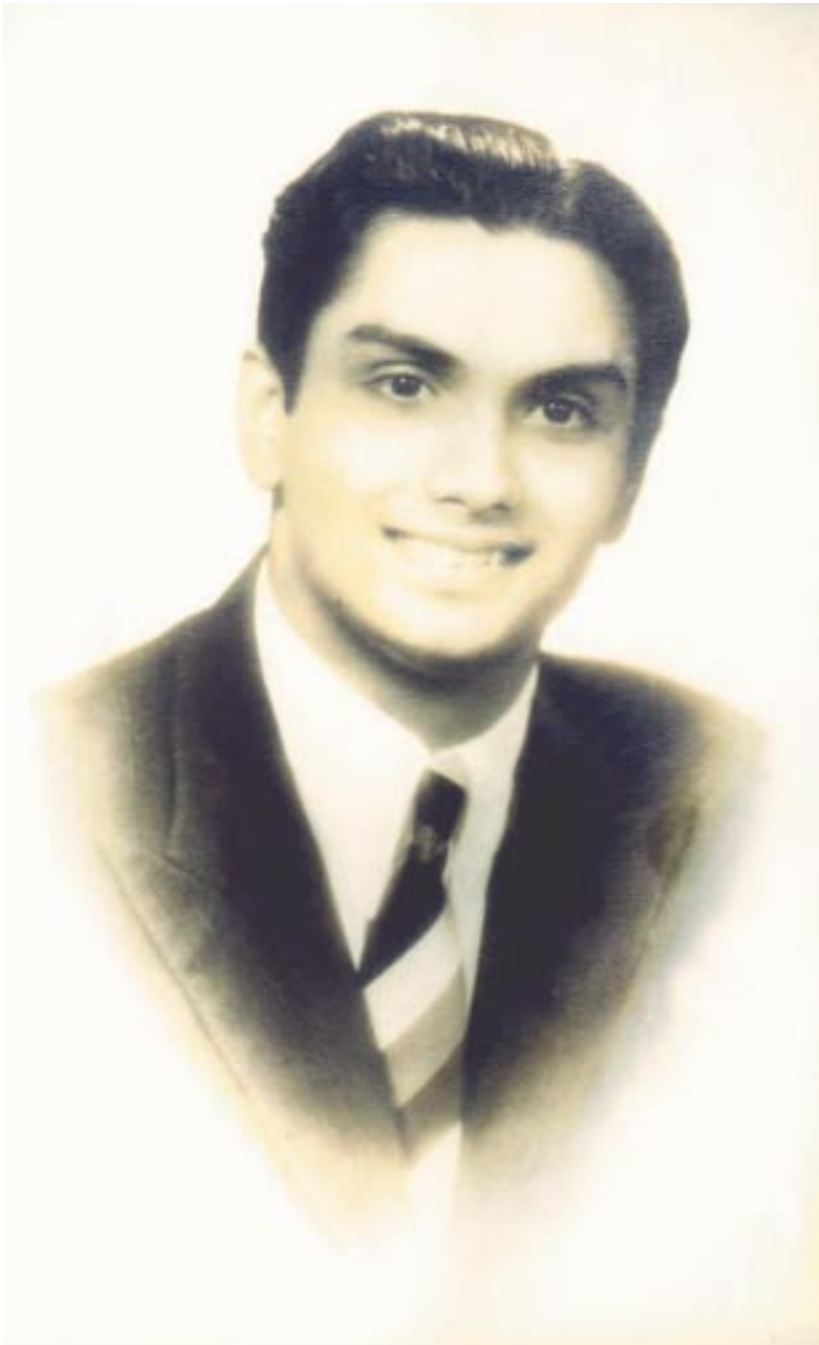


THE CUBICLE OF FAMILY LIFE



Ramesh's father was the greatest influence on him, apart from Maharaj. "Although I saw so little of him, between my parents I definitely loved him more, without a doubt. He came home on Saturdays around three o'clock in the afternoon and had Sundays off; and he was able to take one month in the year off. He was always busy with his social work over the weekends, you see, or people would come to visit. He worked socially for the Saraswat community, working for the upliftment of the community which, probably fifty years ago, was very small – maybe 10,000 to 20,000 people, most of them in Bombay. It was a very close community and we had a Saraswat association of which he was president for two or three years. I had very little personal contact with him. I remember it was a joke among the relatives that there was nothing my father would refuse me, and yet he was extremely strict. My own impression is not so much of his generosity as his discipline. He was a tremendous disciplinarian. If I was not supposed to go to a movie and I went to a movie with someone, I'd get a beating – not a very tough one, but a beating nonetheless. It was definitely physical. And that is why, in spite of that, my love for him was much stronger than my love for my mother."

"He too was an ordinary person – physically about my size – education only up to school-leaving certificate. His father died when he was quite small, and his mother, with six children, had to take refuge with an uncle and aunt who had no children. The uncle and



Ramesh Sadashiv Balsekar, when he joined the Bank of India, in February, 1940.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY



After Ramesh joined the bank, on the 30th of May, 1940, he got married. His wife, Sharda, lived in a suburb called Bandra, about ten miles from central Bombay. Their families knew each other all their lives, so Ramesh used to see her quite often. They married in the traditional Hindu way; however, it was not an arranged marriage. “Both parents were delighted, of course, but we did decide to get married. There was no pressure of any kind from either side.” Ramesh and Sharda had three children. “Ajit was born on 22nd of February, 1941, then Jaya was born on 28th of September, 1942, and Shivdas, 29th of June, 1948.” Throughout Ajit’s childhood he suffered from asthma. “It began with eczema, a very virulent form of eczema on his legs. We were warned that the eczema being treated could lead to asthma. But the eczema was so virulent, we had to take the chance, and we treated it with ultraviolet rays and that kind of thing. So the eczema was cured, but as was to be expected, it gave rise to asthma. He suffered from it ever since until he died.”

Ramesh spent night after night as a young parent holding this child up all night. “And the really touching part of it was he would sit there, he knew he was causing a great amount of physical strain on me even as a child of three or four years, and he would look at the sky. We were on the open terrace, you see. We’d sit on a chair and look at the sky, and he would sort of watch the stars, and he would say that when it was dawn he would get well. And he did; and then at or near dawn he would go to sleep. So during the night he



The newly-wedded couple – Ramesh and Sharda, May 1940.

During the twenty years that Ramesh spent with Joshi, he studied Advaita. When asked about spiritual practices that Joshi advocated, Ramesh said, “He did advocate sitting in meditation sometimes, and also Japa – counting beads and repeating the name of God.” Ramesh said that he didn’t realize any special tangible changes from those practices, unless they were an unconscious happening, and that he didn’t read and study spiritual matters at that time because he was working at full speed and didn’t have the time.

But after he retired, Ramesh discovered Nisargadatta Maharaj through an article written by Jean Dunn in the ‘Mountain Path’ – the official journal of Ramana Maharshi’s Ashram. “In that article, Jean Dunn gave lots of extracts from *I am That*, so I immediately bought the book *I am That*, went through it, and then went to Maharaj.” That first meeting between Ramesh and Maharaj occurred in November 1978, in Maharaj’s house. “It was in the poorer section of Bombay, and very close to what is known as a red light district. It was close to the public bathroom, too.” It wasn’t a desirable district to live in, and as Ramesh said, “Not at the foot of the Himalayas.” Maharaj spent most of his time upstairs in his loft room, coming downstairs only for his bath and meals. Ramesh described his first visit, as he ascended the stairs to the loft, “The first thing he said when I went up there was, ‘You have come at last. Come and sit down.’ So I looked back to see whether he had said that to someone else, but there was no one else behind me. Those were his first words. His response was totally unexpected. It was as if he was expecting me, and we hadn’t met each other at all. Regarding Maharaj’s first words to me, I had the distinct feeling that the words just came out. It didn’t seem as if he was deliberately addressing the words to me.”

From that time on, Ramesh took up a regular pattern of visits, attending Maharaj’s morning talks seven days a week. The talks started around ten in the morning and lasted for around one-and-a-half hours. Every day, after the talks were over, Ramesh took Maharaj out for a drive. “I would sometimes have my son’s car

