

MARRIAGE  
AND CHILDREN

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## MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

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My family and parents were forever talking about my marriage, even while I was still studying at Government College in 1944. Bhai Amjad was married when he was 19 but Bhai Wajid got married much later at the age of 29. Like me, Bhai Wajid didn't want to settle down at an early age.

Perwin is the daughter of my father's elder brother, Syed Ahsan Ali. We therefore shared the background of our fathers' early years, when they struggled to build up their business; we were told how they would sleep on the ground beside their bicycles when they made trips away from home. Things were much easier by the time we were both born, which in her case was in Peshawar, where her mother had accompanied her father on a business trip. When Perwin was newly born, my mother went to see her and told my aunt that she was to be her daughter-in-law, when I was only four years old! This plan remained what my parents wished for.

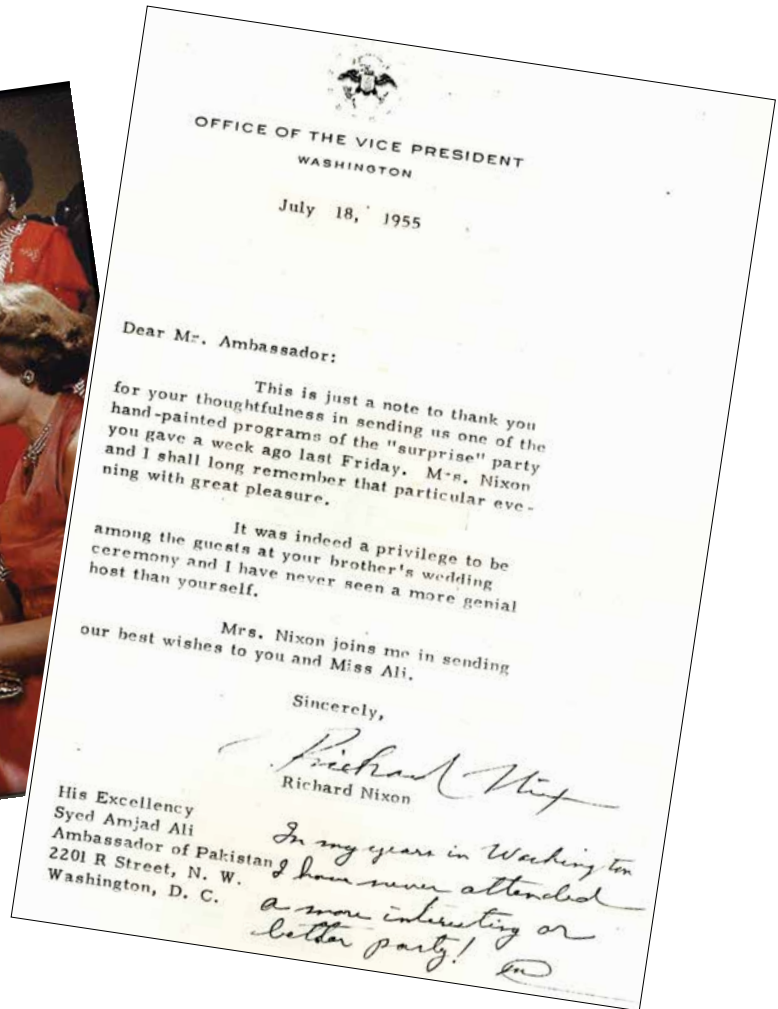
When I came back from America in 1948, I was not keen to get married in a hurry. My father was keen that I should get married soon. But at that time I lived in Karachi, living the life of a young man about town, with plenty of partying and dancing but no drinking. I didn't mix with people who drank and we never served alcohol at our house. Even so, my father disapproved of my lifestyle. My group of friends, boys and girls, came from very prominent Karachi families. One very dear friend, Mazhar Ahmad, was the Naval ADC to the Quaid. He had been in Government College for his M.A. when I enrolled in 1944; he later joined the Navy and served for some years in Bombay, where I saw him regularly when I visited Bhai Wajid. During Khawaja Nazimuddin's regime as Governor-General of Pakistan, because of Mazhar, we had a free run of the Government House facilities, including the Sandspit beach hut, which we frequented on Sundays. Among my friends were the Bokhari sisters, daughters of Z.A. Bokhari<sup>35</sup>, Zeenat Haroon and Mari Hussain (later wife of General Habibullah), Nafees Sadik (she married Azhar Habib Sadiq who was also an ADC to the Governor-General), and Veera Katrak, who married John Cowasjee, brother of Aredeshir Cowasjee.

My mother encouraged me to have a home of my own and not live in the larger family, telling me that she did not want me to be 'beholden to your bhabis'. She was adamant that I should build a house of my own in Karachi. As soon as the house was completed, Mehdi Ali Mirza, my architect, pointed out that when you have the nest, the nesting comes very quickly.

I was engaged to my cousin, Perwin Ali. When I came back from America, I joined the family business in Karachi which in those days was a fun city with a lot of dance parties. I also moved around. Perwin came to know about it. She was upset and broke the engagement and stood up for her right when she learnt about my partying. My whole family was very upset. Bhai Amjad was then Pakistan's Ambassador in Washington. Perwin was taking guitar lessons in those days and her desire was to take lessons from Sagovia in Washington, D.C. After a great deal of persuasion, Bhai Amjad convinced Perwin to come to D.C. She went and stayed there for some time. In the meantime, I went to Perwin's best friend, Nusrat, to explain to her that dance parties were innocent fun. With great difficulty, she convinced Perwin and she said yes.

<sup>35</sup> One sister married Afzal Khan of Burmah Shell and the other sister married Hakim Ali Zardari

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1955: Washington, D.C. Mr. & Mrs. Richard Nixon attending Perwin and Syed Babar Ali's wedding and their thank-you letter

It was time for Perwin to go back home so Bhai Amjad called me to Washington D.C. so that before Perwin again heard some other rumour about me, we should be married in D.C.

In 1955, I was 29 years old and Perwin was 25 and popular with my family. She had not wanted to marry early as she wanted to complete her degree in Humanities and Literature at Kinnaird College. All my sisters liked her and she was a favourite with my brothers. Being all by herself, and being the only unmarried daughter of my uncle added to her character.

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The wedding took place on 8th July 1955. On the invitation card, Bhai Amjad mentioned that it was a surprise party – he didn't mention that it was a wedding as he didn't want the guests to bring any presents. He was very meticulous about such matters. Of course, when he got a call from the office of Vice-President Nixon (who attended) to ask what the occasion was, he told them. Among other notables were the head of the World Bank, Mr. Eugene Black, and Nelson Rockefeller. There were 250 guests and they enjoyed the ceremony, which had many Pakistani cultural traditions. Perwin and I wore traditional wedding dresses. Of our relatives, apart from Bhai Amjad, one of my sisters, Sarwat was there and Perwin's brother Akhtar who was married to my sister. Nusrat came all the way from Pakistan. My niece Tamkanat, nephew Syed Asad Ali and Syed Imtiaz Mehdi were also present. The custom of 'Arsi Mosaf' (you look at each other in the mirror for the first time) was also done. It was the very first time I had a proper look at Perwin since she was a child! Later, Vice-President Nixon gave a toast to the bride in which he wished us happiness and then I had to reply. In my speech I narrated the story of a person who said that when he and his wife got married, they decided that all major decisions would be taken by him and all minor decisions by his wife. They had been married for thirty years, he continued, and not a single occasion had arisen when a major decision was necessary! The wedding pictures and story were in the Washington papers the next day. Life magazine had covered the wedding and it would have been the feature of Life that week but the Khrushchev-Eisenhower meeting took place in Geneva that very weekend so that became the feature story, but Life sent us the pictures they took at our function. A few years ago somebody from Life magazine saw our wedding picture with Richard Nixon and put it on the facebook.

My parents travelled to London but decided to stay there to meet us; for them Washington was too far away. We joined them in London and then spent a few days in Paris; at the night club, the Elephant Blanc (White Elephant), we were thrilled to see the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. While we were in Paris, my father had a heart attack so we returned to London where he fortunately survived. He asked me to return to Lahore in time to supervise the Moharrum Majalis at our Imam Bargah. When we arrived in Karachi, the Customs people asked us about our heavy luggage, which included gifts, and we told them of our wedding and showed them our newspaper photographs.

I am happy I decided the way I did. Ever since I got married, my wife has played a very important role in all my activities. She has been an impeccable housewife, entertaining our guests, especially my business associates, whether they came for a meal or to stay with us. We have maintained my father's practice of having an open house for visitors. This ranges from sit down dinners to big dinners for groups of fifty or more. Perwin has always made our visitors completely at home and we have enjoyed playing host to friends from all walks of life and nationalities. I can never thank Perwin enough for the support she has given me all these years.

### **CHILDREN**

My first child, Henna, was born on December 4, 1956 at the United Christian Hospital (UCH) Lahore. I got a telephone call from Rahim Jan, a very close friend of the family, to tell me that we were blessed with a daughter. My mother had already decided that if a daughter was born, she should be called Henna. She had an interest in literature and she named most of her children and grandchildren. Being the youngest son, my mother doted on me and Henna got a lot of love from my parents and also from my mother-in-law. Hyder was born on October 21, 1958, at the Holy Family Hospital in Karachi and was named by me. I remember I was listening to a majlis and all of a sudden a thought came to me that if I had a son, I should name him Hyder.

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I was very keen that Hyder should go to my old school, Aitchison College. Before that, he went to Toddlers' Academy at the age of three and a half, which was run by Mrs. Alam, next to the International Hotel on the Mall. Before being delivered to school, the children used to drop me at Packages in the morning. I can recall that Henna, soon after she joined the Convent of Jesus & Mary, could read the letters 'A, B, C. . .'. In those days there were not many buildings in the neighbourhood and you could see the 'Packages Limited' sign from a distance. I used to ask Henna to read what was written and she would read 'P, A, C, K, A, G, E, S – Packages Limited'. This was a daily routine. Hyder was at Toddlers' Academy and was learning the alphabet. I asked him to read the same and he said, 'A, B, C, D. . . . Packages Limited'. When we started growing roses at Packages, we named the garden 'Henna Rose Garden'. She was only about 4 or 5 at that time and when somebody once asked her name, she said, 'Henna Rose Garden'!

We had a nanny from Hyderabad Deccan and she looked after the children till they went to school. We didn't over-indulge them but we gave them what we could afford. We travelled abroad quite extensively, especially during the summer holidays and found it a bonding time for the family. The most rewarding moments of my married life have been the lack of tension.

We were very keen that when the children arrived, they had a good education and upbringing. After his retirement from Aitchison as the Principal, I requested my teacher, Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah, to join us at Packages. At the time the kids were 14 and 12 years old and Shah Sahib used to come to our home in the evening to spend time with them. He taught them various subjects but he was more of a tutor than a teacher. In the summer holidays, we used to go to Karachi, and Shah Sahib would come with us. The children thus had this very rich upbringing with Shah Sahib. He exposed them both to Urdu. Henna took to Urdu but Hyder didn't – he could read Urdu but nothing more. It didn't stick! Later, he got interested in *qawali*, which he still loves. As a five-six year old child, Henna was very daring and without any hesitation she would plunge into English without even knowing what she was talking about.

We had a very large repertoire of friends for the children to meet. For example, Bano Qudsia and Ashfaq Ahmad made Henna interested in Urdu literature and she became particularly friendly with Bano Qudsia. The culture in our family in comparison with my parents' family was different in that I was not travelling as much as my father did and I was in much closer contact with the children. Both Perwin and I were very welcoming to Henna and Hyder's friends. The result is that I am still very friendly with most of Hyder's friends and Perwin is friendly with his and Henna's friends. In fact, many of Hyder's friends are in direct contact with me and come to me for advice; my wife has had a similar relationship with Henna's friends. This was very comforting because we knew that Henna and Hyder were mixing in the right crowd and we didn't have to tell them who to be friends with.

My wife participated intensely in the process of bringing up our children and we are still in daily contact with both of them. Perwin must get full credit for the way she has brought up our children. Because of my pre-occupation with my work, I could not devote as much time to the children, and all credit for the way they were brought up must go to her. She also participated in the upbringing of our grandchildren, and showed the same enthusiasm and devotion as she did for Henna and Hyder. She is more like a friend to them rather than a grandmother.

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### **THEIR EDUCATION**

Hyder did his 'O' level from Aitchison College. We wanted him to go to a University in America but from Lahore to America in the 1970s we thought was too big a step, so we sent him to England to do his 'A' level at King's School, Canterbury. He was then admitted to the University of Michigan in the U.S. for his Undergraduate Programme in 1976. Henna also gained admission there. She had already done her B.A. from Kinnaird College Lahore, completed after private study at home and only three months at the College. We were very proud that in Geography and Music, she came first in the University of the Punjab.

As a member of the U.N. Commission on Transnational Corporations, I visited New York three times a year and that gave us the opportunity to visit Henna and Hyder at Ann Arbor. When they got to the US they each got an allowance. In the first year, they stayed in the University Halls. In the third year, they rented an apartment together and shopped at supermarkets with trolleys – his, hers and theirs! They both graduated in 1979 after which Henna did her Masters in English Literature from Ann Arbor. After her return to Pakistan, Henna developed an interest in writing poetry in Urdu and English and published several books. She took up Pakistani classical music seriously and spent much time with Madam Noor Jahan and Farida Khanum who coached her. Later, after her marriage, she has played a key role in the brand development at Packages Limited and is an important member of the management team. She has leadership skills and is currently the Chairperson of DIC Pakistan Limited, the largest ink company in Pakistan, a joint venture between Packages and DIC of Japan.

After Hyder had completed his undergraduate studies in chemical engineering at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Perwin and I were very keen that he should do his Masters. I sought advice from my friends in the paper industry as to the best place for him to get his Masters from. They recommended the Institute of Paper Technology, attached to Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, which had been sponsored by the paper industry of America. There was no way one could get admission there unless the student was outstanding. Hyder did well and got admitted there, joining a student body of 100 with 50 faculty members. This was entirely merit-based, attracting a full scholarship with no fees. I was keen that Hyder should do his PhD and Hyder got admission in the PhD programme but he deferred the admission for a year. He later decided not to join the Programme.

Hyder had a clear-cut educational career, which led to an internship at Weyerhaeuser in Seattle. We were buying pulp from Weyerhaeuser for our paper mill in Lahore so I encouraged them to employ Hyder, to give him some practical training. They liked his work so much that they offered him a permanent position and he worked with them for four years. Because of my close relationship with the Rausing's, I asked them what Hyder should do next. They suggested that he should get some commercial exposure and they offered him a job in Tetra Pak America, where he worked for two years. Of these two years, he spent one at their plant in Dallas where a new factory was commissioned. The other year he spent at the Tetra Pak America head office in Connecticut. After that, we wanted him to come back and he did so willingly. Henna and Hyder had been coming to Lahore every summer so they were not cut off from Packages.

Hyder is now the Managing Director of Packages Limited and it took him twenty years to rise to that position. Just as my father had broken me into business, I did the same with him. My father used to send me to various centres



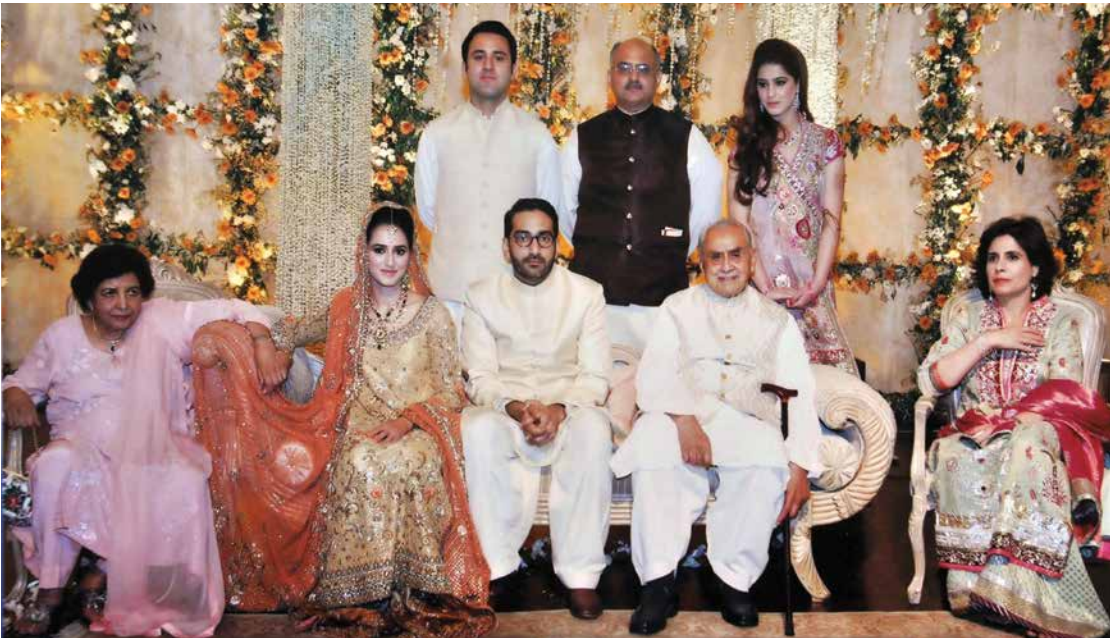
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*2013: Photograph taken at the wedding of Mubarik Imam and Talba Sattar*



*2013: Photograph taken at the wedding of Zebra Hyder Ali and Isfandiyar Khan*

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in India, visiting what they called the 'coffee shops' where they had canteens and grocery stores etc. Hyder started working on the ground floor at Packages and worked first in the Corrugated Department before taking charge of that department. He was then in charge of new projects and gradually worked his way up to the second floor. I tried to inculcate in him and others that professionals in the company are not socially or economically disadvantaged. Nobody has the last word on any issue at Packages; we take decisions by consensus.

### **THEIR FAMILIES**

We have been fortunate to have a wonderful son-in-law, Faisal Imam, married to our daughter Henna, and a wonderful daughter-in-law, Amina (Rani), married to Hyder Ali.

Faisal Imam is my sister's son. Henna agreed to his proposal and they got married in 1983. Faisal studied at Aitchison and F.C. College, did his B.Sc. in Agricultural Economics and then an MBA from Cornell. He has an excellent combination of interests: one is farming, which he inherited, but he is also an astute politician, playing an active role in politics in his area. He has taken a great deal of interest in social work, especially in the area of education, primary and secondary as well as technical, and provides leadership and support to a number of schools in his district. Faisal and Henna's only child, a daughter, is Mubarik.

Mubarik studied at Lahore Grammar School and on the basis of her excellent results in 'O' and 'A' levels, she was admitted to the Undergraduate Program at MIT Boston where she completed her degree in Electrical Engineering and Physics. She then worked for two years with Bain & Co., a consulting firm, before spending a year as a fellow of the Acumen Fund. After that, she decided to take a three-year Masters Joint Degree between the Kennedy School at Harvard and Stanford University, where she performed with credit. She is outgoing and adventurous (at one time, she wanted to be an astronaut!). She is a sky-diver and is currently learning to fly. She married Talha Sattar whom she met during her studies in America. Talha comes from a respected business family in Karachi. He did his Undergraduate studies at North Western University, Chicago and his MBA at Stanford before joining McKinsey. They were married in March 2013 and now live in Palo Alto. After her MBA, in September 2013, Mubarik decided to join What's App and we were thrilled to know that she was on the negotiating team that finalized the sale of What's App to Facebook for \$19 billion in March 2014!

My wife gave a choice of two girls to Hyder and he decided to get married to Amina (Rani), who is the granddaughter of my wife's step-sister, our next door neighbour. Amina has not only reared her children well, but has also participated fully in family activities, especially in fostering good relations with our business partners. Amina took up studies again after raising three very handsome and loving children. She has been teaching at Kinnaird College Lahore in the M.A. programme and is now pursuing a doctorate degree. Very courageous in a family where more women have been home-makers!

Hyder and Rani have been blessed with two daughters and a son. The eldest daughter, Zehra, like Mubarik, studied at Lahore Grammar School and gained admission to MIT for her Undergraduate studies. She continued for her Masters degree at MIT in Architecture and Environment. She is an enterprising young lady and started her own Company,



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Ghonsla, which was a result of a competition while at MIT. She has been able to carve out a niche for her product, which is based on turning waste material into insulation products for buildings. Zehra married Isfandyar Khan, whom she met after her studies in Pakistan. He is an accomplished economist who started his Undergraduate studies at LUMS and moved to Rutgers and then to Columbia for his Masters degree. He is now working for the World Bank. They married in May 2013 and are now living in Brussels.

Like his grandfather and father, Hyder's son, Murtaza, studied at Aitchison College and then did his higher schooling at the Lab School in Washington D.C. where his parents bought a home and where he is now pursuing his Undergraduate degree at the American University. He is humble, a keen cricketer, and a boy of lovely habits and demeanour, making us all very proud of him. He takes advice from his grandmother on all issues. When asked by her what he wanted to do in life, he said, 'I want to be like my grandfather'.

Rani and Hyder's youngest daughter, Gauhar Afroze, is a very bright young lady. From day one, she has been interested in fashion designing. After she had completed her 'O' level, she arranged a dress exhibition at which she was able to sell all her designed dresses within two hours for a hundred thousand rupees which made her very happy! She is now in Poly Moda School of Faragamo in Florence and excelling in fashion design. She is even helping some students in the third year at her School in Florence. Out of my grand-children, Gauhar is the most devoted shia. Because there is no Imambargah in Florence, she listens to Majalis sermons on her laptop during Ashura. She has a very soft heart and would make all possible efforts to help any human being.

We are very proud of all our grandchildren who, after excellent academic records, are putting these to good use in their professional careers. I think I was a better father than a grandfather because I was more strict as a father, but we enjoy the company of our grandchildren and are more friendly with them than we were with our own children, perhaps not uncommon with grandparents!

### **FAMILY'S TOGETHERNESS**

When my brother Wajid Ali was alive, he entertained the entire family at Eid lunches. Since his demise, we have had the privilege of having over a hundred members of our larger family to Eid lunches in our house, at which my wife has been a gracious hostess. She looks after all the details and I don't even have to spend a few minutes in this arduous task.

I have had unconditional support from my family, who have provided a tranquil home background. Henna, Hyder and their families come over for dinner at our home whenever possible. Henna and Hyder eat early like us, but the grandchildren follow their own timings and, therefore, do not always eat with us.

I am very happy with the way Henna and Hyder were brought up and the way they have developed their personalities. My children and grandchildren also support me in my promotion of LUMS but they feel that I do not stress enough the need for the graduates to repay something to LUMS; they have all benefited from the superb facilities and many of them have received full scholarships.

