

Division of father's estate between two Real Brothers

A narration of the event.

Preface:

I am translating a heart touching real life event of division of estate in a village in Gujarat. Since it is a real event, I call it a narration and not a story. It can't be called 'history' because it does not involve 'Big' people. This is an event covering 'small' villagers. This event may be of the pre-independence times. I have no information - except that I had first read this narration sometime in the 1960's. And at that time, this story was considered very old story. Original narration by author Shri Shambhauprasad H. Desai is in extreme native language and difficult to translate. It also reflects the native culture - part of which - city people may not be aware of. Hence this is not a literal translation. I have tried to bring native village life and mood in this English version.

Purpose of writing this narration is to make my next generation aware of a culture prevalent amongst **noble people*(1)** in India. Since they (Young generation) cannot enjoy such native Gujarati, it is translated. Some typical village matters are explained in the explanatory notes to this narration. For some readers, it may be better to first read the explanatory notes to understand the culture and then read the story. Every word or concept explained is marked in **red colour** with an asterisk * and the **number of the note**.

Preface completed. Narration started.

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Mamlatdar Saheb* (2) had come to Lolvan village. Farmers, Traders & villagers had all gathered at the central **chowk*(3)** of the village.

Mamlatdar Saheb was sitting on a sofa set. Talati & village Sarpanch were in attention. A man had died without heirs. He was the owner of a large fertile farm of about hundred Vighas (40 Acres) with pucca **Well*4** & infrastructure necessary for agriculture. As per the law, an estate without heirs goes to the Government. It would be auctioned. The Farm had a farmhouse, stables for animals and forty mango trees. Coconut, orange & chikoo trees were also there. Farm had pucca boundary wall. The deceased was a rich man. For his own pleasure & hobby, he had built all infrastructures. He died a premature death, without any heirs. Some people were interested in buying the Farm. It can turn out to be a lottery. Most people were curious - 'who will be the lucky man to get the lottery?' was a matter of interest. There was a big crowd of onlookers. (This narration talks about three different agricultural plots of land. To

differentiate, the big rich farmland of 100 Bighas is referred to as "Farm". Others are: small farm of ten Bighas where grains would be grown; and a Vadi where fruits would be grown.) All three are subject matters of this narration.

Since Mamlatdar Saheb had come, a lot of routine matters had to be resolved. If the auction is delayed, more people would be present. There may be better bids and Government may get better price. So saheb was first focussing on all small matters. Farmers were telling their issues and Saheb was giving his instructions. Talati was writing down the instructions.

Talati announced the name: "Kana Gova". A young man stood up. Dark black skin, just a half dhoti (Chorno)*5 to cover lower body; and a small pugree on the head were his only dresses. He came forward with folded hands & uttered: "Yes Sir".

Talati: Is your name - "Kano"?"
"Yes Sir".

Your brother's name is "Gopo"?"
"Yes Sir".

"Where is Gopo?"
And Gopo stood up.

Mamlatdar Saheb looked at both brothers. In colour, dress and features they looked so similar that one could mistake one brother for the other. Saheb looked at both brothers & said: "You have recorded with Talati, your desire for the distribution of your late father's estate. I am reading out aloud. You can make any modification now. Once I approve of the distribution, you will not be able to modify. You are aware of this position. Right?"

Kano: "Yes Sir".

Mamlatdar Saheb: "Ok then listen. Gopo gets - (i) a farm of ten Bighas (2.5 acres) which has a khijda tree and (ii) Lolvan village farm; both. Is it ok?"

Kano: "Yes Sir."

Mamlatdar Saheb: "Kano gets the farm on the way to Rampara village. It is of six Bighas, has a Well and many trees. Alright?"

Kano: "Yes Sir."

Mamlatdar Saheb: "Ok then should I approve this distribution of your father's estate?"

Kano & Gopo both with one voice: "Yes Sir".

Mamlatdar Saheb took pen to sign the order. But before he could sign, a voice from behind the crowd said:

"Aei **Mabaap***6, wait. Don't do this huge cruel injustice on me."

A lady with skin colour resembling a - moon less star less night sky; carrying an equally dark skinned child and rearranging her saree, came in front shouting:

"A baapa your son has gone mad."

(Explanation: typical way of - respecting Mamlatdar by addressing him as father; and at the same time cursing her husband. What the lady meant was - her husband Kano has gone mad. She is requesting Mamlatdar to reject the distribution just now agreed by both brothers.)

The lady with raised fist, extreme anger and at the same time holding her son; addressed Mamlatdar: "I will not give the Farmhouse under any circumstances. Will not give and will never give. Where do I throw my children?"

Mamlatdar asked: "Who is this lady?"

Kano: "My **Jivlen**."*7 Kano introduced his wife in one word.

Wife: "You are taking away my Jiv and accusing me? Give away everything to your brother. Today give away this home & farm; and tomorrow you will give away me also." And as her last weapon, the wife started crying loudly.

Kano: "But of course, I have to give half share to my brother. You do not understand; and in public you are robbing me of my prestige & respect. Go. Go away."

Now Patel intervened. "Wait Kana. Don't get angry. Let me try to explain. Look here beta (daughter). If you do not want to give farm, then ok. Give the Vadi to Gopa."

Wife: "Nothing. Gopo is unmarried. He will find his meals anywhere. I have children. With the whole estate also, I can hardly make ends meet. What can I give to Gopa? Nothing except severe punishment."

Mamlatdar saheb watched speechless.
All onlookers also found this injustice as intolerable.

Now Gopo said: " Saheb, I renounce. I do not want anything. Please record. My brother & sister-in-law will enjoy entire estate."

Kano: "That is impossible. You are my father's son. You are entitled to your share." Kano prevented Gopo from renunciation. "My wife has gone mad."

Wife cried loudly & said: "You have gone mad. You want to be a beggar and will make us also beggars. ..."

Gopo: "Saheb, please record what I have said. Maibaap, I do not want anything. If my brother is happy, I have the whole world. I will earn my daily bread anywhere."

Kana's wife: "You go to the ditch. You, bastard. You want to rob your innocent brother. Thank God, I came to know about it. Otherwise you would have made me homeless. I will not allow anything to you."

Gopo: "But I do not want anything. Both of you live happily. Seeing both of you happily living, from a distance, I will be happy. But in the presence of all these people, please do not rob our respect. I do not want anything....."

Wife: "These are empty talks. In front of all these people you are talking like a noble man. But afterwards, you will come to fight. I know you since you were a child."

Gopo smiled. He was entitled to half the share in his father's estate. He was ready to renounce it. He was not ready to claim half share which would cause quarrels in his brother's family. Brother's happiness was most important for Gopa.

"Ok then. Listen. I do not want my half share, farm or Vadi, home or furniture. I am entitled to these clothes that I have now worn. Everything else is **cow-meat*8** for me."

Public outcry: "hey...hey..."

Mamlatdar Saheb: "Gopa, think about it. Law supports you. You are entitled to half share."

Gopa: "Saheb, Bapa, Once I have said Cow-meat, for a Hindu son, it is final. If my brother & his wife are happy, I am hundred times happy."

Entire crowd is watching this illiterate **koli*9** young man who has sacrificed his everything for his brother's happiness. One man- Kano is silently crying with his head down in shame.

Mamlatdar became silent.

Gopa's signature was taken on his renunciation of all his rights.
Whole place went silent.

Mamlatdar Saheb: "Now let us start the auction of the Farm."
Main important work was started and crowd became interested.

Talati read out the conditions & details of auction. Mamlatdar explained that true value of the Farm would be several thousand Rupees. (A thousand Rupees in 1940's, were much more valuable than a million Rupees now.)

Mamlatdar appealed to the public to make bids for the Farm. But no one is making the first bid. Very 'big' men, rich men had come to the auction. But everyone is looking to others for making the first bid. A lot of time passed. Mamlatdar requested Village's respected trader Vanechand Sheth: "Sheth, make a bid. Start. Once the bidding starts, others will make their own bids."

Vanechand Sheth: "Yes sir. Someone has to start. You announce any one's bid. Then bidding will start."

Mamlatdar: " Ok. Whose bid shall we announce?"

Someone from the crowd: "Let it be Gopa's bid." Whether that man was sympathetic to Gopa or was making fun of Gopa - was not clear. Gopa had just now renounced everything. He had no capacity to pay Rs. 5,000 or more for this Farm.

Mamlatdar: "Ok. I announce - Gopa's bid for One Rupee and four annas" (125 paise.)

Gopa: "But sir...."

Mamlatdar: "Don't worry Gopa. These Sheths will make big bids. No one will allow you to take this Farm. You won't have to pay anything."

But no one makes 2nd bid.
Time goes on.

Mamlatdar asked: “Habib Sheth, you were enquiring about this Farm for many days. Why have you gone cold now?”

Vanechand Sheth: “Sir, you erred. Who can tell you your error?”

Mamlatdar: “Why? What error I committed?”

Vanechand: “First bid is of this angel Gopa. Who can make a bid on his bid? We will get a thousand Farms. But will not get one generous noble man like Gopa. One who sacrificed his share in Father’s estate for his brother’s joy; cannot be competed against. Give. Sir, give this Farm in One Rupee four annas to Gopa. Make it final.”

Whole crowd was happy. Every one supported Vanechand Sheth’s proposal. No one was ready to make a bid against Gopa’s bid.

Mamlatdar: “ Ok Gopa, Should I announce three time? You sacrificed ten Bigha land. In return you got 100 Bigha land. Happy? Mamlatdar announced –One, Two.....

Gopa, with tears in his eyes: “If the village permits me and you – Mabaap give me; I am happy. But what would I alone do with this big farm? Please add my brother Kana’s name to the Farm...”

Stunned Silence.

Writer: Shri Shambhuprasad H. Desai. (Time not known.)
Translation by Rashmin Sanghvi June 2018.

Explanatory notes:

1. **Noble people** here means – people with high character. Generous people who value family relations far more than wealth. They have deep understanding of human nature. While they themselves are noble, they have no complain about others who are not. They accept people as they are. No quarrels. No complain. And continue to act nobly.
2. **Mamlatdar:**
The authority hierarchy in Government works as under:
This is broad description. Real effective authority varies from state to state & from time to time. In the 1940’s a Mamlatdar was a “Big” man.

Village Sarpanch, also called “Patel” is an elected villager representing one large village or a few small villages.

Talati is an employee of the Government. He is a basic record keeper at the grass roots level. The bottom Government employee in touch with villagers. Normally, he would be staying in the village & would know all villagers.

Mamlatdar is the next higher authority above Talati. He has decision taking powers. He supervises Government administration over a Taluka.

Next higher authority is **Collector**. He is in charge of an entire district's administration.

Elected representatives may be roughly compared in authority with Government employees in following ranks:

Elected Representatives of the people	Government employees
Village Sarpanch	Talati
Mamlatdar	Corporator
Collector	MLA

In today's times, some of these persons have less authority & influence over the people. However, in the 1940's, they were treated with much respect and authority.

3. **Village Chowk:** In a village, a central open place has a raised platform – generally under a Banyan or Peepal tree. It is a common meeting place. All festivals are celebrated at the chowk. And even formal meetings are held at the chowk. It resembles a Town Hall in a town.
4. **Well:** To differentiate 'Well' – a source of water; and 'well' – an adjective; source of water is written with a capital 'W'.
5. **Chorno:** You can have a fair idea of this dress by remembering the half dhoti that Mahatma Gandhiji used to wear. Gandhiji's dress truly reflected/ represented poor villagers' dress code: Half dhoti & no shirt.
6. **Mabaap:** Literally –mother & father. Parents. This term is used to show respect to seniors & authorities.
7. **Jivlen:** This one Gujarati word says so much that it just cannot be translated into English. I am describing the meaning & then using the same word in English.

“Jiv” means life, pran. Nearest English word is soul. In Indian philosophy, jiv or pran is the life giving energy. On the departure of Jiv, man dies. Yet, Jiv or pran is less than Atma or soul. Atma never dies.

“Len” here means one who will take away.

“Jivlen” means a cruel quarrelsome person who will take away my life.

Kano refers to his wife as Jivlen. Wife is a quarrelsome, selfish, greedy person. For her, property is everything. Kano is extremely miserable. He is not angry. Just miserable. Kano is a noble person. He loves his brother. But his wife is prepared to go to any extent for estate. With society and traditions, Kano cannot divorce her. He can't do injustice to his brother. And cannot prevent his wife from quarrels. This is frustration without solution.

What he means by the word Jivlen is: The grief caused by my wife will one day cause my death. And yet, I am helpless.

All onlookers understand. They all know that they can't do much except trying to explain & convince the lady. And the lady would not budge.

8. **Cow-meat:** For a north Indian Hindu, a cow is divine goddess. A mother. Even meat eating Hindus will not touch cow-meat. So when Gopo compared his share in father's estate as cow-meat, he declared a final, unequivocal, irreversible decision that he has no claim in his father's estate.
9. **Koli:** An Adivasi/ tribal community.

Pranam.

Rashmin Chandulal Sanghvi