

## A post card of 1943: Priceless heritage



Shown on the left is a postcard from my grandfather: Nawal Singh Mehta (Basaheb) to my father: Jai Singh Mehta (Kaka), which is being presented here for its intrinsic value, high quality English language, good handwriting etc.

A postcard cost 9ps those days, which was also one and half annas. Today a postcard costs Rs 0.50. In spite of the huge inflation, we must admit that the postcard still remains an inexpensive form of communication, especially for the poor.

The postcard was written on 17 October, 1943, at Udaipur; posted on 19<sup>th</sup> and reached father on 21<sup>st</sup> at Delhi. It was a message that Kaka should plan to come home for Diwali, and leave after Diwali, as he and uncle I. S. (Inder Singh) would. Surely, all Kaka's colleagues at Ruby General Insurance Co at 21, Dariyaganj would have seen and read the same.

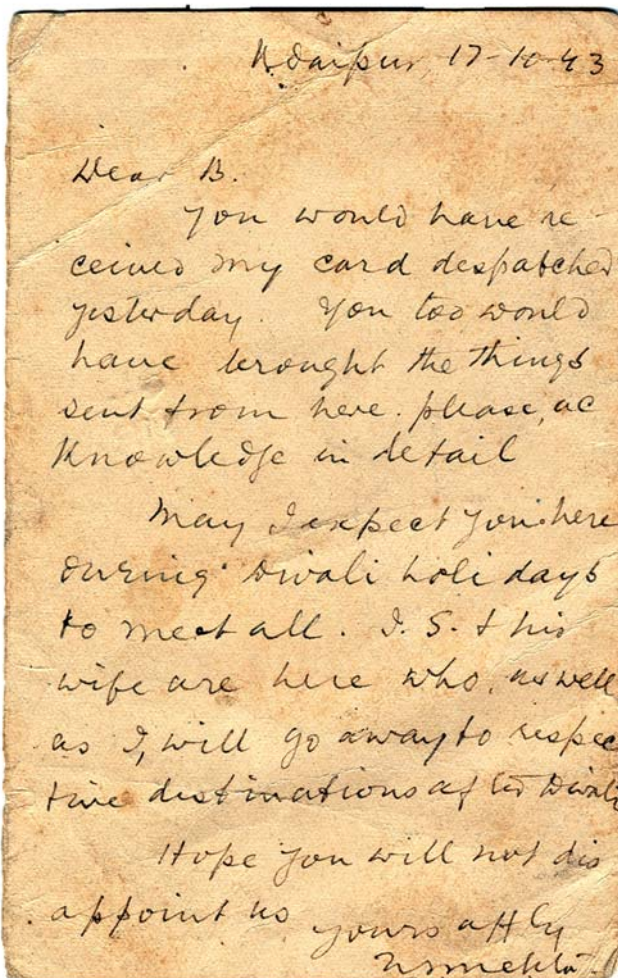
Basaheb spelt Kaka's name as Jaisinha, and not Jai Singh as is being done currently. Actually, this form is being used by Chandra Sinha Mehta, OBE, as we can see on the name plate at Vishram Kuti, Udaipur. Kaka told me many years ago that people would associate the spelling 'Sinha' as someone from Bihar, therefore it was better to use 'Singh', the more popular one.

Basaheb addresses Kaka as 'B', which stood for Bacchait or the middle one. Kaka had a younger brother too, other than two older sisters, and hence he was given the affectionate pet name of the middle one. Govind Singh, the youngest son, expired when he was about 4 years of age due to some disease, perhaps small pox.

Notice the parsimony in Basaheb's writing, when he splits at least four words at the end of the space: re-ceived; ac-knowledge; respec-tive and dis-appoint.

His last sentence: 'Hope you will not disappoint us' is an imploration rather than a command, as he could very well have done. And he signs off in a formal manner: NSMehta, with the appellation of 'Yours affly', and not 'Yours affectionately'. Thus it shows that such abbreviations were common and the norm. Nowadays, the sms/email world has thrown the art and ethos of good writing into the dustbin.

Kaka tells me that when he was young, he would hardly ever speak to Basaheb directly, but if there was anything, he would convey it through his mother or Basaheb's valet: Roopji Dada. Thus too, such postcards hold some important messages, of how a father would communicate with his son, who doesn't live at the same place.



Pradeep S Mehta, Jaipur, November, 2006