

My Father Said

It is almost a year since my father passed away (June 2021). I had a complex relation with him. While we cared for each other, and agreed on many things, we also strongly differed in our religious beliefs, politics and world views. He was a ritualistic, religious person and a hardcore right-winger which I didn't subscribe to. For several years before his death, we refrained from talking about politics because it would lead to serious arguments. There was an unspoken agreement that we will talk not about it. On my part, I tried to separate our political views from our filial bond, so that I could love and care for him in spite of our differences. I'm sure he did the same.

Idea: After his passing, the idea for this work germinated and slowly took shape. It grew from a series of reflective moments strung together and became a cathartic exercise. It gave me space to examine our difficult relationship and the negotiations contained within it that shaped me. This in turn led to clarity and allowed me to come to terms with his passing and absence. The process of contemplation yielded several insights and the book evolved as a series of dialogues between him and me. Some of the statements he had said directly to me at various points; others were unsaid, but suggested. Through it all, larger ideas of 'parental script' and my ways of resisting it were also operating in the background.

When it finally came together, the book became a juxtaposition of two viewpoints: mine and his. The book alternates between English and Kannada (my mother tongue) text, almost like two parallel narratives unfolding through the book, converging and diverging at various points. It textually represented my perception of what he said verbally and non-verbally, and how I responded to them, all of which is in English. His, on the other hand, is in Kannada (my mother tongue). After his passing, I came across his diary in which he had recorded his views about me in Kannada. It spanned almost my entire life – from my school days and my intense desire to join art school to how he struggled to support me and how proud he was of my achievements. These lines formed the perfect foil to my thoughts and perceptions, so I scanned them from the original and inserted them in between my own textual narratives.

Form: I created the book format to suggest recording and book-keeping. It is the size of a ledger, which again dovetails into the idea of documentation. It is physical and palpable. It is displayed on book stand, a common support for religious books. For me it also suggests the power relationship we shared. Especially in the Indian context, the father holds lot of power in the family, and his approval or disapproval matters a lot to the child. I saw him as a figure of authority but also had to defy him to assert myself and hold my ground. The recurring line - My father said - was to highlight the repetitive nature of instruction.

My father was a typist and had a Remington machine. So I have used a type-face which is reminiscent of that. The text itself was created in Photoshop and transferred using toner transfer method. The papers were made in my studio and text-transfer was done at Atelier Prati. The book is bound using traditional Korean binding method.

Material and making: The papers in the book were made by me in the Hollander beater in my studio from *panche* (an unstitched garment, usually white, wrapped around the lower part of the body by males) used by my father. According to Brahmin rituals a dead person is also wrapped in white cloth. The threads seen in this book are called *janivara/janeu*. It is a sacred thread (actually a set of threads twisted together) worn by upper caste males as a mark of caste identity. It is a constant reminder of allegiance to their faith and position. I have cut up the *janivara* (considered sacrilegious) and sandwiched the pieces between two sheets of paper – a thick lower sheet and an ultra thin upper sheet. The threads are composed linearly on the pages with my father's voice, indicating rules set by my father and all that he believed. On the facing pages, where I agree with him, the lines are somewhat aligned. Where I agree partially, they tilt at an angle, and run amok where I completely disagree. Only one set of pages have no lines – where we express our love for each other. I also see these lines as links which are difficult to erase. The lines from one page have also left impressions on the other, suggesting how we affected each other. Finally, the cover page, with the image of pairs of scissors, suggests severance, while the last page suggests sewing/bonding. Both are constantly happening in the book.

All the pages of the book can be seen in this Youtube video link: <https://youtu.be/YW314YQbB10>