

## SCHOOL DAYS – ABHAYA SHARMA

I went to my first school in Bijnor, it was some Montessori school, I don't remember much of it except that me and my younger brother Ajay had gone to Hardwar on an excursion. We got little delayed and my grandmother, naniji, was very wild at my eldest brother late Prabodh Sharma, telling him where he had sent the two little souls, we were her darlings. The other things I now remember about Bijnor days, my birth place is that I was exceptionally good at English, our neighbor's daughters who were in eighth or ninth standards used to come and ask me some difficult spellings, I don't know, if they wanted to test me or really wanted to learn from me.

I don't remember anything distinct of my next school in Agra barring that it was some government school and I had been promoted to one extra class, probably I never did third or fourth standard.

The perfect schooling I received from fifth standard onwards at Kendriya Vidyalaya, Air Force station Agra is what I feel is clear like crystal in my memory. I entered KV, Air Force Station in the year 1969 along with my younger brother, Ajay. We studied in the old as well as the new building, after not so brilliant start, it was in the half yearly exams of sixth standard, that I started showing signs of brilliance, that I stood third or was it second among some 30 odd students, was quite a departure from my first year, where I was actually promoted to sixth by some grace marks. I never looked

back since then. I have fond memories of Kendriya Vidyalaya Agra, I remember faces of lot of seniors from volley ball matches and also cultural activities. My favourite was tall Prithviraj Bose, elder brother of my classfellow Dhiraj. There were Nirmala and Ajay Bedi, Bimal Kumar was quite stylish and thought he was like Rajesh Khanna. Pradakshana Pandit was my competitor in studies, probably it was a healthy atmosphere that groomed me up nicely. Then there was Kanchan Singh Bisht, who was a very close friend. I remember Pinaki Chakrabarti had played Shivaji in Panna Dhai. I distinctly remember only our maths teacher Sehgal sir, J.L. Sehgal, I believe he was very strict and marvelous at teaching. One of our principal was M.K. Recriwal, that was at the time we moved to new building. I also liked the house system prevalent I Kendriya Vidyalaya, whole school was divided into four houses- Shivaji, Tagore, Ashok and Raman, I think I was part of Raman and later Shivaji house. I also remember Mathew and Oomen George, they were good friends. I also don't forget an incident with class monitor Nirmala, she had spanked me with shanty, while minding the class, probably, I also took my chance to give back, when I was monitoring, not sure of the second, but we were good friends any way.

It was in the seventh standard that we moved to Kendriya Vidyalaya, Port Blair at Aberdeen Bazar. Initially, we were staying at Junglee Ghat and later moved to MES staff quarters, it was in the second phase that I enjoyed most, we had community centre where we used to play Table Tennis, officers Mess, where we saw many Hindi movies. The first time I

remember I saw a movie in a theatre was at Mount Batten, the school had organized to take students to theatre for showing Anand, Ghar Ghar Ki Kahani and Pavitra Paapi and probably Bidaai, the order may be wrong. I saw my first film bunking (not informing home) with Jayesh Shekhar at Mount Batten – Ek Haseena Do Deewane on a fateful day. First we probably located a ghost or a spirit on our way back, some lightning was encountered for a brief duration and both of us had fallen down, we were fortunate we did not slide completely down the upslope (nearly 50 to 60 feet) that we had taken on our return from the movie, the one that led to Gol Ghar, where Jayesh was staying, we had gone to another friend, Jagbir's house for help to drop us back home safely, we were shit scared. Later on reaching home, I had learned a near fatal accident that my father had met that day on way back home from work. I didn't know what to do, I really felt ashamed of my act of going to movie. Arjun Singh, Son of our landlord Bhagwan Singh had helped a great deal as also father's various colleagues like Mr. Acharya, Mr. Pyare Lal Sharma (who probably wanted to adopt me at one given point of time) and our History/drawing sir Ulfat Singh Rathore, who was also a friend of my father, probably he was from Bareilly.

Schooling at Port Blair was simply great, lot of interaction among the students and we were knowing almost everyone, who traveled back home in the Army truck during our next stay at quarters. The friends I remember is a long list – favourites were Sudipta, Manohar and Alok, then there were Jayesh, Jagbir, Sudhakar, Ramchander (Ramu), Reji and his elder

brother Roli Philips (who joined us in eighth had died of some illness, it was the first time I witnessed death from close quarters), we also had Joy James (TT player), James and Janet Philips, there was one Shebati (Nandy), both Jayesh and me liked her. There was also one anglo Indian girl, was it Polla or different, I don't seem to remember, whom we (me and Jayesh) used to visit, I think she was not from our school, probably she was a student of Mount Carmel. Nirupa Bhatia, Vijayalkshmi, Mala Dhar and Revathi were the other girls I still remember.

The biggest attraction I had was towards Nandita Bhardwaj, she was beautiful and intelligent. She always scored 40 out of 40 in Sanskrit. I remember his brother Ajay sang 'Vatan ki rah mein vatan ke naujawan shaheed ho' on some occasion, I had liked the song very much then. At the same time I seriously started improving my voice, carefully hearing the songs for proper diction, rendering them as melodiously as possible. I did not have formal training in Music, yet If people say I can sing, today while writing this episode, I remember that Nandita and Ajay were responsible for my initiation into music, thanks Ajay.

Another good friend who deserves space here is the chubby looking Alok Bajpai, he was also attracted towards Nandita. They both belonged to the upper middle class, I had once visited Alok's house on some occasion and played Table Tennis there. I left interest in Nandita because of his good will to befriend me, though everyone wanted to be close to him he was very choosy with friends.

It was for the first time a boy, that was me, who had scored a 40 out of 40 in Sanskrit. I was asked by our Sanskrit teacher Shri S.K. Singh to get up, I thought I was in for some punishment but to my surprise he announced that I was the first boy in the history of the school who had scored hundred percent marks in his subject. He was generally partial to girls, so he was little lenient while marking them, but would never give the boys their due till, I had left him with no choice but to give 40 out of 40, it was obvious that I became his favourite. We Had Radhakrishnan Sir, who was teaching us Maths, he also liked me a lot, I remember Parmeshawaran (Physics) sir who did not quite like me, Pushkaran Sir (wood work and craft), Suresh Sharma was very strict with students. I also remember one smart looking Kutty sir had joined sometime before we were to leave Port Blair, he was very good at Table Tennis, that explains my love for the game. Sanyal teacher (music) had taught us the KV song – ‘**Bharat ka swarnim gaurav kendriya vidyalaya layega, takshshila nalanda ka itihaas laut kar ayega**’ I love the song to date.

One of the principal at Port Blair was B.N. Kaul, I don't remember who replaced him later. S.K. Sircar sir taught us maths in ninth and he was very strict with marking as well as discipline. I was told by someone he died young, a great teacher that he was, I felt very sad, probably, Revathi, who joined Delhi University for M.Sc. told me about him. We also had a native called Victor

Raj, who used to travel in boat to attend school as he used to stay at Bamboo flat, that was on another island.

The large number of seniors I remember were very popular in school because of athletics and sports activities, they used to score lot of marks for their houses. The list goes like this Mahesh and Mani Algappa, Rashid Parekh (His father owned Light House theatre and he came to school on a motorbike), Ajay Bhardwaj (Nandita's brother), B. Anand (Vijaylakshmi's brother), Kabir ( great volley ball player), Purnima sen (Rashid's girl friend), Rajesh and Brijesh Arya (brothers) are the names that automatically come to mind. I think I wanted to be someone like Mahesh Algappa, a tall handsome athlete, very presentable and someone who had good command over english.

Few years back, I had met one engineer Arun Srivastava at Chennai, who was from Port Blair and had also studied in KV there. He told me about my school after some thirty years and about Victor and Nirupa, that they were still there as part of school. I would love to go and meet them some day.

I would devote a separate chapter to my days in Kendriya Vidyalaya at IIT Delhi, where our class was senior most for three consecutive years and we were the first batch of Higher secondary from that school when we passed out in 1976. I was seventh among a class of twenty nine or was it 27, which had as many as twenty first division holders, it was probably a great result that we gave to our school, we had no one to teach us Physics for more than a year. I would talk

about some big achievers in life from KVIIT in my next article.

There are several stories about KV IIT, I am still in personal touch with couple of friends like Atul, Ashwini and Brijendra, had met Shankar and Vipin in Mumbai, in fact I felt very sad when Brijji told me couple of years back about Shankar's death in a road accident.

I would rate a very good friend in Rajiv Bhandari as the closest, we had planned and studied together for final exams of All India Higher Secondary, he got more marks in Hindi than me because of his good handwriting! and we both had joined Hindu College for a Chemistry Honours course, he later went to BITS Pilani, we were in touch for the longest times. He continued coming to my house in every vacation for atleast five years, later he did management from Pilani, I moved to Mumbai and we lost touch. I have found out his phone number and we are in telephonic contact. I have not met him ever after coming to Mumbai, we had spent a night together at his home in B4-72 or was it 76 Safdarjung enclave, I remember we studied whole night and he had made paneer from milk by adding lemon. It was good time that I have had with him.

I wrote my first poem Tulsi Mahima as a part of some centenary celebration function of saint Tulsidas at Port Blair, it was original work, my mother only helped me a bit later for minor corrections. It got published in the Hindi Patrika of Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, just around the time when we shifted to Delhi. Our Hindi teacher at KV,IIT, Keshav Dev Pandey had developed

some special affection and attachment to me, probably he liked the poem very much. He almost cried when he learned that I had got only 102 marks in Hindi, he was expecting a distinction from me. He later told me I had shattered all his dreams. He told he deliberately did not give me more marks in Hindi so that I do not become overconfident. Sir, I did not tell you that day the exact reasons for letting you down, now if you are still alive in some part of India, let me tell you that I never ever gave time to Hindi and English, being languages, I had a belief that my first aim was to get a first class in the board exam. Had I paid little attention to my handwriting, I would have still coasted along, Rajiv who knew lesser on both the papers had scored 111, unfortunately, he also missed the distinction by just one mark. That we had received the kind of love and affection from you and all other teachers would require a separate webpage, I would still say that our brilliant performance in the board exams was a result of sheer hard work and dedicated efforts of you, I.D. Sharma, Savita Kapoor and D.K. Gupta. I probably was one among seven students, that our math sir, initially thought were required to be detained from filling the form for the first ever board examination the school was to face in less than six months. I clearly remember, his words to the principal, 'Sir, inko bhagwan bhi aakar padhaye to yeh log maths mein pass nahi ho sakate'. However, when I featured among the nine students in half yearly exams, who had passed, he was surprised, and when after the board exam, I told him that I may get somewhere around 105-110, he had patted me on the back and put his arm around my shoulder saying, chinta na kar kaake, you will get distinction, I can't

forget that day, it was a true teacher who loved his pupil from heart. It gave me as well as him immense pleasure, when the results came. I had scored 128 marks out of 150, only Vipin with 140 was ahead of me in the class. Or was it someone got 129, I am not sure. This was an effort which I had made most sincerely in my life, and had practiced maths day in and day out. When I tell you that I had lost the track of time in the second paper, and had three unfinished theorems on the paper, plus, I was certain that I had goofed up in the binomial question, my 128 marks were actually out of 130. I am sure the examiner was more considerate, having realized, what had happened to me in the second paper, he definitely gave some extra marks, there was a sea difference in the beginning and end of that paper. I had tried to explain each and every aspect of the questions in trigonometry, co-ordinate and mensuration, that I had run short of time and my watch had ditched me was very evident on the answer sheet, I was very dejected, I attempted all the theorems in half, just to drive home the point that I knew but could not finish. The examiner was kind enough to take the note, otherwise, there was no way I could have scored those 128 marks. It was a fine gesture of benevolence on his part.

**It was great having met Ashwini on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2007 after nearly 30 years.**

For completeness I would just include the names of some of the students and teachers I still remember:

**Class fellows: Boys: Rajiv Bhandari, Atul Khandelwal Vipin Sachdev, Brijendra Singh Negi, Ashwini Aggarwal, Deepak Mehta, Ajay Yadav, Sanjay Mathur, V. Srinivas, Lalit Mohan Chaudhary, Ajit Kumar (Saain), R. Srinivas, Kripa Shankar, Vijay Deep Singh Dayal, Vipin Maira, Sunil Bajaj, Sheel Kumar!, Ramesh Gehaney, Mukesh Bhatnagar, Rajesh Bhardwaj, Gurpeet Singh Nirula, Mohinder Singh, Sharad Tiwari. Sorry, I had forgotten about Hitesh Manocha, may be there were couple of others as well.**

**I have learned that R. Srinivas and Kripa Shnakar are not amongst us today, they both met death in separate road accidents. R. Srinivas was one of the best athlete of the school and Shankar was very good at Hockey, he played for Delhi University, if I am not wrong! My sincere solace to their families and hope their souls rest in peace.**

**Girls: Lata S. Kaushik, Ranjana Mehta, Hemlata Sharma (She studied Physics Hons. at Hindu), Rita Nadir, Kaushal Gupta, Madhulika and a couple of others who joined later I have forgotten their names.**

**Teachers: Savita Kapoor (Chemistry), K.D. Pandey (Hindi), I.D. Sharma (Maths), Dixit madam (English), Sharma madam (Sanskrit), Asha madam (Drawing, she used to tell us stories from english movies), S.K. Bhayana (Physics) and also D.K. Gupta (Physics), Sharma madam (Biology), A.K. Ray (Principal, social studies), Ujagar Singh and Bhasin Sir (Physical Training).**

I am sure Brijendra and others will have more names to tell, there were two or three juniors we were close with Atul Sood, Bhaskar, Goyal (forgot initials), Sushama Lele (had once put a letter in her notebook, to be friends), Kumud Varma, Damanjeet Kaur, Nandini (she was a good athlete), Madhu Dua and Vandana (Atul's sister).

I think I would be delighted if any of these people from my school days and even those who are not mentioned here find this article, and feel like to write back. They can send an email ([abs31may@gmail.com](mailto:abs31may@gmail.com)) or call me up at (91-22-25507600 mobile 09869258424). I would be more than glad to include some articles by my batch mates at my website [www.abhayasharma.net](http://www.abhayasharma.net).

It would be unfair if I do not mention the support and attachment of my cousin Neeru, she was a student of Kendriya Vidyalaya at ASC Centre at Bareilly. She was one class ahead of me, and poor soul, she was so brilliant and yet missed her first division by just two or was it just one mark. I had vowed that I would get a first class in my All India Higher Secondary at any cost for her. She was the motivating factor for me to excel against all the odds, and I could get the first class with a distinction in Math was no less a result of her great support to me particularly in that year. **Thanks Neeru, thanks a lot by being on my side when it mattered most.**

School days were really great, I am proud to be a KVIAN, having studied in three different Kendriya Vidyalayas over a period of seven years was a nice experience. **A Great Teacher's Day to all my Teachers.**