

**My memoirs of Govt. Indian High School Nairobi, Kenya, Later called Duke of Gloucester School and now Jamhuri High School**



*I was born at Nairobi on the 4<sup>th</sup>. January 1927. My primary education was in Nairobi in the Primary School in temporary wood and iron structures. I passed the Kenya Preliminary Examination (a mandatory examination) to get in to the High School. Therefore, by natural progression, I gained entry into the High School which at that time was known as Govt. Indian High School. To reach the highest class in the School being Form 4, it was necessary to pass another overseas examination called the Junior Cambridge which, I passed and hence was able to reach up to Form 4.*

*I have very many memories of my studies in the High School, but I will endeavour to highlight the important ones.*



*Let me in the first instance talk about the Teachers. They were highly qualified, good and dedicated. There were some Teachers with whom we could take liberties and poke fun. There was an Urdu Teacher (whose real name I do not know, even now). He was nick named as “Chhichhi”. He had a sense of humour and could stand with pupils poking fun at him. He had a son called Shameem. One morning he came to the class looking very upset and angry. We asked him why he was upset. He said...*

*“Main hu Urdu ka Teacher, aur aaj, subha subha Shameem ki Maa ne Lafafe ko Falafa keh diya. Main hu Urdu ka Ustaad aur meri biwi ilfaaz ko sahi nahi keh sakti.”*

*“He was upset because being an Urdu teacher, his wife (Mother of Shameem) could not properly pronounce an Urdu word for an envelope which is Lafafa, instead, she said Falafa.”*

*One of the Geography teachers was Mr. Varghese. He was from India. At that time, National Movement for the Freedom of India was very active. One day he was talking about the main cotton*

growing countries. He did not mention about India. We asked him "what about India?" He replied "no - no, not of significance importance." We said "you are obviously against India" and we made a fuss. At the end he said "alright put in brackets, INDIA."

There were two Ahmedi Muslim Teachers. They were brothers. One was called A.R. Shah and the other was S.M.U Shah. They were really good. A.R Shah was a big man and he always carried with him a huge pair of wooden compasses which he used to punish mischievous boys. SMU Shah was our English Teacher. He had a very powerful personality and nobody dared to be mischievous. If someone did venture, he would look straight in his eyes and shake his head as if saying "no" that was enough to put a mischievous boy in his place. He was a very good Teacher. All our teachers were really good. Mr. Lobo, Chemistry teacher, Mr. RC Patel he was really a big man and his rebuke words in a strong Indian accent was "You Phool! Stop it!" and that was enough. Mr. Trivedi, a good Geography teacher, Mr. Manohar Lal, Mr. Mangat, they all kept us on straight and narrow.

We had another Chemistry Teacher Mr.Sobti. Three of his front lower teeth were missing. Every time he pronounced the word "Sulphuric" the pressure from his mouth leaked and without realising he would end up blowing a whistle. Whenever he said "sulphuric acid" and blew a whistle we all would look at each other and smile. The Teacher, however, could not see the funning side.

The Principal of the School was Mr. J. H Maxwell, an English man, a proper gentleman, but very strict. When he got angry, he had a peculiar smile on his face. Initially, we would smile back at him, but that attracted his wrath. He maintained good discipline in the School and had earned respect from the pupils and the Teachers. When he retired, he was succeeded by Mr. D Somon, a Jew and very small in size. He was an absolute anti-climax and a disaster. He was a bully for reasons which, no one could understand. At that time, the Indian Freedom Movement was gaining momentum, and we being Indians were supportive of the Movement. One morning, he burst into our class and picked up six boys and ordered them to go and wait outside his office. I was one of them. On arrival at the office, we saw several other boys who were similarly ordered. None of us

could understand why we have been picked up. Soon Mr. Somon arrived; we had nicked name him Sumuni (half a Shilling). He was short in size, and generally not pleasant. All the boys who had been picked up were wearing Indian tri colour flag on their lapels. We were ordered to immediately remove the same and not wear it in School. We later learnt that he had similarly ordered the sketch portrait of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru to be removed from the Drawing Room. We reported this matter to Senior Pupils of the School. This resulted in a general strike in the School which went on for about a week. I remember a senior student Maqbool. He took a leading role in organising a strike and was later expelled from School along with others.

Mr. Somon was promptly recalled to the Education Head Office and replaced by Mr. T.A McKay an English man. He was very good. He restored order in the School but it was sad that some of the senior boys who took the leading role in the strike were expelled.

We generally had great respect for the teachers. There was a sad incidence, which I recall. A teacher, Mr. Chand once admonished a pupil called Noor. Noor challenged him by saying "I will see you after School time." When the School finished at about in the afternoon at 1 'O' clock, Noor with some of his other friends waited outside the School in the path which Mr. Chand used to take. As Mr. Chand arrived, Noor and his friends surrounded him. We could feel that there would be trouble and feared that Noor may assault the teacher. The Teacher slapped Noor on his face. Noor stood in silence but did not retaliate as the others prevailed upon him not to retaliate. Mr. Chand went on his way and we were pleased that the Teacher was not assaulted



We had lots of extra curriculum activities. The Boy Scout movement was very strong. Our School's troop was called "3<sup>d</sup> Nairobi Troop". The Scouts were divided into groups called Patrols with a Patrol Leader. Each Patrol had a name. I was one of the Patrol Leaders and my Patrol was called Eagles Patrol. There were eight Patrol Leaders – Kuldip Sethi, Baldev Moolraj, myself, Biji Sood, Harbans Singh, Ram Murthi, Narsing Pal and Satya Vrat. In 1943 we had a group photograph taken with all the patrol leaders in the front row with Muhammad Yusuf as the troop leader in the middle. Mr. Deewan Chand was our Band Master. He taught us to play the big drum, the side drums, flute and the bugle. We practised

*a lot and were able to play well. How ever we never had any idea of marching in step. This was a big failing.*



*We had a very active Debating Society and I was an active participant. Mr. Mc Kay introduced the system of School Prefects. The Prefects were the chosen students who helped the headmaster and the Teachers generally in all sorts of matters. Abdul Majeed was the Head Prefect. I was one of the prefects. My main duty was to catch late comers and take them to the Principal's Office. The late comers were all canned.*

*Physical Training was another activity of great fun. Miss Dodds was a Physical Training Instructor (PT Instructor). She was a tough English Lady. In taking a class for P T lesson, she really tired out the pupils. The other PT Teachers were Mr. Bakshi, Mr. Balwant Singh Shant (Nick Named Simba).*



*Our School was a boy's School. When we were in Form 4, there were several occasions, when we would have girls from the Goan Girls School joining our class for the period of Chemistry Lessons taken by Mr. Lobo. That was a pleasant experience to have girls in a boys' School for a change.*



*After leaving the School, I was a Teacher in the Primary School for seven years. I studied Law and qualified as an Advocate and practised in Kenya until 1974. I migrated to the United Kingdom where I re-qualified as a Solicitor and had a very successful practise in Birmingham. I am now retired from my legal practise and devote a lot of time in Voluntary Sector in different Organisations. I have a deep interest in Spirituality.*