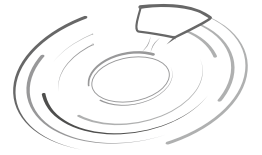


THE ROSE BOWL



Since 1985



DSOBS Vision

To foster fraternity amongst Old Boys,
support School, and serve society.

THE ROSE BOWL 
SINCE 1985

NEWSLETTER OF
THE DOON SCHOOL OLD BOYS' SOCIETY

C O N T E N T S

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Siddharth Sethia (176 T, 2003)

Vipul Swarup (438 K, 2000) [Digital]

COVER PHOTOS

Front Cover:

Great Ocean Road, Victoria, Australia

Sashikant Dash (419 H, 2005)

Back Cover:

Practice Makes Perfect

Pratik Basu (442 T, 1993)

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Feats of Un-Olympic Sporting Non-Glory

Pratik Basu (442 T, 1993)

Editor-in-Chief



Tata House with the Inter House Athletics Trophy – every precious point matters!

Watching the Olympics couldn't help but excite my mid-life-crisis-having senses. How could one not be stirred by all that inspiration flashing by on TV? Maybe I could take up the javelin? Maybe shooting? Diving? Swimming? Running?

Weight, age, injury, and gravity brought me back to

earth, and from beneath all that unearned male bravado emerged the harsh reality of memory.

Watching Katie Ledecky lap the competition in the pool reminded me of my own time at School. Except, instead of being the Ledecky, I was the one being Ledecky-ed.

It started right from the beginning in the shape of six-packed, broad-shouldered, Michael-Phelps-swaggered **Siddharth Lal (501 H, 1994)**. There's an urban legend that he broke a School record every time he entered the pool. This is no legend. It really happened. I was there. I bore the brunt of it.

I had to do it for Tata House. Coming in second meant precious points for the Inter House [Insert Sport Here] Trophy (which is why participation from Leagues 1 to Juniors 3 was strictly enforced). But the precious points didn't take into account the utter humiliation of being beaten by one, two, three, even four lengths. I swear, once Siddharth Lal had already beaten me and was drinking an espresso and reading the *Financial Times* before I even got into the pool.



Getting Ledecky-ed by Tyagi



Getting Ledecky-ed by just-woken-up-from-nap Janak Singh

The humiliation extended to Athletics as well. This time it was **Tyagi (Rajesh Tyagi, 447 H, 1993)** doing the Ledecky-ing. 100m, 200m, 110m Hurdles, 4x100 Relay, Walking to the Main Building, Eating Dinner, Sleeping - it didn't matter what the event was, he was already on to his next race by the time I stumbled past the finish line. Once, I was put in a different Heat than him, and I thought, finally, I'll win a race. Only, they realised a runner was missing,



Not getting Ledecky-ed by Tyagi



Losing while winning

grabbed **Janak Singh (454 H, 1993)** from his nap (his room happened to be near the starting line), grabbed a pair of those woefully *chapati*-thin sneakers we had, and proceeded to grab a first before I realised what was happening. Even when Tyagi wasn't around, there was someone else available to Ledecky me.

One year, my parents made that rare (for them) trip to Founder's. My mother, Aditi (bless her ever-cheerleading heart), wanted to see me race. My father, **Prabir Basu (138 T, 1962)** (bless him for staring stark reality in its unblinking face), wanted to go to Mussoorie. It's alright, I said, go ahead, I always lose.

This time I didn't.

I don't know what happened that day (most likely Tyagi was carrying an undiagnosed broken leg and was stoically carrying on for Hyderabad House), but I started in front, felt him breathing right down my neck, *literally*, never gave up that slight lead, and crossed the finish line first. Of course, in that one, okay, *only*, moment of triumph, my parents weren't there. **Shiv Dev Datt (61 T, 1964)**, my father's pal, was. And he had a video camera on him. Later, he would excitedly show the footage to my father, who, to his eternal credit, was satisfied that he had made the right choice. The weather in Mussoorie had been spectacular that day.



People being shocked

There was that time when three out of the four members of the School Mediums 4x100 Relay Team were in H House (I was the oddball fourth), and the three were out for *blood* (I still have nightmares of their intense extra-time baton-exchange practices on the Main Field, they looked like angry thoroughbreds with their muscular limbs...and snorting...and mad eyes!). I was, once again, given the humiliating task of anchoring against Tyagi (Do it for T House!, they said). Surprisingly, it was T House which got off to a flying start and was still in the lead when **Choppy (Premjit Singh Chopra, 440 T, 1993)** handed the baton to me with his *do-not-mess-this-up-for-us-Basu!* look. All I remember is that I could hear Tyagi's terrifying breathing right behind my ear but, for whatever reason, I wouldn't let him get ahead of me, and shockingly passed the finish line *inches* ahead of him. I mean, trust me when I say that people were *shocked*. Except, an H House Housemaster, who happened to be a Line Judge, claimed that one of us had stepped out of our lane (an infraction that had been, apparently, invisible to everyone *else*), and we were disqualified.

Even when I won, I lost.

Which is a long, roundabout way of saying that when I eventually became an SC Former, I had had enough. No more humiliation by land (Athletics), air (Basketball), or sea (Swimming). I was my own boss, no one could say anything. My Athletics career had been mercifully cut short by a curt (and sadly prophetic) "*Basu, tu mota ho gaya*" from **Captain Swaran 'Sadoo' Singh (SWS)**. Even if my swimming career was hanging by a thread, I was still *not* going to do the Medley Relay. I was always made to race the Butterfly just because I could do a "dolphin kick."

FOUNDER'S 2024

Which meant I was always up against, guess who? Yup, Mr Katie Ledecy himself, Siddharth Lal. Not this time, pal. You'll have to find someone else to (dolphin) kick around. Basu was out.

Then, the guilt-tripping began.

You see, this time it was T House with the three-out-of-four team. Choppy, **Lakhan (Arjun Lakhanpal, 435 T, 1993)**, and **Sitlani (Vijay Sitlani, 409 T, 1993)** were all world-beaters and needed a fourth to just round out the numbers. There was an Australia vs USA type rivalry brewing between T and H, and T wanted to win, *badly*. I was the boss of me, an SC Former, a God amongst boys, and rebuffed all advances, whether from batchmates, juniors, or Housemasters, even. Until they pulled out the showstopping What would your father think?



Mr Satinder 'Sattu' Kumar (SKM), Headmaster, Tata B, unsuccessfully pleading the case for T with judge, jury, executioner, Mr SK 'Bond' Vohra (SKV)

Fine, I'll do it.

The day of the race arrived with a lot of hype. Everyone had convinced me that I (*finally!*) had a shot at Siddharth Lal. He's too old, he's too focussed on his exams, he's actually nervous of *you*, they said. And I believed them. Now, I was the one with the Michael-Phelps swagger.

Sitlani got T off to a scorching start. We built on the lead in the second leg. By the time Choppy touched the wall with his *do-not-mess-this-up-for-us-Basu!* look, we were nearly a length ahead. I could feel my heart swell every time I popped my head above the water to take a breath. They were cheering for me Léon-Marchand style! "Baah," gulp, "Sooh!" In time with my strokes.



"Baah," gulp, "Sooh!"

This was it, I was going to do it. I would be the one doing the Leducky-ing. I banged the wall with all of my unearned male bravado and Lakhan jumped in for the final leg. I got out of the water leisurely, victory was assured. So how much did I beat him by? Beat him? Yes, *beat* him, I heard the cheering! Oh that, you were going so slow we were yelling at you to hurry up because the chap in third was catching up. Siddharth Lal was already enjoying his espresso and *Financial Times*. (Years, maybe decades later, the story was confirmed by **Toad (Karan Lal Mehta, 425 J, 1993)**, he had heard an entirely different chant: "To-," gulp, "-ad!" in time with his strokes and had, *almost*, caught up with me.)

I had lost again.

With these troublesome memories resurfacing, I firmly put all thoughts of Olympic sporting glory aside. That is, until the articles for this issue began filtering in. Skeet shooting! Mountain climbing! Walking the country! Triathlon! My unearned male bravado made

me declare to my physical therapist that I was going to start running again. Really, all right, let's get you on the treadmill, wait, have you seen the way you run, when was the last time you exercised? Uh, September. Really? September...of *last* year. You'll hurt yourself. You mean, hurt my fragile psyche made brittle by a lifetime of humiliating second places? No, it's your ankle that's too weak, try walking first. Ha, the joke's on you, Walking is an... wait for it... Olympic sport!

I'll see y'all out there!

PS. Questions? Comments? Suggestions? Corrections? Articles? Photos? Walking advice? Please email me: BasuRoseBowl@gmail.com

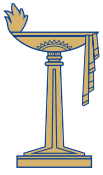


I'll see y'all out there!

ERRATA

On page 21 of the Spring 2024 issue we misidentified **Haripal 'Bull' Singh Gill** as 329 H, 1963. Haripal's correct number and year of passing is, in fact, **328 H, 1966**. The oversight was brought to our attention by **Dipinder Singh Brar (91 H, 1967)**.

The error is sincerely regretted.



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We've Got Mail

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

An absolutely remarkable issue, especially your piece on you and your clan in School. There is that piece by **Shomie**. I loved reading **Sumanjit Chaudhry (7 J, 1963)** and the writeup on **Nandu Jayal (101 T, 1942)**. Of course, that piece on Ranthambore is wonderful, as are those letters.

The whole issue breathes the spirit of Doon.

Yours sincerely,
AN 'AD' Dar (AND)

Dear Editor,

I read the tribute to **Mr Gurdial 'Guru' Singh (GU)** in the Founder's Day 2024 issue.

It was a wonderful compilation with great tributes and photos. And an amusing editorial!

All the best,
Preetinder Singh Virk (242 K, 1956)

Dear Editor,

Congratulations on a great job with *The Rose Bowl*. **Samir Kuckreja (179 H, 1984)** and I were handling it many moons ago. I served three stints in the Executive Committee but now stay away as I'm the Auditor for The DSOBS!

Warm regards,

Nikhel Kochhar (41 K, 1973)

Dear Editor,

I distinctly remember quadrangle football being a regular pastime for many Doscocs. As far as I know, it has been a regular feature for many weekend evening games, the best stress buster when no sports were allowed during exams. In general, it would be a point of constant interaction for boys of different Forms and Houses throughout the year.

Another interesting aspect which I observed was how Houses that regularly played 'towel stand' or 'quadi football' developed distinct playing styles of their own. I remember the senior Jaipur House players having a very distinct one-touch football style which can possibly be credited to their near-daily habit of playing football in their house quadrangle in the evening.

I believe that quadrangle football stands the test of time and can qualify as one of the many traditions developed over the years that resonate with Doscocs across several batches.

Thank you and regards,

Adv CC Chengappa (287 K, 2017)

Old Boys' News



Mr Alok Tirtha Bhowmik, the former Head of Art Department, was awarded the prestigious Veena Shri Samman Award for his contributions in the fields of art and design in India. Congratulations!



Maj Gen Sachin Malik with his father Gen VP Malik

Maj Gen Sachin Malik (536 J, 1987) is now heading the famed 81 Mountain Division which had been commanded by his father, former Chief of Army Staff, Gen VP Malik, during the 1999 Kargil War. The division is headquartered in Ladakh and keeps an eye on the Line of Control. Maj Gen Sachin Malik's familial connections to the Army run deep. In addition to his father, his mother Mrs Ranjana Malik served as an Army doctor, and he himself is also married to a military doctor. A heartfelt salute to the entire family!



Tanuj Bhramar (53 K, 2008) and **Karan Singh (162 O, 2003)** released their co-production *Barah by Barah (12x12)* in May. The film received positive reviews, including being called “a poignant portrait of a city at a crossroads” and has the distinction of being one of the few modern movies to be shot on film. Congratulations and all the best for continued success!



Republic Day Honours



Lt Gen Ravin Khosla and Lt Gen Vipul Shinghal with their honours

Three Doscos were on the list of Republic Day Honours earlier this year. **Lt Gen Ravin Khosla (661 H, 1981)** was awarded the Param Vishisht Seva Medal (PVSM). **Lt Gen Vipul Shinghal (305 J, 1985)** was awarded the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal (AVSM). **Maj Gen Sachin Malik (536 J, 1987)** was awarded the Vishisht Seva Medal (VSM). The entire community is proud of the continued service of these brave men.



From L-R: Dhruv Agarwal, Raghuvendra 'Donny' Singh (878 T, 1982), Aaryaman Scindia, and Vidit Sidana

Rohan Gupta (527 T, 2013), Vidit Sidana (552 O, 2013), Dhruv Agarwal (596 J, 2013), and Aaryaman Scindia (632 J, 2014) were responsible for the successful inaugural edition of the Madhya Pradesh League (MPL) T20 cricket tournament held at the Jai Vilas Mahal in Gwalior, Rajasthan. Tournaments like the MPL are under the aegis of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to promote the cricketing talent in the states, to give aspiring cricketers exposure, and to get them ready for the next level like the IPL and India B teams. Congratulations to the quartet!



Sidharth Sethi (8 T, 2014) recently organised the inaugural Oxford India Forum. The forum featured lively discussions around key issues facing India, including environmental responsibility, technology, and innovation as the country continues on its path to becoming the third largest economy in the world. The University of Oxford declared the forum “a landmark event, involving some of India's most high-profile and influential business leaders.” Well done!

Making History at the Olympics



Saumya Dev Singh at Paris 2024

Saumya Dev Singh (266 H, 1985) had the privilege to travel to the 2024 Olympic Games held in Paris, France, as Chief Coach, India Skeet Shooting Team.



Saumya overseeing the team



Saumya getting a close-up look



Saumya during the competition

This is the first time in the history of Indian skeet shooting that they were able to win three Olympic quotas. The team of Maheshwari Chauhan and Anant Jeet Singh Naruka finished a credible fourth in the Skeet Mixed Team Shooting Bronze Medal match against China after a dramatic, and razor thin, shoot-off.

What an incredible achievement and a continuation of Dosco success in shooting competitions at the Olympics!



Saumya with the team

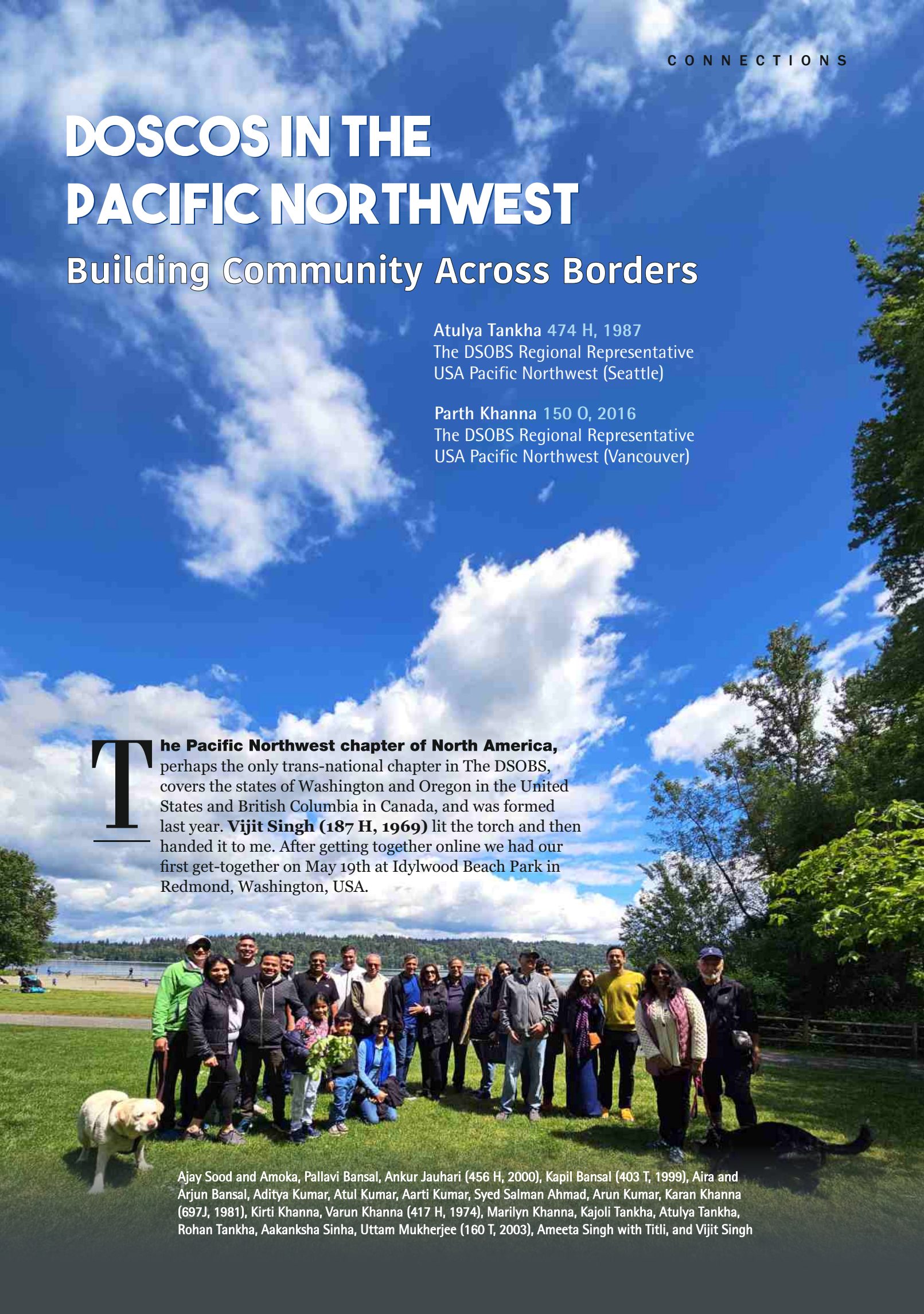
DOSCOS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Building Community Across Borders

Atulya Tankha 474 H, 1987
The DSOBS Regional Representative
USA Pacific Northwest (Seattle)

Parth Khanna 150 O, 2016
The DSOBS Regional Representative
USA Pacific Northwest (Vancouver)

The Pacific Northwest chapter of North America, perhaps the only trans-national chapter in The DSOBS, covers the states of Washington and Oregon in the United States and British Columbia in Canada, and was formed last year. **Vijit Singh (187 H, 1969)** lit the torch and then handed it to me. After getting together online we had our first get-together on May 19th at Idylwood Beach Park in Redmond, Washington, USA.



Ajay Sood and Amoka, Pallavi Bansal, Ankur Jauhari (456 H, 2000), Kapil Bansal (403 T, 1999), Aira and Arjun Bansal, Aditya Kumar, Atul Kumar, Aarti Kumar, Syed Salman Ahmad, Arun Kumar, Karan Khanna (697J, 1981), Kirti Khanna, Varun Khanna (417 H, 1974), Marilyn Khanna, Kajoli Tankha, Atulya Tankha, Rohan Tankha, Aakanksha Sinha, Uttam Mukherjee (160 T, 2003), Ameeta Singh with Titli, and Vijit Singh



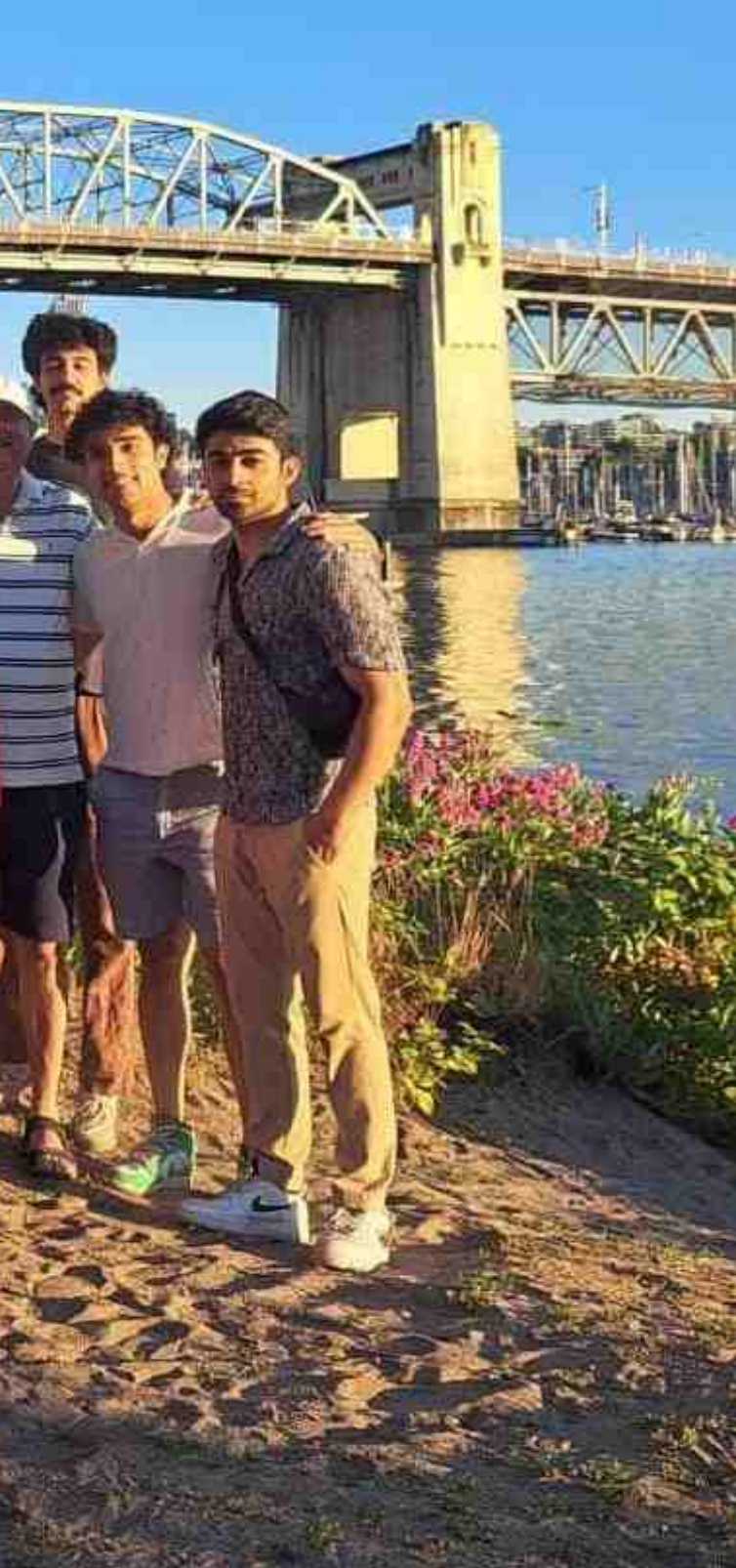
(L to R)
 Kneeling Paramdeep Singh (607 T, 2015), Aarya Tamrakar (214 H, 2016)
 Standing Salman Ahmad with Gia, Vijit Singh and Titli, Nachiket Jain (233 O, 2016), Parth Khanna, Ajay Sood, Ameeta Singh,
 Fateh Phoolka (193 H, 2016), Atulya Tankha, Samarvir Mundi (502 T, 2019), Shreshth Mehra (405 O, 2018), and Arush Sood (658 H, 2015)

It was a perfect spring day for a picnic and most of us based in the Seattle area could make it. Vijit, Amita, and their lab Titli joined us from Bellingham, Washington. It was also really nice to have **Syed Salman Ahmad (444 K, 1993)**, and **Ajay Sood (423 J, 1986)**

and his lab Amoka join us from across the border. Salman is an active member and attended both get-togethers. **Aditya Kumar (567 O, 1993)**, Salman's batchmate, was visiting Seattle and attended the picnic. His son **Karan Agrawal (267 O 2024)**, a

freshly-minted Old Boy, has since joined the University of Washington. It was a pleasant surprise to have **Atul Kumar (868 T, 1982)** and Aarti join us at the last minute.

Although we were all meeting each other for the first time,



with Doscós spanning over four decades, there was an instant connection. Some of us who hadn't visited School in decades received updates from the more recent generations. The Seniors regaled us with stories from their era.

There was a lot of fun, bonhomie, and an excess of food. The *samosas* brought by **Arun Kumar (99 K, 1976)** were the biggest hit. Everyone, including our furry friends, had a wonderful time and after a valiant attempt at “Lab Pe Aati Hai Dua” we bid au revoir, having decided to turn our first picnic into an annual event.

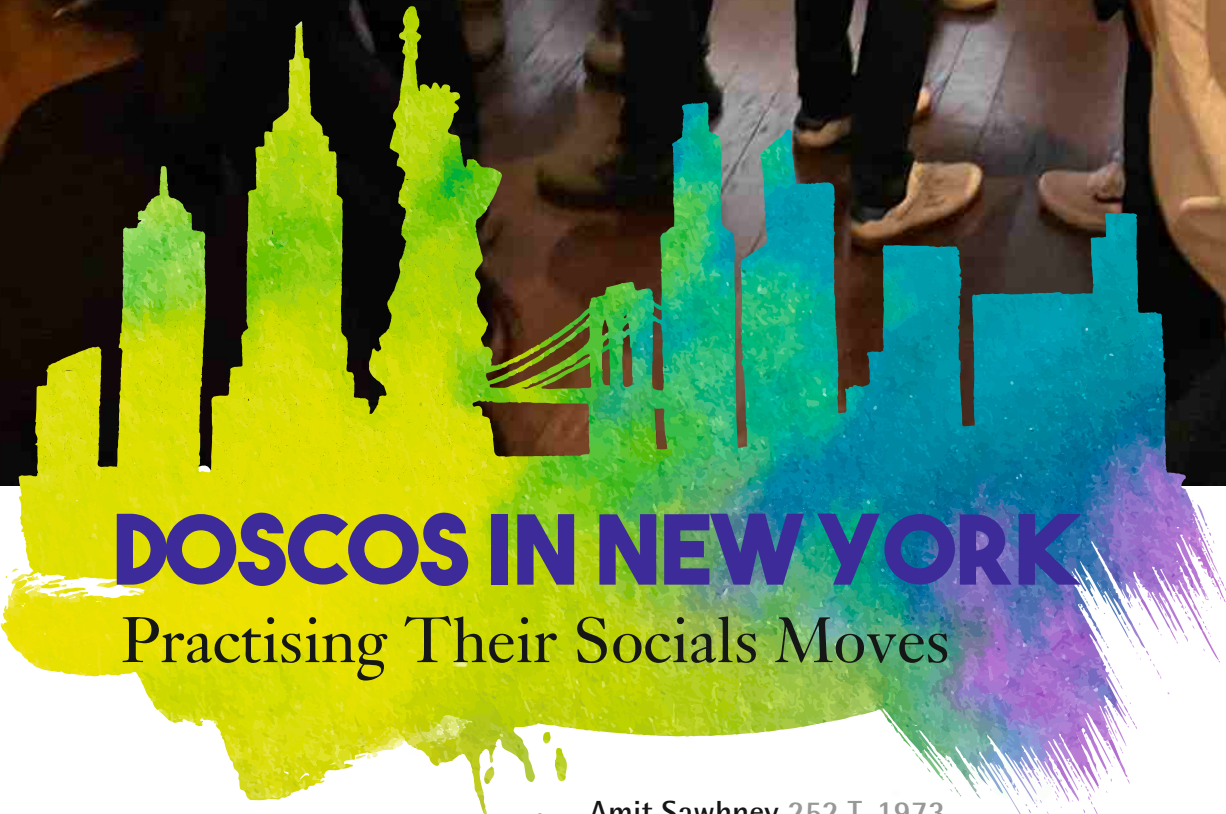
Some of us who hadn't visited School in decades received updates from the more recent generations. The Seniors regaled us with stories from their era.

Our first ever event across the border in gathered at the iconic English Bay Beach on a beautiful summer day, the perfect setting for a relaxed get-together. The potluck was a feast for the senses, with a delicious array of dishes, from savory *samosas* to decadent *crème brûlée*. Everyone surely brought their house feast appetites for the delectable barbecue as well.

Vijit Singh brought along his lovely partner, Ameeta Singh, and his adorable dog, Titli, adding a touch of lively energy to the atmosphere. Another friend, Salman, surprised us by bringing his young daughter, Gia, who quickly charmed her way into our hearts.

The fifteen of us spent the afternoon laughing, reminiscing about old times, and learning about each other's lives at School and after. We even managed a “pitch perfect” and rousing version of Song No 3, the iconic “Lab Pe Aati Hai Dua” – a heartwarming reminder of the enduring bond our community holds across borders. 🇮

Atulya Tankha moved to the USA for graduate school, but quit his Doctoral program to work with his son Rohan, who was diagnosed with Autism. Since 2007, Atul has been dabbling with various different things that have caught his interest. He currently splits his time between Redmond, Washington, USA, and the tiny US exclave of Point Roberts, south of Vancouver, Canada, with his wife Kajoli and Rohan.



DOSCOS IN NEW YORK

Practising Their Socials Moves

Amit Sawhney 252 T, 1973
Shubho Ghosh 472 O, 1993
The DSOBS Regional Representatives – USA East Coast



Doon-Welham joint get-together

A joint get-together between The Doon School and Welham Girls' School was held at Utsav restaurant in New York City, on Sunday, June 23rd. This was the second get-together of DoscOs and Welhamites held in the Big Apple, and by common consensus, is set to become an annual fixture! All in, over a hundred DoscOs and Welhamites showed up, quite a few with their significant others. The energy was palpable. Many in attendance were still practising their Socials "moves."



Over a hundred attendees



The energy was palpable

Incidentally, the next New York event is the Annual DSOBS Dinner on Sunday, September 28th. We are hoping to see many more Doscocs there! 🇺🇸



Practising Socials "moves"



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Safe from the rain at Sly Granny's

DOSCOS IN GOA

A STRONG SPIRIT

Arjun Khanna 633 0, 1995
The DSOBS Regional Representative – Goa

The Goa DoscOs continue their fine tradition of socialising in the midst of an unrelenting monsoon season.

On Sunday, July 7th, we gathered for lunch. It was pouring cats and dogs but we met anyway at our favourite establishment, Sly Granny's Beach House. The DSOBS will be thrilled to know that we each used our Dosco Card to take advantage of the Dosco discount!



Enjoying lunch



Arjun Khanna and Mr Sheel 'Shorty' Sharma (SKS, 345 K, 1964) along with other revellers



A delicious feat of logistics



A fantastic dinner



Filled with chatter



Good energy

We had such a good time that we met again a week later. On Monday, July 15th, we were hosted by **Vijay Mohan (90 H, 1968)** and his lovely wife. Ma'am always does things in style and she outdid herself by organising a fantastic sit-down dinner for the 15 of us. This was quite an impressive, and delicious, feat of logistics.

It was a lovely evening filled with chatter and good

energy. The incessant rains didn't stop us from meeting - such is our strong Dosco spirit! 🙏

Arjun Khanna is the founder of Mhymatch, the World's first full stack AI recruiter and AI-driven community platform. He lives in Goa and is deeply passionate about connecting people using technology.



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Together, we can ensure a sustainable future for the next generations.

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DOSCOS IN
Ludhiana
Off to a Great Re-start

Abhishek Singhi 517 H, 2006
The DSOBS Batch Representative – 2006

(L to R)
Kneeling Arnav Goyal (68 K, 2014), Aaditya Gupta (259 O, 2010)
Standing Abhishek Singhi, Nikhil Bector (474 H, 2006), Ruhaan Goel (183 K, 2023), Rushil Goyal (365 K, 2018),
Sanyam Gupta (596 O, 2020), Harshil Aggarwal (55 K, 2014), Parth Aggarwal (217 O, 2016), and
Abhimanyu Singhi (229 H, 2003)

We re-started The DSOBS Ludhiana group after more than a decade as the numbers have increased in recent times. There are now 46 of us in the group. We are aiming to get together on the third Friday of every month. The Initiative for the get togethers was taken by **Nikhil Bector (474 H, 2006)** and myself, in concert with **Abhimanyu Singhi (229 H, 2003)**.

The first gathering was at The Kylin Experience in Ludhiana, Punjab on June 21st. The gathering was notable for the presence of so many youngsters, the oldest person being from the Batch of 2003.

The second gathering took place at Bistro 226, also in Ludhiana, on July 19th. This time the senior most was from the Batch of 1983. Again, notable

was the presence of so many from the batches of 2022 and 2023.

These gatherings were both great fun – dinner, drinks and, most importantly, stories from School.

The aim is to get as many DoscOs as possible together from Ludhiana and the surrounding areas. Looks like we're off to a great start. 🙌

Abhishek Singhi is currently the CFO of Arham Knitwears, one of India's leading uniform brands catering to thousands of schools across the country. He resides in Ludhiana with his wife Vandana and son Arhaan.



(L to R)
Abhimanyu Singhi, Ruhaan Goel, Abhishek Singhi, Sahil Aggarwal (525 T, 2007), Rajesh 'Lorry' Saigal (80 T, 1983), Abhisar Sudhakar (707 J, 2022), Aaditya Gupta, Aseem Sahni (329 O, 2011), Nikhil Bector, Sanyam Gupta, and Aadi Jain (168 H, 2023)



The DSOBS Chandigarh Golf Team

DOSCOS IN CHANDIGARH

THE EVA INTER-ALUMNI GOLF TOURNAMENT

Sabir Singh (213 K, 2016)
The DSOBS Regional Representative – Chandigarh

The DSOBS Chandigarh Chapter participated in the EVA Inter Alumni Golf Tournament held on Wednesday, April 17th at the Chandigarh Golf Club, Chandigarh, Punjab.

We sent two teams comprising of the following:

Team 1

- Ajaytaj Singh (353 J, 1970)**
- Col Abhaya 'Rusty' Rastogi (125 T, 1972)**
- Ranjan 'Itcan' Bhalla (368 J, 1972)**

Team 2

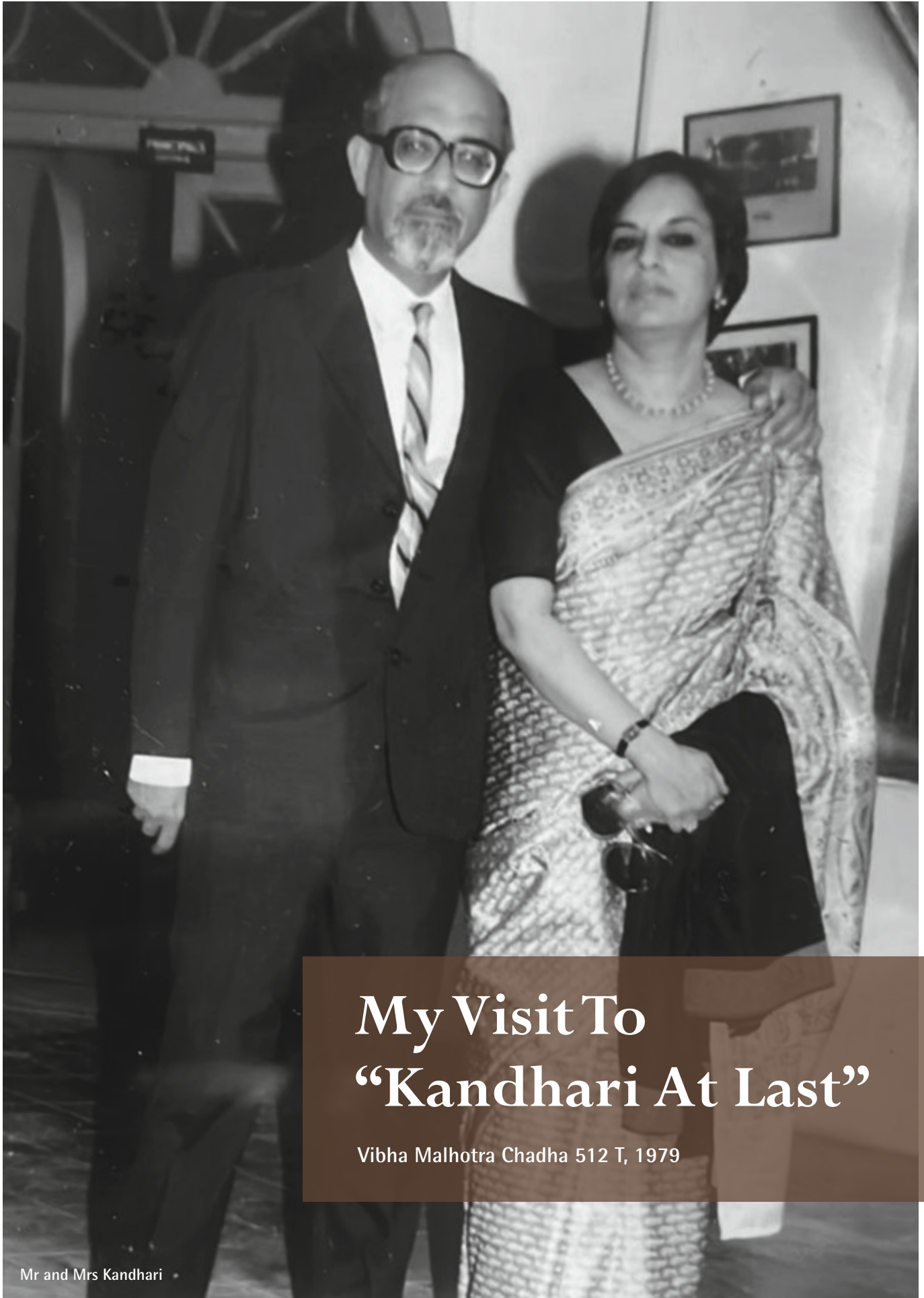
- Ravibir Singh (19 K, 1983)**

Gurbrinder Singh Brar (577 K, 1988)
Jayant Pathak (58 H, 1996)

Over 22 schools participated in the tournament, including stalwarts like Mayo College, The Lawrence School, Sanawar, Welham Boys' School, and Yadavindra Public School (YPS).

Our team performed well, especially given the stiff competition. Jayant Pathak won the prize for best nett after a superb performance.

We are looking forward to participating again next year. 🏌️



My Visit To “Kandhari At Last”

Vibha Malhotra Chadha 512 T, 1979

Mr and Mrs Kandhari

For the past few years, every time I visited Dehradun, it was on my mind to check how the Late **Mr Surendra 'Charlie' Kandhari's (KD/SKK, 122 T, 1951)** wife Usha was doing, especially as I never got the opportunity to pay her my condolence after the sad demise of Charlie few years ago.

In April 2024, this persistent thought got me to finally find myself sitting in good old Charlie's Dehradun home – the home that they built together for his retirement.

To my amusement the address that was given to me actually said “Kandhari At Last,” and true to its word, the drive from Dalanwala, after crossing the outskirts of a village to “Kandhari At Last” certainly felt like the destination at last!

It is commendable how a Dosco returned to give back to his alma mater and went not one step but two steps beyond. Charlie spent many years teaching geography at Doon and serving as the Housemaster of Jaipur House. He later became the principal of The Welham Boys' School, Dehradun. This home is similar to the Jaipur Housemaster's residence where The Kandharis resided for many years.

The fish pond at the threshold was inviting enough to make me walk through the living room to the veranda overlooking the lush green grass in the beautiful garden.

While I sipped tea, I was reminded of Charlie's visit to our home in Los Angeles. He was so happy to meet me and the family that he kept remembering “Daddy OPM” (**Mr OP Malhotra**) and said that he should definitely visit his daughter, and I had to tell him politely, “Sir, if you know OPM, he will never stay in his daughter's

home.” With my younger sister **Prabha (Prabha Malhotra, 188 T, 1984)**, he became slightly lenient with his principles by agreeing to have a cup of tea when he would visit her in Dehradun occasionally.

During my younger days in School, Charlie would always inquire about my older sister **Pratibha (Pratibha Malhotra Narang, 343 J, 1963)**, whom he had taught, and whom he remembered for her brilliance. It is amazing how, with the passing of time, one does not forget kind words uttered by a friend, a relative or, as in this case, a geography teacher.

I also cannot forget the joy which their son **Chetan (Chetan 'Kaddu' Kandhari, 414 J, 1993)** expressed on discovering The Doon School mugs on the bar in our home. He said they immediately made him feel at home.

Looking at Charlie, and his zest for life, no one could imagine that he would leave his loving wife and companion Usha to enjoy his pride and joy “Kandhari At Last” alone, when he, to everyone's surprise, left this world way before his time.

All these thoughts kept scanning through my mind as I sat in the

Kandhari home which Charlie had so beautifully designed.

Memories of Charlie's presence on The Doon School campus kept flashing through my mind. I remembered him walking by, puffing his pipe in dignity, even when casually cycling on the cobbled path, always smiling, saying positive words such as “May you go from strength to strength.”

In fact, believe it or not, whenever I utter these same words I am always reminded of the happy, healthy, Charlie Kandhari. 🙏

It is commendable
how a Dosco
returned to give
back to his alma
mater and went not
one step but two
steps beyond.

Dear Sir...

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the next in a series about the Masters who shaped our futures.

For OPM, in Fond Remembrance

Kanti Bajpai (KTB, HM) 264 T, 1972



Mr Om Prakash Malhotra (OPM)

As I head towards the end of my teaching career, I often think about those who taught and mentored me, from my schooldays to my doctoral studies. At Doon, the person who saw me at my worst and perhaps my best was **Mr Om Prakash Malhotra (OPM)**. That he was a stalwart of the Mathematics department and Housemaster of Tata House for eleven years is well enough known. Less well known are his other contributions to School life and his activities beyond Chandbagh. As boys and Old Boys, we don't pay enough attention to the fuller lives of our Masters. I write this as a small corrective to that insularity, for a teacher who gave the better part of his life to Doon but transcended the School.

I had this notion that OPM was from Dehradun and had rarely stepped outside the valley. In fact, he was born and raised in Jammu and went to school and college there. A master's degree in mathematics from DAV College, Lahore, followed. While I did know that OPM was a fine mathematics teacher, I didn't know that he was a first divisioner and scholarship holder all his school and college days and a Gold Medallist in Mathematics. Armed with his degrees, in 1943 he went on to teach at DAV College, Hoshiarpur, as a lecturer in Mathematics, where he soon rose to be head of the department.

Quite how and why OPM chose to come to Doon, after his start in college teaching, is a bit of a mystery.

Mr JAK Martyn (HM), who always had an eye out for talented teachers, may have spotted and recruited him. Or perhaps OPM saw an advertisement – had he tired of college teaching by then? Or was Doon simply financially more attractive and, as we would say today, a better lifestyle choice? In any case, in 1951, OPM arrived in Chandbagh as Assistant Master of Mathematics (all

Masters at Doon are Assistant Masters unless they rise to being Senior Master aka Deputy HM). For the next 33 years, under four HMs, OPM was the stalwart of Mathematics at Doon. Jaipur House boys will remember him as a Tutor (1951-1967), but it was in Tata House that he left his real pastoral mark, as Housemaster from 1967 to 1978 – first of a unified Tata House, and from 1971 onwards, of Tata B. In his final years at Doon, from 1978 to 1984, OPM served as Senior Master under **Mr Eric Simeon (HM)** and **Mr Gulab Ramchandani (HM)**. (His chalk and duster days were not done though: from 1984 to 1992, he taught at Welham Boys' School.)

The more I got to know about my former Housemaster, the more it was clear that OPM's life-experience went well beyond Doon. This should not shock, but thanks to my schoolboy self-absorption, I saw him in only two dimensions – Chandbagh and mathematics.

For instance, until recently, I knew nothing about his UK days. In 1960, the British Council sponsored a stint at St Bees School in Cumberland (founded a mere 400 years earlier), where OPM taught Mathematics. During his stay, he visited Eton, Harrow, Winchester, and Rugby, all of which had influenced Doon in its formative years. He was not overawed by his English exposure, though. He concluded that “the Doon School was in no way less than those schools, rather in many ways it was an improvement,” thanks to **Mr AE Foot (HM)** who had taught at Eton and Martyn who had taught at Harrow. During his stay in the UK, OPM wrote about Doon for the *Illustrated London News*, which led to a meeting with the editor of the magazine (probably Bruce Ingram, the grandson of the magazine's founder). He also shared his thoughts on English public-school education in a ten-minute BBC interview.

Perhaps inspired by his media moments in the UK, OPM started to write commentaries for the Indian press. Over the years, he published in the *Times of India*, the *Hindustan Times*, *The Statesman*, and the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, on subjects as diverse as science, astronomy, ballistic missiles, economics, education in ancient India, and the English public school system. His article on “Basic Education” for the *Hindustan Times* caught the attention of the Union Education Minister, KL Shriali, who formed a committee on how Indian public schools could help improve the Basic

Education schools (schools based on Mahatma Gandhi's notions of education).

From 1965 onwards, OPM's life beyond Doon was dedicated to producing a wonderful set of mathematics textbooks for the junior-most to the senior-most classes. He started out as a co-author with his former professor, Dr Shanti Narayan. Later, he co-authored with younger collaborators. When I took “Higher Maths” for the ISC, it was his textbook that guided me through geometry, trigonometry, calculus, and statistics. I went on to do an Economics degree and was able to sleep



OPM

soundly through “Introduction to Calculus”, having done it all with the help of OPM's classic textbook and **Mr Sheel Vohra's (SKV)** instruction.

This thumbnail sketch of OPM's career hardly does justice to him as a schoolmaster. For years, he led the School's National Cadet Corps (NCC) training. The squads in his time paraded in front of the King of Jordan, the Shah of Iran, and the Emperor of Ethiopia. He was also in charge of Doon's Labour Quota System, which later became Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) under the ISC board. It was during OPM's time as head of the Labour squads that the boys began digging to lay the foundation of the Auditorium (now the Kilachand Library). Incidentally, this is probably the last time that the boys were allowed to help build campus facilities (they had built the Rose Bowl in the early years of the school).

At a personal level, I have many pictures of OPM in my head, but the overriding image is of a stern, brisk figure, methodical and dedicated. On cold

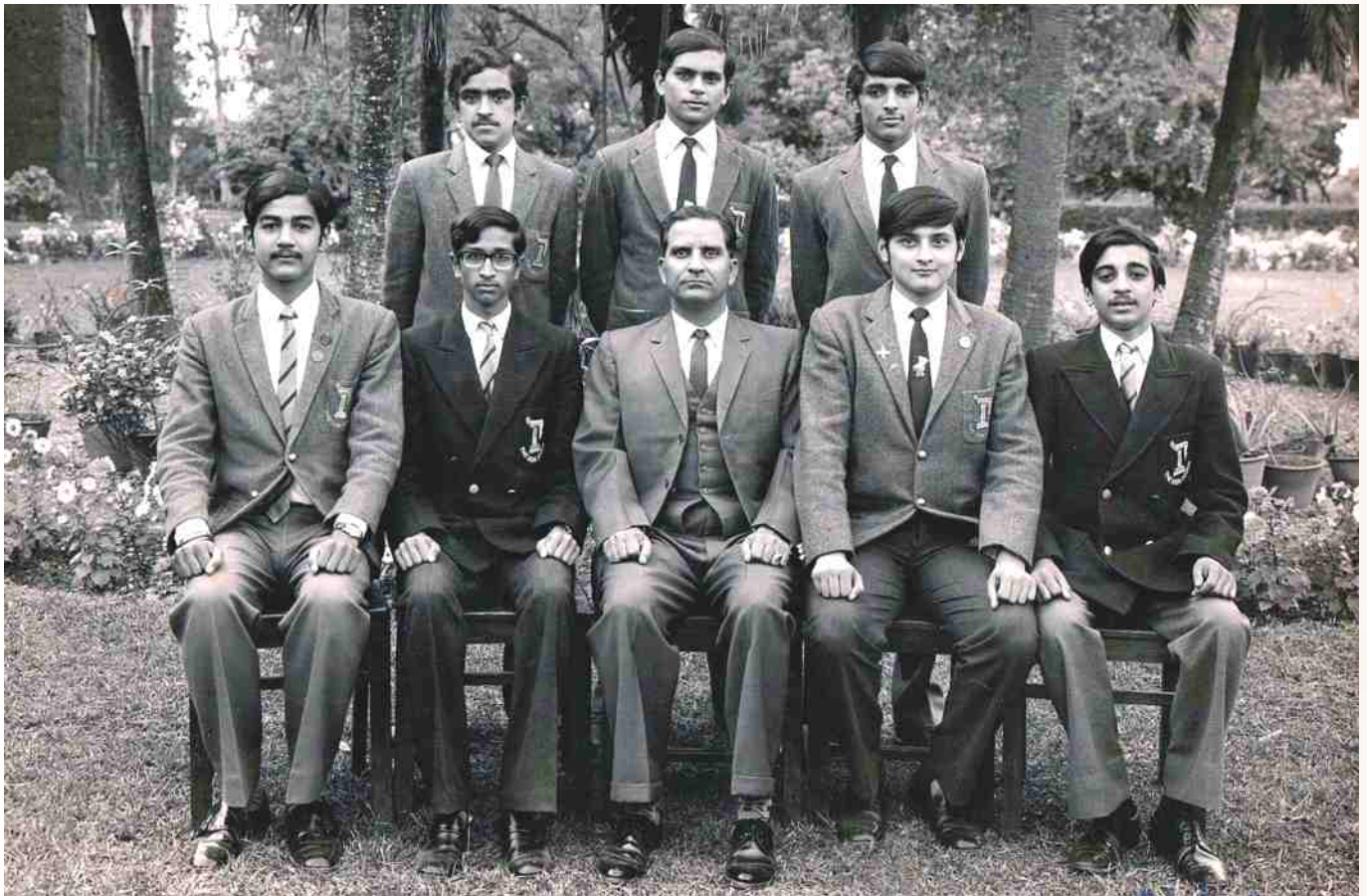


OPM

winter days, OPM sat straight in his chair in the Housemaster's Villa, handing us tuckshop chits and giving us permission for Sunday outings. In the winter, he dressed formally, usually in a grey three-piece suit or a brown tweed coat and flannels. He wore square black glasses, sported a trim moustache, and swept his hair back from a generous forehead. He was a serious man and rarely smiled, but I have no memory of his ever raising his voice. We were afraid of him, especially as juniors, but (with one exception) I never saw him angry.

At meals, OPM presided silently. I remember him as a solid full-faced presence. I don't recall any profound or effervescent thoughts – he spoke very little. When he did speak, it was with a slight incline of the head – just a few words. His smile was a flash of sunlight right across his face, oddly boyish for a stern man. Those of us under his care can probably still remember the pleasant shock of it.

I never saw much of OPM outside the House. I do have a clear image of him walking into Assembly,



Prefects and Monitors, Tata B, 1972

(L to R)

Sitting Sundresh Prasad (213 T, 1972), Kanti Bajpai, OPM, Nikhil Mehta (251 T, 1972), Vinay Sheel Oberoi (327 T, 1972).

Standing Pankaj Mediratta (357 T, 1972), Atul Gupta (227 T, 1972), Abhay 'Rusty' Rastogi (125 T, 1972)

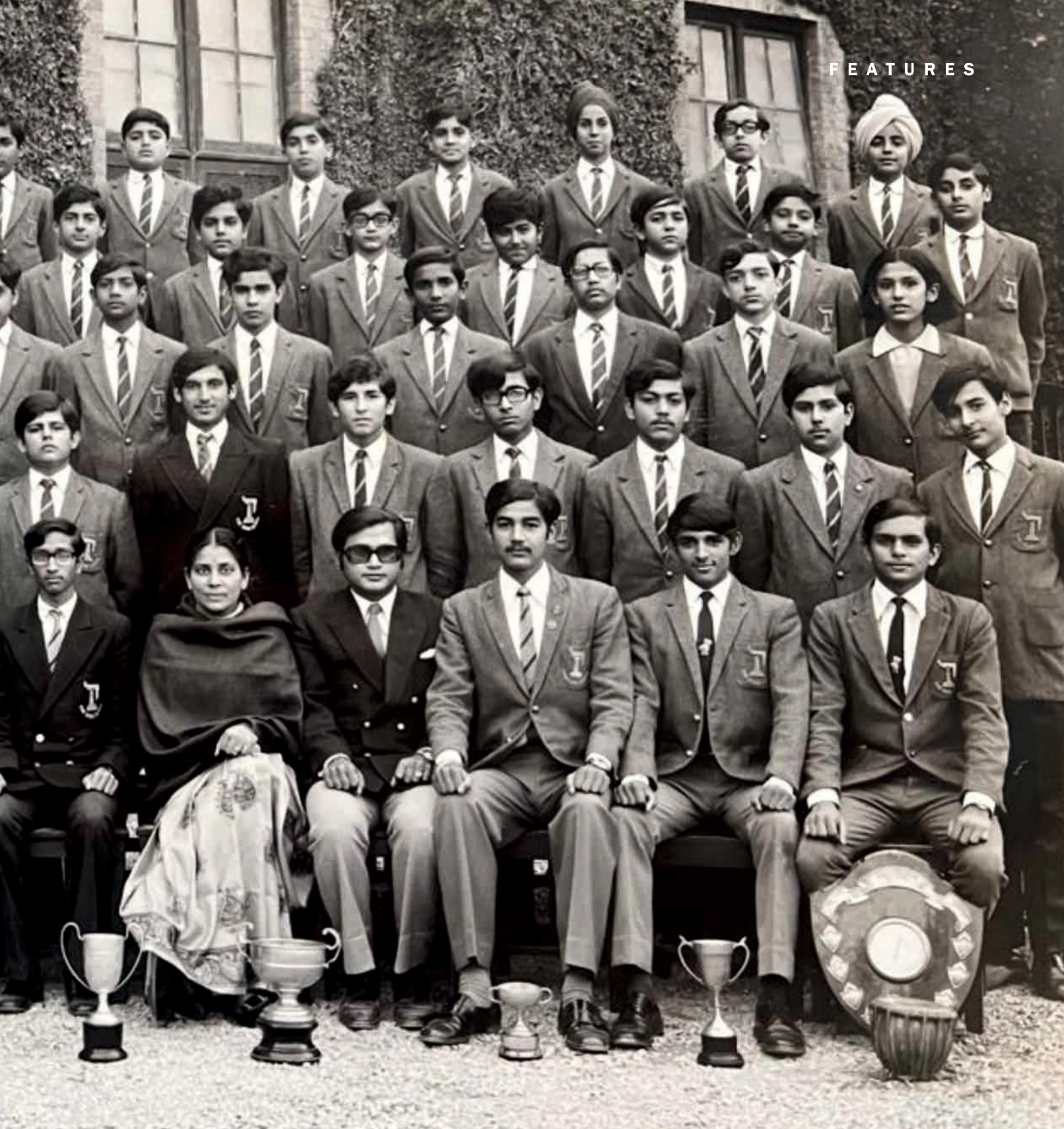


OPM with Tata B, 1972

dressed in his white bush-shirt and matching trousers, always deep in conversation. But I was not in his Tutorial group, his Spare Time Activity (STA), or social service squad. He was never Games Master for my games. I have no recollection of him at inter-house matches, as we competed or cheered. What I do remember is OPM on the Main Field playing hockey in his baggy white shorts and singlet – was it for Staff vs

Boys? He played with all the seriousness with which he did everything. For someone who was not particularly athletic, he was light on his feet. And not a hair out of place!

In the House, I mostly think of OPM at his desk or walking around the corridors, especially at Toye time. On the coldest days, he wore a greatcoat of some kind and a slightly comical cap with flaps



over his ears. He always carried a hefty silver torch. You would be studying, and suddenly he would be at the Toye door or at your shoulder. He shimmered in and out and rarely scolded. If he noticed an infringement, he would speak to the Toye head. No finger wagging at the guilty party, no public shaming – a perfect demonstration of indirect rule!

When I was Tata B House Captain, OPM would come by my study now and then. He always cleared his throat as he approached and knocked on the door as a courtesy. He was a reserved man, even with his House Captain, but I was impressed by how much he knew about the House and how much he trusted his P's and M's. That entire final year – marked by some tumultuous happenings! – OPM often sought my advice. At the



OPM

same time, he tried to help. He didn't always agree with me, nor did he shield me from peers and difficult decisions. He intervened, but just enough. Anything more would have eroded the support of my form-mates and my authority in the House. Looking back on it, his conduct in these moments was textbook perfect for a Housemaster, though I didn't quite realise it at the time.

When I came back to Doon in 1980-81 as an Assistant Master, OPM was Senior Master. Throughout the year back at School, he treated me as a colleague – never patronising or condescending. Sadly, I didn't see much of him. He was too senior a figure, and I was in awe. At Chambers, someone said to me I should address him by his initials, or even "Mr Malhotra." I tried, but the words wouldn't come. When I fell sick, I turned to his homoeopathic ministrations (for 14 years, he taught homoeopathy as an STA). I think **Mr Arun Kapur (AKP)** persuaded me to consult him.

I didn't really believe in homoeopathy, but the little white pills seemed to get me well! Turning to my former teacher for help opened communication with him, and I was easier in his presence after that. I think he enjoyed providing the care and showing off a bit with his homoeopathy. I soon discovered that he was something of a homoeopathy legend in Dehradun, offering his services free to anyone in need. In a note, he wrote: "I have found it one of the noblest ways to serve humanity."

One of the first things I did when I returned to Doon as HM was to visit OPM. He lived in Dehradun, not very far from School. He was not well and had lost a lot of weight: the full face was gone. I was lean and slightly built, but I felt bulky next to him. I remember saying how healthy he looked despite his medical problems. Fumbling for a way to express concern, I asked about his

finances. His reply was brief – "I've written a few books, as you know." His textbooks had made him a lot of money, he explained. We talked about the books, and he showed me the latest – a new edition of the Class 12 textbook. At this late stage in his life and with many editions of the book already in print, his enthusiasm for the new book was rather like a grandfather tending to a new grandchild.

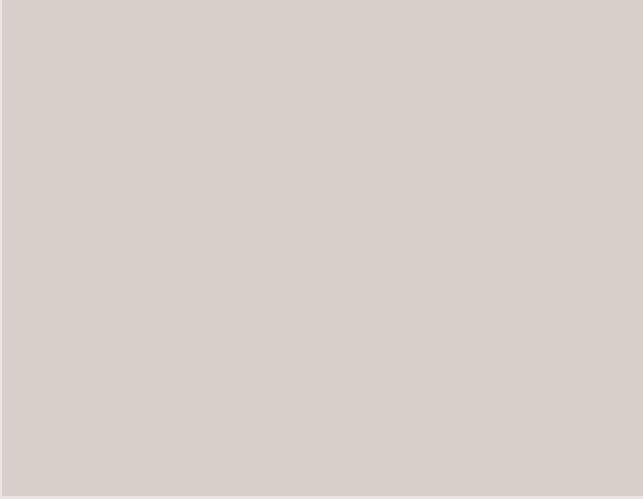
I had hoped to see more of OPM when I was back at Doon – I think we had three meetings. He said he was proud to see me as HM. When I asked for advice, he laughed and changed the conversation – over three decades, he had given everything he could to School and perhaps he had nothing left to give.

At our last meeting, he said there was something he wanted me to have. Some days later, I received a small white envelope. Inside was a note in his neat handwriting. As a boy I had noticed not just his meticulous penmanship but also the distinct, straight-fingered way he held a pen. I could imagine him writing the note that was in my hands. In three pages he summarised his life. Here and there he allowed himself a pat on the back. I smiled at the title, "On the Life Achievements of OP Malhotra", and the matter-of-fact final sentence, "I am fully satisfied with my life's achievements."

OPM did not enjoy the easiest life. As boys we sensed that not all was well at home. But he had a complete career as a teacher – half a century as a classroom teacher, in three institutions, and author of classic textbooks. Few who taught at Doon can match that record. In his undemonstrative but effective way, for more than thirty years, he also cared for hundreds of boys in Jaipur House and Tata House. Perhaps he was not the classic public-school master, but he dedicated himself to the education and welfare of The Doon School boys in his own chosen way with no expectation of acclaim. For this, a whole generation of Doscocs will remember and thank him.

Salute to you, OPM.

Kanti Bajpai is a professor of international relations at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, where he teaches international relations. He will soon retire in Delhi, where he hopes to write some books and drink some coffee at a leisurely pace.



Ranjona Banerji



John Martyn (HM) at the Masters' Race, Founder's Day 1959

A Special Place in Our Hearts

The John Martyn Memorial School

Ranjona Banerji



Waste Warrior with JMMS students going into Salan Gaon on a cleaning drive

A short distance up the road from where I live on the outskirts of Dehradun is the John Martyn Memorial School (JMMS). Every day, twice a day, its young students walk up and down the road – laughing, joking, greeting passers-by with a cheery “Good Morning, Ma'am” or “Good Morning, Sir.” For many of these years it was my father, **Arijit Banerji (196 K, 1952)**, who received a cheerful “Good morning, Banerji Sir.”



Students enjoying their time at camp

This is because, for many years, he had made that daily trip to the school as Managing Trustee, a post he inherited from **Anant Ram 'Baikin' Iyer (250 K, 1939)**. Father retired from the Board soon after he turned 80, which, he had always laughed, had been Baikin's advice. But he stayed on as a "mentor" at the request of the Board until he died, aged 84, in 2022. Many of The Doon School's finest have been associated with JMMS, including **Mr Gulab Ramchandani (HM, 225 T, 1942)**.

For us in the family, therefore, JMMS holds a special place in our hearts. Started in the name of

one of The Doon School's most beloved headmasters, **Mr John Martyn (HM)**, by his wife Mady, the school provides quality primary education up to Class V to the children of the villages around Salangaon and its environs. Many children walk down from as far as Kolukhet. Thanks to the efforts of the Board and the Principal, after they graduate from Class V the children are placed in schools around Dehradun, at little to no cost to their parents. These include The Doon School, Welham Girls' School, Jaswant Modern Senior Secondary School, Purkal Youth Development Society (PYDS), and so on. The

The youngest students from participating in outdoor activities: Yoga, Dance, Breathing, and Zumba





Students in biology class

school's new Principal, Protima Sen, hopes to take the school further, engendering in the children "pride and honour in the alma mater and a deep sense of gratitude."

Covid took its toll on humanity and on institutions like JMMS. As humans looked inward and towards their own immediate safety, many of us forgot about those less fortunate. I fear that JMMS has fallen into that category and needs a little love and care. The bi-annual trips to cities like Delhi and Mumbai need to be restarted, for instance. These trips for classes IV and V opened the minds of

these children from the hills to new worlds. I remember the amazement on their faces when they first saw the sea at Mumbai's Juhu Beach a few years ago, when I took a break from work to catch up with them. Then, spinning on a dime, they said, "Okay enough of this, where's Shahrukh Khan's house?!"

In addition to these trips, there are several other needs like meals, annual scholarships for students, more exposure to the world, upgrades to the school's infrastructure, etc.

Students participating in summer camp at Kasiga





Students on an educational field trip in Purkul Gaon

A few years ago, young Doscos asked me why the school had any responsibility towards JMMS. Who remembered John Martyn anyway? In answer to that, I can only say that alumni of The Doon School should remember not just his enormous legacy, but the important words of **Mr AE Foot (HM)** on the “aristocracy of service.” I did not study at your illustrious school (no girls, eh), but feel connected by association - from a grandfather who studied at FRI when it was on the grounds that became The Doon School, to my uncle **Ranjit Banerji (188 K, 1947)**, to my father, and innumerable relations and friends.

So maybe, this is like an appeal. JMMS has a good Board and a Principal who is trying to reach out further into the community and bring the school up to date. All it needs is a little love and care from a few more friends, so the laughter that rings out on my lane twice a day continues to reverberate for a few more years.

Ranjona Banerji is an independent journalist who writes on media, social, political, and gender issues. She moved from Mumbai to Dehradun 10 years ago and is deeply concerned about the environmental degradation of the Doon Valley. She is the niece of Ranjit Banerji (188 K, 1947) and daughter of Arijit Banerji (88 K, 1952).

John Martyn Memorial School (JMMS)



Glorious, Wild, Untamed

The Dream Trek to Kilimanjaro with Four Chronic Medical Conditions

Sanjai Banerji 387 H, 1976

A discussion I had with my physician some months ago comes to mind. When I broached the subject of a physical fitness certificate required for an expedition to Mount Kilimanjaro, he looked me squarely in the eyes. He said, “Are you not pushing things too far with four medical conditions needing continuous medication, including hearing aids for 70% loss of hearing, flexural psoriasis, ocular hypertension, and Type 2 diabetes.”

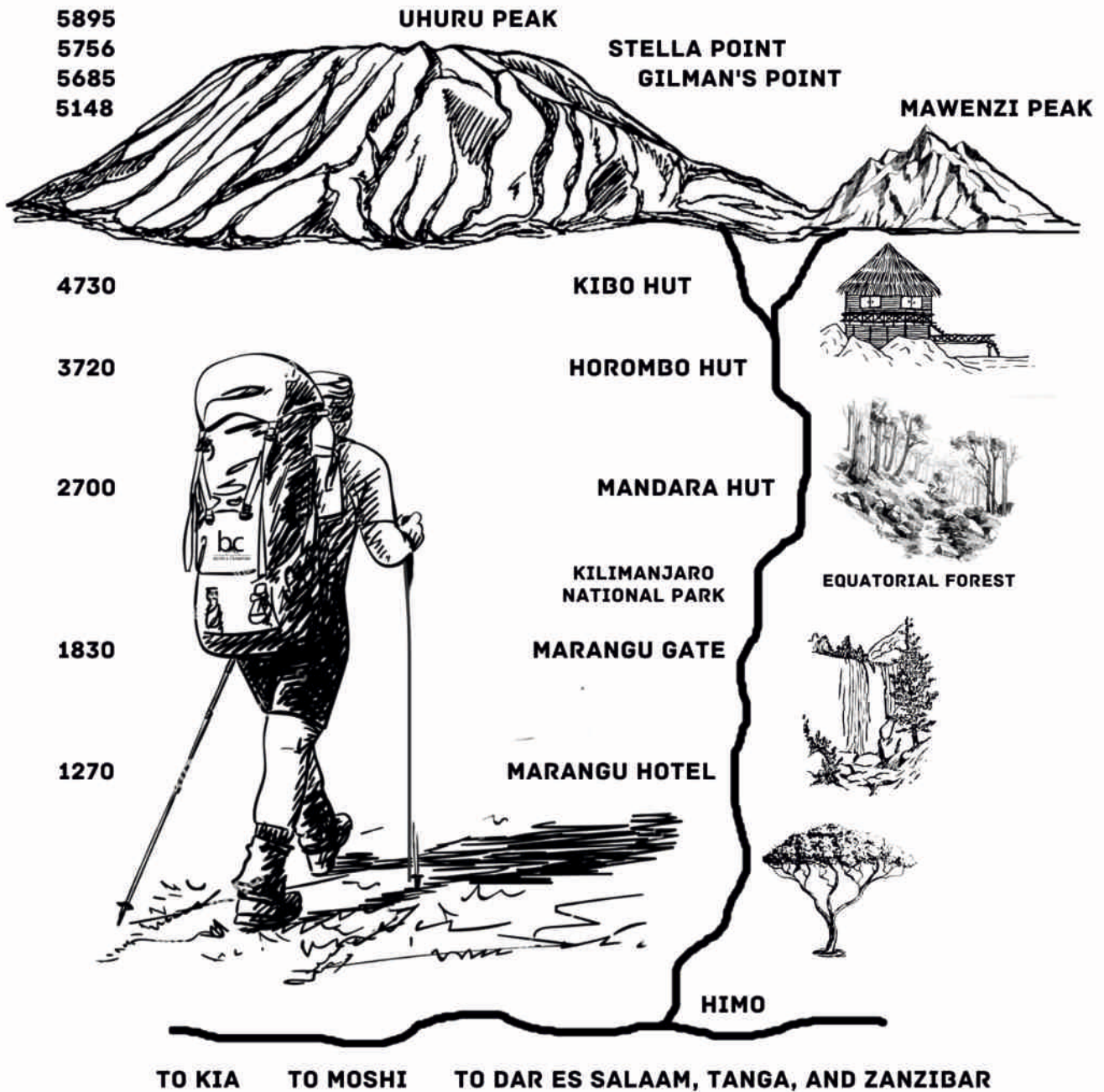
I replied, “Can you say something positive?”

“Yes,” replied the physician. “Your heart and lungs are in good shape, so I am signing the document.”

Thus, I embarked on an eight-day trek with expert mountaineering guides Boots & Crampons to summit Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest free standing mountain in Africa.



Arriving at Kilimanjaro Airport with the team



The route to Uhuru Peak *Courtesy Boots & Crampons*

his expertise in mountaineering was evident from the outset. Conducting a thorough gear check, Romil ensured each member was adequately equipped for the journey ahead.

From the outset, the camaraderie among our team was palpable. It felt as though we had known each other for a lifetime. Setting off the following day after breakfast by bus, we made our way to the

starting point of Marangu Gate at 1,830 metres. While filling out the registration forms, we reveled in the fellowship of teams from all over the world collecting there. We spent some time in the morning admiring the 3D model of the mountain, taking pictures in front of giant posters, and gearing up to climb with hundreds of porters lined up for weigh-ins.



Thrilled to be at Mandara Hut

FEATURES

I made sure to apply drops in my eyes three times a day. It was a drill inculcated in 2002 when I had a retinoscopy on both eyes. I remember the eye surgeon in Surat telling me then that failing to comply would mean losing my eyesight. I have also struggled with flexural psoriasis on the soles of both my feet since childhood. I remember vividly winning the Senior Cross Country run in 1975, setting a record for almost 30 years, broken by **Justin Burrett (60 J, 2002)**, son of **Mr Philip Burrett (PBR)**, former Deputy Headmaster at Doon. I got some respite at the age of 45 in 2005, when I was also prescribed oral medicines in addition to the ointments I had been using on my feet.

The following day, we woke up early for a beautiful sunrise. However, there was more misfortune;

another strong trekker, Ritu, was hit by diarrhoea and vomiting. There was a long day ahead of an eight-hour trek up to Horombo Huts at 3,720 metres. Romil advised us to avoid milk but drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated. Most days, there was plenty of hot water, masala tea, ginger tea, honey, coffee, chocolate, and milk powder. All the guides and porters were merry, and we learned some basic greetings and phrases like *mambo* ("what's up") and *hakuna matata* ("no worries:). Bharani did not get her luggage back, but the team came to her rescue, and she quickly found herself consoled with all the requisite equipment, attire, and trekking poles. This is what exemplifies team spirit.



Sanjai receiving Senior Cross Country Trophy in 1975 from Mrs Jean Simeon as Headmaster Mr Eric Simeon looks on



Through the rain forest towards Horombo Huts

On the way to Horombo Huts, the vegetation changed gradually as we ascended from the forest to Moorland, which had giant grasses and heather. The weather kept fluctuating from the bright sun beating down to pelting torrential rain showers and back to bright sunlight. We took a long lunch break in the middle of nowhere. Our group reached Horombo Huts amidst rain showers. We spent two nights in Horombo going for short acclimatisation walks. We went after dinner on the first day and on the second we completed an acclimatisation walk up to Zebra Rocks, which was a fun-filled short half-day walk up to the black and white striped eponymous Zebra Rocks. There Romil made us do twenty push-ups, which, surprisingly, all of us could manage. We buddied up that night to fit summit gear for two people into one backpack to be taken to summit camp, and other non-essentials in the second person's pack to be left behind at Horombo. Chandrika, meanwhile, developed a persistent cough but was eating. She had only just recovered from a viral fever one week before arriving in Tanzania.



Dinner at Horombo Huts

The weather kept fluctuating from the bright sun beating down to pelting torrential rain showers.



The team at Kibo Hut, the final stop before the summit push

It felt like we were walking through a completely different part of the world.



I was fortunate not to have had any problems with my hearing aids all this time. I had taken two rechargeable hearing aids and a button cell-operated hearing aid. I kept the hearing aids warm against my chest, even when I slept. I was in constant fear that if my hearing aids failed at high altitude, it would be dangerous to proceed since communication at that altitude is essential in a

group expedition and I am practically deaf without the aid. Luckily, nothing happened.

We left for Kibo (Summit Camp) the next morning at 4,730 metres. It felt like we were walking through a completely different part of the world; the vegetation changed to a bleak alpine desert, scattered thorny bushes, no trees, and barren

lands with icy winds. Ascending further, we arrived at Kibo Hut after an eight-hour trek, where we celebrated Devashish's 44th birthday amidst the cheer of fellow climbers. With preparations underway for the final summit push, Romil ensured our comfort and readiness, organising accommodations and an early dinner before the ascent.

After an early dinner, our team of fifteen, including team leader Romil, set off in two groups, one at 10:30pm and the other at 11:30pm. I was given the privilege of leading the second group. Thus, we commenced the arduous journey to Uhuru Peak, with Romil's unwavering support guiding us every step. That day, we had barely four hours to rest, not even sleep. Bharani was collecting a motley

We were all carrying the burden of cumulative fatigue and the anxiety of what would come.

Resting during midnight Climb towards the summit

collection of borrowed clothes for the summit push. Ritu was barely getting steady on her feet, and Chandrika's cough did not seem to diminish. Some of us were experiencing the tentacles of altitude sickness already creeping up. We were all carrying the burden of the cumulative fatigue of the last three days and the anxiety of what would come at night.

The weather Gods were kind, and we had a clear starlit night with a ruddy moon and a visible Milky Way. In their infinite wisdom, the guides kept reining us back, reminding us to go Pole, Pole (Slowly, Slowly). The darkness was so intense it felt like a physical weight on our shoulders, pierced feebly by our puny headlamps, the wind blowing in from all

directions. I remember, in the intervals of stillness, the crunch of gravel underfoot and the sound of people retching and heaving as altitude created nausea. The guides kept our spirits up by singing songs and providing hot herbal tea. The headlamps of the groups of climbers above us looked like haunting strings of fairy lights bobbing along.

Finally, while climbing up the last considerable rocks to Gilman Point, I saw the dark shapes in front of me blushing a beautiful pink. I turned around to see dark, tortuous spiral columns of clouds on the horizon being thrown into visibility by a magical liquid gold bubbling and spreading like magma. I realised it was the sun.



The dawn makes everything visible on the way to Uhuru Peak

I could see Africa in all its vastness, stretching out in every direction, endless from horizon to horizon.

The dawn suddenly made everything visible, and I could see Africa in all its vastness, stretching out in every direction, endless from horizon to horizon – glorious, wild, untamed, and magnificent.

Reaching Gilman Point felt like crossing a finish line, but Romil was there to ensure our pace

continued toward the summit ahead. While approaching Stella Point, Parul, a dermatologist, marathon runner, and certified PADI Scuba Diver, fell flat on the ground due to high altitude sickness and was unable to get up. After much coaxing from her guide, she returned to Gilman Point. However, Romil, who had by now been up and down the mountain several times, made sure our entire group of fourteen climbers reached Gilman Point and proceeded to Stella Point from where Uhuru Peak was only 200 metres away. Romil persuaded Parul to continue towards the summit after telling her that if an old man like Sanjai can do it, why not you? Much later, at the certificate ceremony, Romil profusely apologised to me, to which I replied, “If Parul could summit due to the crazy antics of an old man, so be it.”

The summit!



Romil was there for us throughout the trek, moving up and down to ensure nobody was falling behind. He played both devotional and inspiring Hindi film songs to urge us on. Finally, the first of our team, Sachin, a pilot from Air India, after going through Gillman Point and Stella Point, summited Uhuru Peak at 5,895 metres at 9am on March 7th, 2024.

We followed in different batches. As we reached Uhuru Peak, the sense of achievement was profound. Romil's presence at the summit, welcoming each of us with open arms, encapsulated the culmination of an extraordinary journey. It was an unbelievable 100% summit for the ten women and five men!

Hoisting the flag



The sense of achievement
was profound.

Strangely, there is a magical challenge about summiting Mount Kilimanjaro. The success rate taking into account the six different routes is an average of 66 percent. These statistics come from nearly 30,000 climbers that try to summit Uhuru Peak every year.

Throughout the trek, I took my Metformin and Emsita tablets daily before breakfast and dinner. They were my lifeline to manage my blood glucose levels due to my diabetes. I avoided sugar in all my meals, but I was fortunate to have avocado, a popular fruit in Tanzania (and good for diabetes) for breakfast and dinner daily. On Romil's advice, I

drank copious cups of masala tea every morning and evening without milk or sugar. Thanks to the organisers, boiling water magically appeared whenever needed.

Due to the slope, we ran down to Kibo while descending with some help from the porters. However, there was no respite, and we trekked down to Horombo Huts without any rest. By the time we reached Horombo late at night, we had been on our feet for almost 36 hours. After dinner, we reflected on the bonds forged and the indelible memories created.



Sanjai at Horombo Huts

In these times of global warming, Mother Nature deserves all our support!

The next day, we trekked to Marangu Gate after an early breakfast at 7:30am. Since I turned 64 years old that day, the celebratory dance with teammates, guides, and porters was an unforgettable moment. We reached our hotel at Moshi by bus and celebrated our triumph with certificates and medals during dinner. We had an awesome dinner, where certificates from Boots & Crampons and the Tanzania Government were distributed along with medals. Romil gave me the privilege of distributing the certificates and medals to all my teammates. It was a very humbling moment for me. I made it a point to say a few words about each teammate. My certificates and medals were presented to me by a 54-year-old Aparna, a formidable trekker in very good physical shape. My birthday was also celebrated that night.

Subsequently, on my return to Bhopal, I was told there were other accolades in store. I became the oldest person to summit Uhuru Peak from Madhya Pradesh and the oldest Indian to summit with four medical conditions. I remain grateful to my friends, colleagues, relatives, and the press for their love and support. I plan to summit at least four other highest points of the continents to make it a grand five of the total seven summits in the future. I urge DoscOs to support the environment and practise the principle of Leave No Trace while climbing mountains worldwide. In these times of global warming, Mother Nature deserves all our support! Tanzania is a plastic-free country. Anyone littering the mountains or streets can be fined heavily and liable to be arrested.



Sanjai competing in the 80km-long 2016 Tuffman Desert Ultra in Jaisalmer

FEATURES

As an afterthought, I realised what made me successful in summiting Africa's highest point was my resilience and my training. Since the age of 48, I have run several half-marathons, marathons, and ultra-marathons. It was only in 2022, suffering from diabetes without medication, I was struggling to run marathons. My physician strongly recommended that I either take medicines to stabilise blood glucose or perish. He also advised me to run only 10Ks and an occasional half-

marathon. This advice was taken wholeheartedly, and I became a pacer for 10K races from 2022 onwards.

Two months before reaching Kilimanjaro, I practised long walks for four to six hours at a stretch with a 10-kilo backpack, trekking poles, and trekking boots. My 29-day Basic Mountaineering Course from Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports in April 2021 in



Sanjai completing the 2019 Mumbai Marathon

Manali helped and also made me the oldest Indian to complete the rigorous BMC with an A Grade.

This training regimen enabled me to summit comfortably without suffering from high-altitude sickness. Additionally, Romil's leadership and motivation, reminiscent of Krishna in the *Mahabharata*, propelled our team towards success. The camaraderie and mutual support exhibited throughout the trek underscored the spirit of teamwork, with each member contributing to our shared accomplishment.

In acknowledging the efforts of all fifteen team members – Aparna, Chandrika, Ritu, Rina, Parul, Meghna, Vijayata, Neeru,

Alpa, Bharani, Devashish, Sachin, Deepak, and Sanjai, alongside our esteemed Team Leader, Romil – I salute the collective spirit that made our dream trek to Kilimanjaro a reality. I would do a great injustice if I did not mention the extraordinary effort of the guides and porters to help us to the summit. Their steadfast support, exuberant nature, and brotherly solidarity made us achieve our goal.

Now, onward to the next summit!

Sanjai Banerji, after retiring as General Manager of Corporate Image at Prism Johnson Limited in 2020, has reinvented himself as a Lifestyle Coach, Motivational Speaker, Adventurer, and successful author of four books. Sanjai currently resides in Bhopal with his wife, Sanjukta. Their son, Sujai Banerji (176 H, 2009), is pursuing a doctorate in Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Helsinki in Finland.



Onward to the next summit!

Young Old Boys From Swim to Stride

A Triathlon Journey
of Growth

Aarnav Bahl 19 J, 2021

EDITOR'S NOTE: The next instalment in our regular feature, hearing from the younger lot amidst our midst: the Young Old Boys.



Biking in a Half Ironman, Santa Cruz, California, USA

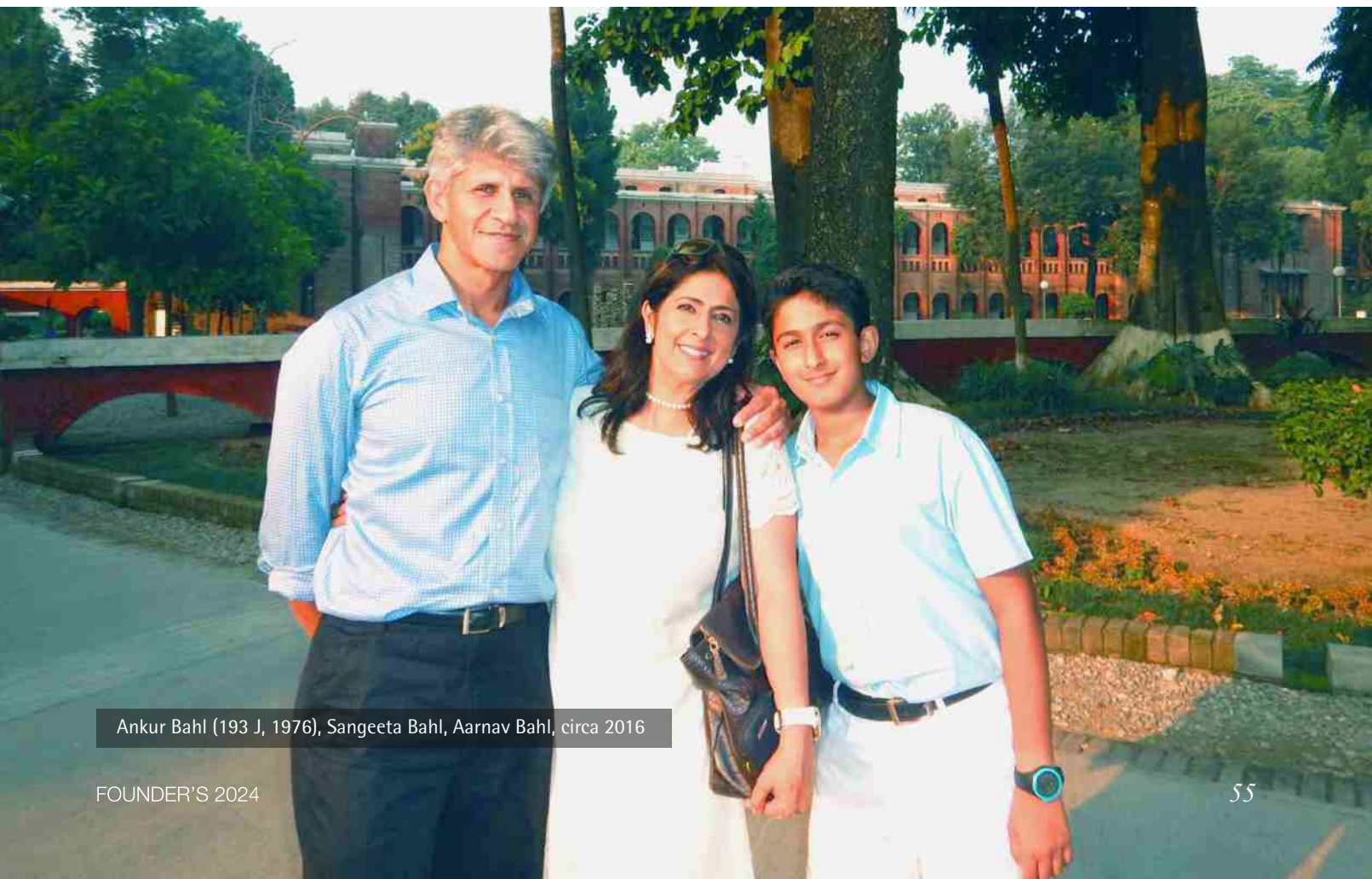
In the early months of 2021, there was a drastic shift in my mindset. The world was still struggling through the pandemic, and, like everyone else, I was struggling with my mental health.

It all started when I couldn't find anything constructive to do with my time. To be completely honest, I was unhappy about the fact that I wasn't in School for most of my SC Form. There were no sports for me to play since I couldn't go outside. There were no friends I could meet because of all the social restrictions. And to top it all off, my long-distance girlfriend had broken up with me. Life dealt me a bad hand and I didn't resort to the best way of coping with it. It started with smoking a few cigarettes every now and then. Before I knew it, I had developed a terrible nicotine addiction and constantly found myself looking for the next hit.



First day of School, circa 2015

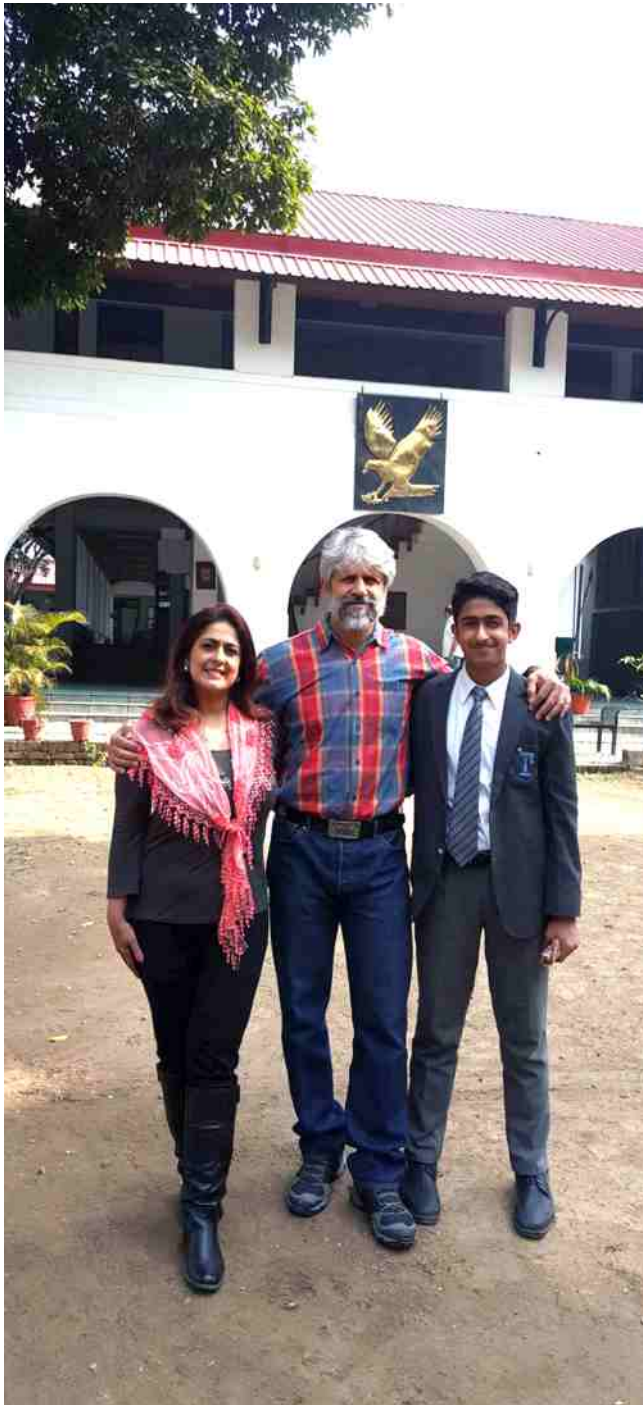
"Life dealt me a bad hand and I didn't resort to the best way of coping with it"



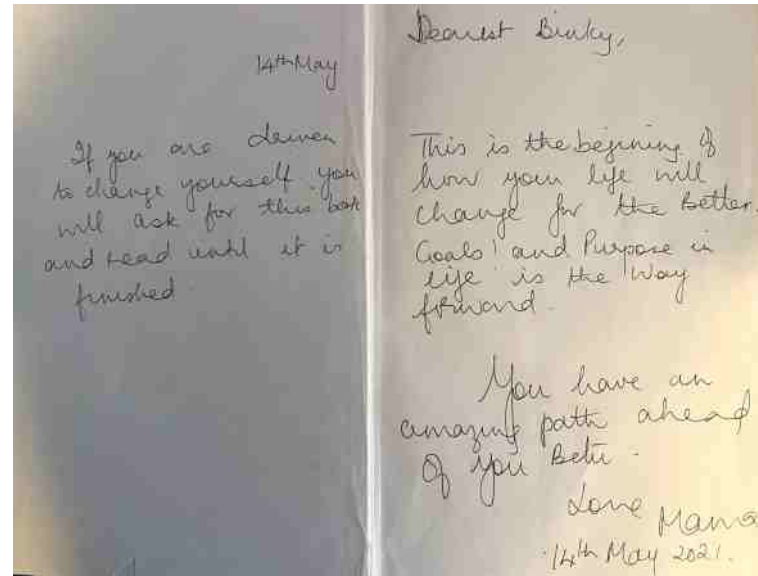
Ankur Bahl (193 J, 1976), Sangeeta Bahl, Aarnav Bahl, circa 2016

FEATURES

Shortly after that, I got diagnosed with Covid-19. While I was confined in my room for 10 days, I felt frustrated and irritable because of the nicotine withdrawal. Until then, this whole thing was a secret. After I recovered, I couldn't hold it in any longer and I just told my mother. She was very supportive and promised me that she could fix it, just like how she always has a fix for everything. She told me "Beta, if you want to change your life, read this book", recommending David Goggins's *Can't Hurt Me*. At the time, it looked like any other self-help gimmick. I didn't pay it much heed.



Sangeeta, Ankur, and Aarnav, circa 2018



My mother's note the day my life changed

In the next few days, I decided to go for a run. I was appalled to see that I couldn't even get past a few hundred metres! For someone who was a seasoned runner, who had raced the 5000m event in School, I didn't feel like myself at all. That was a wake-up call. I realised the toll my habit had taken on my health, especially when coupled with a serious respiratory illness like Covid and the impact of long Covid even after I recovered. I rushed back home and told my mother to give me that book. It would eventually be instrumental in shifting my mindset. I have been free of nicotine ever since. It wasn't easy to quit, but with the help of some counsellors, my mother and a few friends at home, I was able to pull it off.

That day was May 14th, 2021, and it was the day that I made a decision that was going to change my life forever.

I didn't know it was going to at the time. Goggins guaranteed that his book would illuminate a path to self-mastery and betterment whilst also making the world a better place. There were challenges at the end of each chapter, and one of them was to step out of your comfort zone on a regular basis

"Step out of your comfort zone on a regular basis and do things you were uncomfortable doing"

and do things you were uncomfortable doing, especially the things that are good for you.

As I gradually progressed through the book, I learned that Goggins couldn't swim, yet every single day, he would get at it and spend hours in the pool trying to learn how to swim. He wanted to be a Navy Seal. And now he's one of the most decorated Navy Seals in the United States. Not only that, but he also ended up racing the Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii, USA. That's when it hit me – I couldn't swim either. I didn't even

want to step in a pool I couldn't stand in. There was something about that story that stuck with me, and I told myself that I wanted to race triathlons when I came to college. At the time, there was a friend of mine from Welham Girls' School who I spoke to and would excitedly tell all my aspirations for the future. She was one of my biggest supporters and helped me instill a sense of self-belief. One of the things that I told her was that I wanted to leave a mark in the sport in one way or the other.



Me with my friend from Welham Girls' School, one of my biggest supporters



The harrowing first open water swim

Thankfully, my academic success led me to Cal Poly SLO (California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California, USA), a top-tier school for architecture with an excellent triathlon team. This felt like a sign. Joining the collegiate triathlon team, I soon raced in my first ever triathlon in a few months. It was a sprint-distance triathlon that consisted of a 750m swim, a 20km bike, and a 5km run right after. It was a journey marked by struggle, determination, and a commitment to myself.

I had only been in open water two days before my first race, just to get a feel for it. Despite my

training in the pool, the unpredictability of being in a lake was overwhelming. On race day, as I stood on the deck looking out at the swim course, a wave of anxiety washed over me. The water seemed endless, and the buoys marking the course appeared so far away.

"A journey marked by struggle, determination, and a commitment to myself"



Me with my teammate after having completed my first triathlon race

When the starting horn blared, I plunged into the water with the other competitors. Almost immediately, I felt a sense of panic. The cold water, the thrashing arms and legs of the other swimmers, and the difficulty of seeing the buoys made me feel like I was, quite literally, in over my head. I struggled to find my rhythm, my breaths became rapid and shallow, and I started to feel the weight of fear pressing down on me. At one point, I was so overwhelmed that I considered giving up and signalling for help. The idea of failure just seemed so real at the time.

But then, something inside me shifted. I remembered why I was doing this in the first place. I had set out on this journey to challenge myself, to step out of my comfort zone, and to prove to myself that I could do it. Quitting was not an option. I couldn't disappoint myself. Besides, my mother was also at the race, and I couldn't let her down. She had not raised a quitter.

"Quitting was not an option"

Drawing on the mental toughness I had been cultivating, I calmed myself down. I slowed my

strokes, focused on my breathing, and began to find a rhythm. I reminded myself of Goggins's story and how he overcame his own swimming struggles. If he could push through, so could I. Stroke by stroke, I made my way through the water, fighting the urge to stop and pushing past the fear. It took me more than twice as long as the average triathlete to finish the swim, but I did it! I couldn't believe myself.

When I finally emerged from the water and transitioned to the bike leg, I was exhausted but exhilarated. I had faced my fear head-on and conquered it. The rest of the race, though challenging, felt like a victory lap compared to the swim. Crossing the finish line, I felt a sense of pride. I had finally stepped out of my comfort zone. I didn't know how to feel, for I was simply overwhelmed by the elation. It wasn't my fastest sprint distance race, but it will always be my most memorable one.

This experience taught me that perseverance is so crucial, not just in races but in all aspects of life. It's important to keep going, even when things seem impossible. By not giving up, I had honoured my commitment to myself and set a precedent for future challenges. This mindset has carried me through many more races and continues to be a guiding principle in my life. One of the things I

Me and my friend Peter



constantly remind myself every day is that I'm not trying to live a mediocre life, but a great one. And while I'm grateful for the opportunities that let me, I have to work hard for it. I started triathlon as a way to quit smoking, but now it's something I've developed a passion in for its own sake.

*"It's important to keep going,
even when
things seem impossible"*

After my first triathlon, I was determined to push my limits even more. I intensified my training regimen, focusing on improving my endurance and efficiency as an athlete. Six months later, I completed my first Half Ironman at the end of 2022, which was a gruelling test of stamina and perseverance. Training for this Half Ironman in

Indian Wells, California, USA, felt like the hardest thing I had to do in my life. I found some friends along the way, one of whom I like to call the "hot blonde I live with." Peter was one of my first friends on the triathlon team and is now one of my housemates and closest friends here at Cal Poly. Our bond was cemented when he came to Indian Wells with me just to watch me race and support me.

As I look back on my time since I have been a part of the Cal Poly triathlon team, I am filled with gratitude for the friendships, support, and growth that this community has brought into my life. Being a part of this team has not only made me a better athlete, but it has also taught me valuable lessons about teamwork, discipline, and perseverance. Whether you are a triathlete or not, I encourage you to seek out communities that foster friendship, support, and growth, and I hope that you can find your own "triathlon team" in any aspect of your life. Finding my "team" fueled my success as a triathlete.



My team taking a break while training



My coach, Roger Warnes

"Seek out communities that foster friendship, support and growth"

Since then, I've participated in over 15 triathlons and completed three Half Ironmans. Each race has been a stepping stone, teaching me invaluable lessons and solidifying my passion for the sport. This journey from novice to an aspiring seasoned triathlete has been transformative for me. I feel a lot fitter, both physically and mentally.

Speaking of training, training for a triathlon was no small feat. It required discipline, consistency, and a well-structured plan. I'd give kudos to my coach, Roger Warnes, for that, who has been a very important part of my life here at Cal Poly. He welcomed me into his life with open arms, and I'd attribute most of, if not all, of my success to him. My training schedule is rigorous but has become a routine that I look forward to every week. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I dive into the pool for swim training. These sessions help build

endurance and improve my technique, which is crucial for the swim leg of the race.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, I split my time between running and biking. Tuesday mornings are dedicated to an easy bike ride, helping me to warm up and build endurance gradually. In the evenings, I switch gears with a harder run, focusing on building speed and stamina. Thursday mornings are reserved for a hard ride, which enhances my cycling strength and my ability to transition smoothly between disciplines. Later in the day, I wind down with an easy run on Thursday evenings, ensuring a balanced approach to my training. The weekends are usually for a long ride or a run. I usually do a longer ride on Saturday morning and then a longer run on Sunday morning to get most of mileage for the week in.

While it sounds like a lot, I must mention that a crucial aspect of my training is incorporating rest periods. Every 10 to 14 days, I take a day off, typically on a Friday or Monday, to allow my body to recover and prevent burnout. These rest days are just as important as the training sessions themselves, as they help me maintain peak performance and reduce the risk of injury.



The day I bought my triathlon bike

Participating in this sport came with its own set of challenges. The gear required can be expensive, from high-quality bikes and wetsuits to running shoes. Even some nutritional products seem to cost a fortune! To afford this, I worked a part-time job as a technician at a support shop and received some help from my parents to cover the costs of races and gear. However, it's important to note that you can still compete with the most basic equipment; it's the spirit and determination that

*"Push those limits, discover yourself...
you are capable of so much more than you think"*

truly matter. Logistics also played a significant role, as managing my training schedule, race registration, and travel arrangements took up more time than I thought. But, in the past three years, this has evolved from a mere hobby into a dedicated lifestyle. Now, I feel confident in my ability to manage my time effectively. Constantly reminding myself that I can achieve anything I set my mind to has been my driving force. After finishing my first triathlon, I knew there was no turning back.

If you're reading this, I will just tell you that participating in a triathlon can transform your life in so many ways. Triathlons push you beyond your perceived limits, forging an unbreakable mental toughness. They teach you the value of perseverance, grit, and relentless pursuit of your goals. The physical challenges will mould your body into a powerhouse of endurance and strength. They will callous your mind and help you step out of your comfort zone. I read somewhere

that "you have to do something you've never done to get something you've never had." In my case, this has never been truer.

I believe that if you do things you think you are not qualified to do, that is truly the only way you can move forward in life. Push those limits, discover yourself. You are capable of so much more than you think. If you truly have the will to challenge yourself, I guarantee you that you will find a way to step out of your comfort zone.

If I did something I thought I couldn't do, so can you!

Aarnav Bahl is an undergraduate student at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, USA, currently in his third year. Alongside his studies, he races for the Cal Poly Triathlon Team. Originally from New Delhi, Aarnav now balances his academic pursuits and athletic ambitions with the support of his family and teammates.



Competing in a triathlon in Chandigarh, India

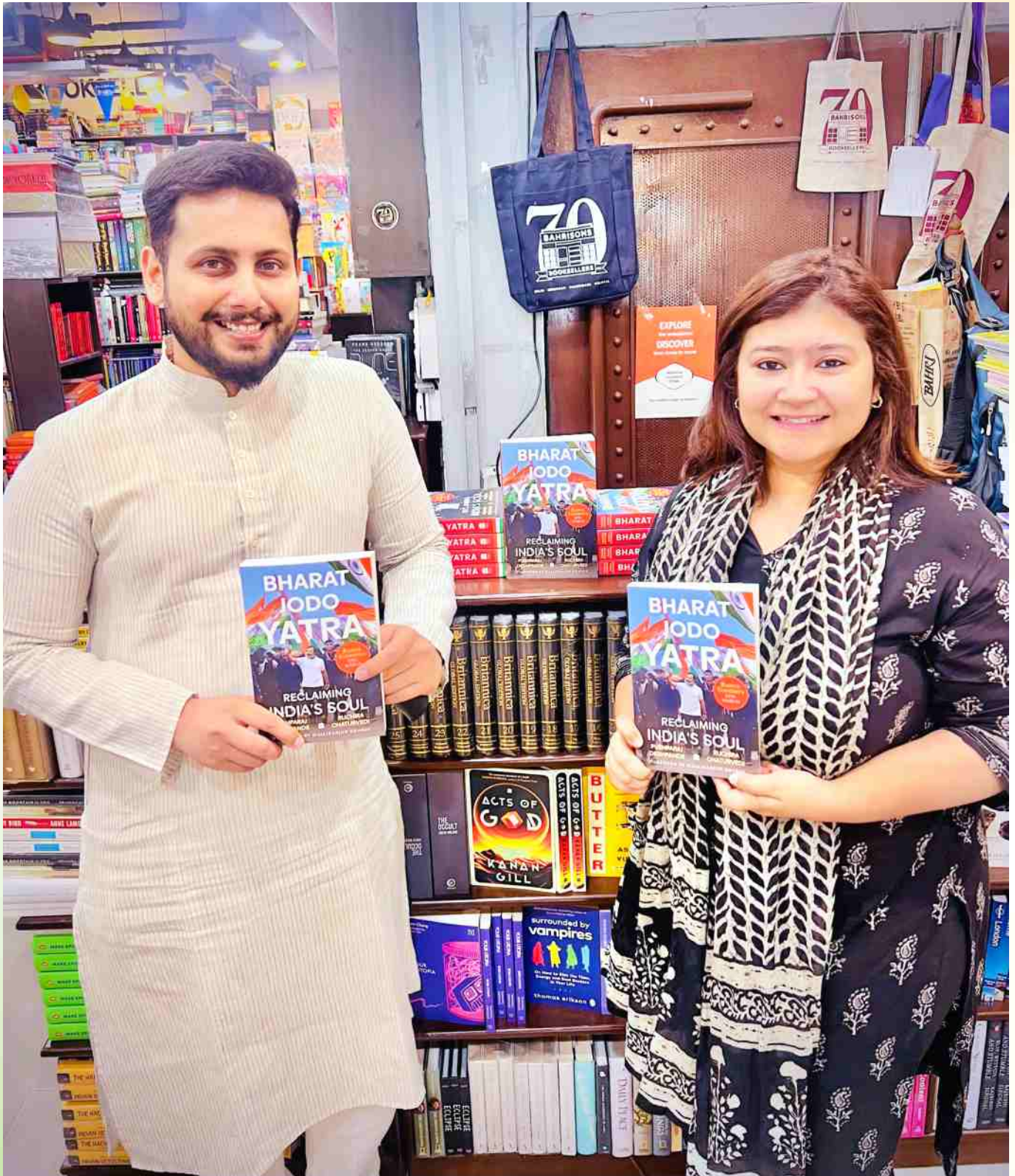


Running with our team coach, and a couple of adorable training companions

Pushparaj Deshpande

Helping Indians Share the Bonds That DoscOs Have

Tushaar Kuthiala 519 T, 2006



The co-authors Pushparaj Deshpande and Ruchira Chaturvedi launching their bestseller, *Bharat Jodo Yatra: Reclaiming India's Soul*

It has been a busy few months for Pushparaj Deshpande (422 J, 2006). He has launched two non-fiction books which have been climbing the bestseller list. His latest work, *Bharat Jodo Yatra: Reclaiming India's Soul*, chronicles the perspectives of various participants in the 4,000km march led by former Congress President and Member of Parliament Rahul Gandhi (520 K, 1988).

Pushparaj is the Founder and Director of the Samruddha Bharat Foundation. The organisation's goal is to build systems to programmatically further and shape mass consciousness to deepen the constitutional idea of India. He credits his life and education at Doon for shaping his perspectives and career, saying that the School managed to instil the concepts of equality, fraternity, liberty, and secularism very subtly in DoscOs.

“Doon consciously created a sense of Indianness and *maitreyi* (camaraderie) among us. The bonds that DoscOs share today, this is the kind of bond that we want every Indian to share with each other, don't you think? We shouldn't be divided on different lines. We are Indians first and last. That was very acutely instilled in me at Doon,” he said.

“I think we don't really reflect on all the songs and prayers that we sing in Assembly. But they are

profound and had a lasting impact on me personally. If you think about them carefully, many of these songs are very deeply metaphysical and nationalistic,” he added.

Bharat Jodo Yatra: Reclaiming India's Soul has been widely acclaimed as a seminal chronicle of the mass event. Published by Harper Collins India, it was released on March 29th and aims to highlight the many layers of meaning underpinning the *Yatra*.

Pushparaj and co-author Ruchira Chaturvedi (National Convenor, Social Media & Digital Communications, Indian National Congress) tried to map the why, what, and how of the massive march. He recalls that they overcame a variety of challenges and unexpected hostility to bring out the volume so that it would come out before the 2024 general election.

The idea for the book was driven by twin motivations and conceived around the time the Bharat Jodo Yatra kicked off, Pushparaj says. At the time, a perceived lack of response from the mainstream media had the organisers looking for alternate methods to reach out to the masses and the silent majority in the country. They were also trying to debunk the meticulously propagated narrative that the Congress Party was in terminal decline.



Crowds gathering along the *Bharat Jodo Yatra*



Pushparaj with other participants of the *Bharat Jodo Yatra*

“We consciously took a decision, my co-author and I, that we should not position this as an official Party book, but make it seem as autonomous and as reflective as possible; like a conscientious chronicler’s perspective on the *Yatra*,” Pushparaj said.

The three distinct sections of the book clearly reflect this. The first section contains accounts from the volunteers who organised various aspects of the march, such as media / social media management, closed-door interactions, civil society outreach and logistics, etc. The second section consists of pieces from members of the Congress Party who walked throughout the *Yatra*, while the third and largest section comprises essays from some of India’s foremost academics, activists, professionals and members of parties other than the Congress party. The carefully crafted structure of the book makes the reader feel like it was a people’s *yatra*, not just a Congress *yatra*.

Ironically, some of the biggest roadblocks the authors faced came from within the Congress ecosystem, mainly when they were deciding which pieces to include in the book. The duo had to deal with a fair amount of jostling for space among the pages from the pool of contributors. In the end, the authors stuck to their guns and tried to ensure that a broad cross-section of communities, from every state and ideological viewpoint were represented.

“Our point was to make sure we got a comprehensive stratified set of voices that would become a symphony,” Pushparaj said. He added



Pushparaj and some kids join in the fun

that he was quite happy about how balanced the book has come out, even though it has attracted its fair share of flak because he has been objectively critical of both problems within the Congress party and politics as a whole, in the book’s introduction.

“I think some people were expecting it (the book) to be completely laudatory, or a glorified puff piece. There’s a point in the introduction where I said that after multiple electoral losses, the Congress was so worried about doing the wrong thing that for a while it became paralysed. This internal creative inertia was disrupted by the Bharat Jodo Yatra and for that credit must go to Rahul Gandhi. I think that didn’t go down well with some of the senior party members who presumably are unwilling to accept that they played their roles in structurally slowing, even crippling the party.”

He also said he faced some very strident criticism from the right-wing – both within the Congress and from the Sangh Parivar – but was pleasantly surprised when quite a few high-level leaders from



Pushparaj addressing the leaders of the *Yatra*

the ruling dispensation and its ideological parent took pains to reach out to praise how balanced the book was, even asking him to include and engage them in similar projects in the future.

Pushparaj, who walked in a few states on the *Yatra*, said that even he had originally underestimated its mass appeal, thinking it would just be a roving political event. But it electrified the nation. To substantiate his point, he posited that “While, initially, non-Congress participants constituted only about 20%-25% of the *Yatra*, by the time they reached Kashmir, almost 60%-70% of the *yatris* in the Bharat Jodo *Yatra* were from outside the Congress ecosystem.”

He also said that he was contacted by Old Boys looking to join the *Yatra* from as far away as the US and UK, which drove home the widespread nature of the appeal and attention the exercise was getting, both from India and abroad. He also explains that he saw the nature of the *Yatra* and the participants morph over time, from a political exercise to a true mass movement.

One incident that stuck with him was when he and other organisers ordered dinner at a Pizza Hut in Kerala one night (the only one open after they washed their clothes and settled in at a primary school for the night). As it was late, the manager came up to them and informed them that he would have to close down soon. However, he noticed the Bharat Jodo *Yatra* lanyards they were wearing and ended up joining them for the next 45 minutes and even got them some complimentary dishes. Pushparaj recalls that the manager, who turned out to be the son of a CPI (M) district office-bearer, nonetheless expressed his support and admiration, not just for the prominent figures and celebrities leading the *Yatra*, but also for the normal walkers and organisers. He also got his



Pushparaj getting some well-earned rest

sister to come over with a selection of local snacks for them and paid for their pizzas.

“After that, I saw it in Kerala, in Tamil Nadu, in Maharashtra... everywhere people were going out of their way wanting to talk to us, hear us, help us and feed us. They didn't just want to interact with Rahul Gandhi, which they undoubtedly did. But a lot of people we met on the way were interested in talking to us. Children kept playing with us, old grandmothers were blessing us, mothers were handing us their babies, and people kept hugging us. Stuff like that stayed and really moved me... I can't explain that overwhelming feeling washing over us. You had to be there. Frankly, the political nature of the *Yatra* became secondary very early on. It became more of a spiritual journey,” Pushparaj said.

During his long and enduring fight for progressive change, Pushparaj worked with various legislators across party lines, Rajya Sabha TV, the Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (RGICS), and the Indian National Congress. He founded the Samruddha Bharat Foundation (SBF) in 2017 and currently serves as its director.

“I felt that nobody in India was carefully studying and redressing the structural faultlines holding India back or actualising progressive politics programmatically. Every nation is run on two variables – the hardware, which includes systems, bureaucracies, economic policies etc and the software – which includes social attitudes, popular culture, mass consciousness, and so on,” he said.



A hard day's walk

According to him, actualising both needs strategic thinking, ruthless pragmatism and evangelical action to further the national interest. Almost no one, in his view, has a 360-degree perspective nor the requisite training for this socio-economic and political statecraft.

In the seven years since its launch, the foundation has built connections to work with most state governments in the nation, 28 political parties, filmmakers, hundreds of civil society movements, India's foremost thinkers, and the Indian diaspora in multiple countries overseas. Apart from organising 45 high-impact programmes across India, the foundation also navigates systems by empowering dynamic individuals to champion what they feel is meaningful and furthers the national interest.

The SBF is launching two sets of non-fiction volumes, titled *Rethinking India* (with Penguin) and *Reshaping India* (with Routledge). They also have a host of books in multiple regional languages. Pushparaj is the series editor of these volumes and, along with All India Congress Committee (AICC) administration lead Gurdeep Singh Sappal, was the co-editor for the flagship book in the *Rethinking India* series: *The Great Indian Manthan: State, Statecraft and the Republic*, released in November 2023.

Comprising essays and reflections from some of India's foremost politicians and practitioners, the book was released as a potential toolkit for future governments led by progressive parties, offering visionary suggestions for addressing critical governance gaps. His experience also stood him in good stead, making writing the second book much easier, as Pushparaj says he knew what to expect from publishers and how to navigate potential objections the second time around.

Reflecting on the goals and achievements of his books, Pushparaj says they were planned for

different target audiences and objectives. Ideally, the earlier book was designed to impact governance and shape policy, while the second one was geared towards shaping political discourse, and perhaps creating a more progressive political culture.

In Pushparaj's opinion, the current Indian political landscape is unsustainably polarised, with all parties responsible for the widening rifts in the political system. Drawing on over a decade's worth of experience in the halls of power, he posits that India has lost the centre.

Illustrating the point, he said, "We have polarised left versus right and black and white dichotomies. There is no bipartisan consensus on where we should be heading as a country in the next 50 years, or 100 years. It is critical for us to have some broad plan on where we ought to be socially, economically, politically, and culturally united. Just to give one example, is it conceivable that we don't have a national security doctrine? The future of India and our place in the world depends on whether we are able to reclaim the centre, and like Singapore or China, singularly work towards certain objectives without losing sight of our progressive values – which differentiates us from most nations. This necessitates a bipartisan consensus between progressives, including from the Congress and the BJP," he said.

When asked if he had any message for Doscos, Pushparaj said, "I feel we have the good fortune to live in a historic juncture. Very rarely are we afforded opportunities to meaningfully change a nation's trajectory and be more than the sum of our individual selves. Our routines and comfort zones lull us into complacency – into living the ordinary. But what we can do today is beyond the ordinary. There is so much that we can do today that's both purposeful and can substantially change people's lives.

"It does involve making hard sacrifices – financial, filial and otherwise, but wouldn't you want to seize the moment, and change the world?"

Tushaar Kuthiala was bitten by the writing bug while at Doon. He has been working in journalism for over a decade with startup newspapers and online media portals, and is currently working on a science fiction novel. He lives in Delhi.

A Lifelong Moral Compass

My Early Years in Boarding School

Mani Shankar Aiyar 55 T, 1957

Excerpted from the book, *Memoirs of a Maverick: The First Fifty Years (1941–1991)*

My mother thought the priority was to get us into boarding school, my father wouldn't hear of it as he did not want to be separated from his boys. Amma had a college friend who had married the head of the Forest Research Institute (FRI) in Dehradun. Their son was among the most distinguished boys at the Doon School. So when my father flew out to Bombay on work, she literally kidnapped us and caught a bus to Dehradun.

It poured buckets of rain that day. The bus was a rattletrap that frequently broke down, and we smashed into a bullock cart. We got to Dehradun very late, very tired and terribly hungry. Finally, arriving bedraggled at FRI, we were helped out of our dripping clothes, fed and put to bed. Next day,



We three brothers: Jam, Mukund, Me, taken at Agra, 1954

Welham: 1949-1952

I was about ten days short of my eighth birthday and my younger brother, '**Jam**' (**Swaminathan Aiyar, 52 T, 1958**), was a few months over six. (**Mukundan 'Mukund' Aiyer, 25 T, 1960**, who joined us the following year, was not even five!) I found myself in Ambala House and Jam was accommodated in Bethany.

After a brief nap in my new house, I walked across to Jam at Bethany (for five-to six-year-olds). He startled me by saying we were at the wrong school; it wasn't Doon at all. Thoroughly alarmed, I asked him where he thought we were. He walked me to the gate and just outside was a board emblazoned 'WELHAM PREPARATORY SCHOOL' and below it the coda: 'FOR INDIAN BOYS'. I was stunned. My mother had dropped us at the wrong school and would never be able to find us again. I spent my first night crying myself to sleep.

Next day, Amma arrived. I demanded to know why we had been put in the wrong school. Unfazed, she replied, 'Doon/Welham, what difference does that make?'

It did not take me long to adjust to a parent-less life. My initiation into the politics of protest began in my first term when I joined the rest of the class in objecting to our being made to sing 'My Bonnie lies



Agra, probably 1950 when I was at Welham
From L-R: Me, Jam, my sister Tara (the lady behind is my aunt,
Dr S Alankaram)

over the ocean' (which was about Bonnie Prince Charlie of Scotland). Someone circulated a rumour that 'My Bonnie' meant 'My girl'. At eight, we wished to have nothing to do with girls and insisted on 'My Bonnie' being changed to 'My cricket bat lies over the ocean!' The teacher was compelled to fall in line with our amendment.

A highly dedicated band of English and Anglo-Indian women, along with one German Jewish refugee, made up the staff which built up the school under the inspiring but strict leadership of the remarkable Miss Hersille Oliphant: Miss Meisenheimer, Mrs Baron, Mrs Simon and Mrs Malik. They stayed on long after Independence saw most of their compatriots sailing home. They had made India their *karma bhoomi* (land of devoted duty). There were also a few young Indian teachers, of whom I remember best Mr Kurian and the physical training (PT) instructor, Mr Gaur, who gave me the appellation 'Cotton Wool Baby' because I was so terrible at PT and all other sports.

While I was all thumbs at games, and thus the object of derision of most of the boys, what saved my honour and gave me some social standing in the school was my ability to construct cricket stories out of my imagination and provide a

running commentary. The stories usually had my classmate Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi, better known as 'Tiger' Pataudi, in a stellar role. He went on to become one of India's best-known and best-loved cricket captains.

One episode from the real cricket field remains etched in my memory. Tiger's father, the nawab of Pataudi, who had captained one of India's first cricket teams to tour England, visited his son at school and entertained us on the main field. Lined up on the embankment, we would call out for a four and sure enough the next ball would be smacked to the boundary. Then we would call for a six and the ball would soar into the sky and fall far beyond us. We were bewitched at this display of cricketing legerdemain.

'Elections' at Welham

We returned to an India gearing up for the first general elections. I was utterly fascinated with the hoardings and posters; the jeeps roaring down the streets, loudspeakers blaring; the crowds that gathered around makeshift platforms and the orators who harangued them; and the colourful processions shouting slogans and singing patriotic songs. I determined that I would organise a mock election in my class at Welham.



Me with a cricket bat and Mukund with a hockey stick too large for him, Agra, circa 1953



On a picnic in Tughlakabad, circa December 1952; at the very right edge, there is me in my Doon School Blazer

All went well until the naughtiest boy, Anand Chakravarti, wrote up on the blackboard: 'Preetinder's Mom and Pop are Commies.'

(**Preetinder Dhillon, 324 H, 1958**, is now emeritus professor of chemistry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). A fistfight followed and the principal, Miss Oliphant, had to step in. The Welham School general elections were countermanded. Democracy at Welham was strangled at birth!

The seed of my lifelong infatuation with elections, win or lose, was laid by this first general election of December–January 1951–52. Through school, college and the Cambridge Union, and well into parliamentary and party elections in later life, if there was an election to be fought, I could not restrain myself from standing, and if I could not stand, avidly following every twist and turn.

Doon: 1952–1958

I had done extremely badly in The Doon School entrance exam and got in only because Miss Oliphant persuaded Headmaster **JAK Martyn** that I should be admitted. I was put in Eb/Eb, the lowest sections for both the arts and the maths/science sections. But after listening to me read about the Great Limpopo River from Kipling's *Just So Stories*, the class text, Martyn pushed me up to the 'a' section for the arts.

All of us first-termers were lodged in a single dormitory in Holding House, under the benevolent guidance of **SP Sahi** and his French wife. One day, one of the boys hinted at the way we were conceived and the rest pounced on him, saying his parents may do things like that but ours didn't. The fracas ended when Housemaster Sahi intervened and gently explained what was what. I don't think any of us really understood!

If the first general election had fired my imagination, an event in my first term at Doon kept me hooked. We were told we had to gather in the Assembly Hall after dinner for a 'debate'. None of us eleven-year-olds knew what a debate was. I sat open-mouthed as the speakers took their turn, one by one, at the podium to support or oppose the motion 'This House believes in breaking bounds'. I was fascinated by the rationality of putting forward arguments and rebutting them, as against the fist fights with which arguments had hitherto, in my experience, been settled. I also loved the fact that brains were scoring over brawn.

P Gopinath (154 H, 1954), a reputed intellectual much senior to me, who went on to a brilliant career as an international civil servant with the International Labour Organization (ILO), was the star. The cut and thrust of reasoned argument, laced with wit and repartee, has been an obsession with me ever since (throttled only now in my dotage by the inanity of TV debates of the Arnab Goswami kind).

One morning, in April 1953, I was getting out of the boxing ring when I spotted a familiar figure waiting patiently. It was my father. He had unexpectedly come to Dehradun on work and had dropped in on the off chance of seeing me before he drove back to Delhi. The school schedule was so tight that I couldn't squeeze out more than ten minutes to spend with him. Little did I know I would never see him again.

Appa's Air Accident

One day, on the morning of 9 May, I was told to meet the headmaster in his office after assembly. He said I and my brothers (including Mukund, who was at Welham) were going to be escorted by the house captain, '**Chicky**' **Ranganathan (33 T, 1951)**, in a taxi to Delhi for a 'religious ceremony'. Quite delighted at this sudden holiday, we hopped

into the waiting taxi with sixteen-year-old Chicky in charge. He tried in vain to suggest that we might on arrival find something amiss. We were too excited to ask for more details.

I was, therefore, astonished to see an army of people sweep us up and swoosh us to our apartment where my mother was sitting distraught on a white sheet. It took several minutes for me to gather that 'something amiss' related to my father, and still more time to comprehend that he had been killed in an air crash. It all became starkly clear when I was later led to the ground floor and saw his dead body lying motionless on an ice slab. As dusk fell, we were taken to Nigambodh Ghat where, as the eldest son, I was required to complete the rituals and light the pyre. That is when the horror of what had happened struck me with full force.

I was twelve and my father was no more. It now fell on me to play the role of the senior male.

Day Scholars at a Boarding School

My mother decided she would move bag and baggage to Dehradun and make us day boarders at school. This was partly to save on expenses but mainly to keep the family together. Austerity was the leitmotif since what was available was unstintingly spent on maintaining the humongous expenses on our education. For Amma, education was the biggest asset and debt the evil to be avoided at all costs. Frugality came to her naturally and so for two summers running we had no fans in our flat. We severely restricted outings to restaurants or the cinema. We travelled third class. And we had no 'home clothes'. Our school uniforms served for us during our school holidays.

Much to our chagrin, the two of us, Jam and I, were converted into Day Scholars. My mother arranged to rent a flat on the other side of the *khud* from School, a steep decline from the road level to the dry riverbed of the Bindal and a steep incline from the riverbed to the road above.

We would cycle down the *khud* and across the dry Bindal riverbed at 6am to get to school in time for PT. The day would last at least twelve hours and often went on later because school society meetings, debates and play rehearsals would take place generally after dinner and we would cycle back home around ten at night through allegedly

dangerous neighbourhoods, or '*chakku mohallahs*' (hovel of knives), although nothing untoward ever happened to us.

I was now over thirteen and getting into a difficult period of adolescence. I could not concentrate in class and often told little fibs to cover up my lack of application. Inevitably, this would lead to reprimands. My mother would invariably cushion these reprimands by blaming the teacher, not her son! But I had to shamefacedly confess to our English teacher, **Mr Webb** (who was from New Zealand) that in listing George Orwell's *Animal Farm* among the books I had read the previous week, I had blatantly lied. I was just showing off.

Yet, although it was long years before I got around to actually reading *Animal Farm*, it was in my very early teens that I started reading a lot and writing too. Our School Library was well stocked and my father too had left behind a few very interesting, beautifully bound tomes. Books were the only distraction in the long afternoons we were forced to spend lying down quietly in the hot summer season. We read voraciously but much of it glorified Empire-building by a Britannia that ruled the waves. It was not the underlying politics of these tales but the breathless bravery of boys my age, or a little older, that got me avidly following their adventures.

It was an extraordinary band of teachers who stoked my love of letters: Headmaster Martyn himself, he of the Great Big Limpopo River; **RL 'Holdy' Holdsworth**, who peppered his teaching of Shakespeare with asides (such as wondering whether Laertes asking that Hamlet's body be carried to its 'untimely bier' meant a beer before 11!); **Nolan**, also from New Zealand, who



Taken at Dehradun on the terrace of our house in 1955 when I was entering B Form
 Front Row (From R-L): Mukund, my sister Tara (St Thomas, 1959)
 Second Row (From R-L): Jam, Amma, me

introduced us to *The Bridge at San Luis Rey*; **Dr SD Singh** who made me read Conrad's *Lord Jim* (a novel I am still unable to comprehend); SP Sahi, whose evocation of Keats' 'Ode to the Nightingale' and Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' still reverberate in my head; and the gentle teacher from Ceylon, **Vijay Hensman**. Legends all.

My biggest regret is that we did not take our Hindi teachers, **HD Bhatt** and others, more seriously. Bhatt was a relatively well-known Hindi short-story writer. Unfortunately, the ethos in school was such that Hindi teachers were treated like the French teachers in the Billy Bunter stories. I think our entire generation was rendered unfit for independent India by being steeped far too deeply in English literature, with little Hindi and no Sanskrit. So we find ourselves today enduring the backlash of being trained for Tom Brown's Schooldays than for contemporary India!

I fear the School, despite its good intentions, really succeeded more in turning out excellent managers for British managing agencies in Calcutta and tea estates in Assam, than in rounding us off as good citizens of independent India. However, we were brought up and remained totally secular and free of religious prejudice. After all, our generation grew up under the shadow of Partition. Daily prayers in Assembly had a lot to do with this. The songs were eclectic, ranging from the *dohas* (couplets or quatrains) of Sant Kabir to the stirring anthems of Allama Iqbal to the dulcet tones of Rabindra Sangeet, eschewing ritual or any one scripture. There were also poems we learnt by heart, such as thanking the Lord:

*For hills to climb and hard work to do
For all skills of hand or eye
For music that lifts our hearts to Heaven
And for the handclasp of a friend*

The School, thus, accustomed us to the 'Idea of India' as the inheritor of a broad, plural, multicultural, multilingual, multi-religious civilisation.

I believe the School's prayer songs are among the finest collections of 'secular' prayers. A great deal of the credit for that must go to the British teachers who came out from Eton and Harrow, Westminster and Gordonstoun, even as it was becoming clear that the sun was setting on the Empire. They stayed on in Dehradun for the rest of their working

lives, indeed some for the rest of their lives, to teach us to become modern Indian citizens, proud of our national heritage but completely eschewing racial prejudice and xenophobic nationalism. Most Doscocs are paragons of a secular India.

Getting Into Trouble

By and large, I succeeded in avoiding getting into trouble. That is, until the prince of Patiala, **Amarinder Singh (45 T, 1959)**, arrived in school. He had smuggled in Rs 100, a huge sum in that day, as illustrated by the fact that our authorised pocket money had risen from Rs 7 a month when I joined school to just Rs 12 a month when I left – and that too to be paid out by cheque, not in cash, so as to prevent us from breaking bounds!

On the eve of the mid-term break in October 1955, Amarinder handed over his hundred-rupee note to me, as I was a day scholar, asking me to buy him 'tuck' from Hamers, the local department store. Schoolboy's honour, I had to agree. I went to Hamers, ignored the astonished look on the face of the salesman at the quantities I was ordering, and succeeded in slipping the contraband goods into Amarinder's hands.

Relieved that I had run the gauntlet and not been caught red-handed, I was going about my daily grind when the housemaster, the formidable **KNP Nair**, pounced on me and ordered me to report to him after lunch. Not quite knowing what was in store for me, I wandered into the dining room for lunch when the rumour came floating to my ears that Amarinder had laid out his illegal purchases on his bed and invited everyone to marvel at the mouth-watering treats he would be carrying to his mid-term camp. Word of Amarinder's public exhibition reached the ears of the housemaster, who then strode into the dormitory unannounced.

In the event, I was given a Yellow Card – the only Yellow Card I ever received – a system of shaming the errant boy into mending his ways. Amarinder's escutcheon was stained with an almost perpetual Red Card, usually issued for such academic lapses as failing to do your homework. And yet, Amarinder has grown into one of our most distinguished Old Boys, having served several times as chief minister of Punjab, and emerged as a noted writer of military histories. Truly, as TS Eliot says in *Murder in the Cathedral*, 'our beginnings never know their ends'!

The Yellow Card did not stop me from accompanying Amarinder on a raid on the fruit trees of his father's estate just behind the School's Rose Bowl amphitheatre. We were not caught, and I salved my conscience by arguing to myself that as the orchard was Amarinder's family property, I could hardly be accused of robbery when he himself had led me into breaking off the delicious litchis and mangoes. (A Janus-faced argument, no doubt, but perhaps that is the moral moment when I embarked on my political career!)

A political awakening

My political awakening happened the following year when I had just turned fifteen. Nasser's

nationalisation of the Suez Canal, and the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt that followed, was the moment of awakening. I followed as best as I could the unfolding of events and became passionately anti-colonial.

I also became achingly aware that privilege, not merit, determined one's position in society. The school was chock-a-block with the scions of the richest and most powerful. Yet, it was evident that they were being rewarded by destiny for birth, and not really any merit. Yet, it was also true that within the school compound no distinctions of birth or wealth were credited. For example, no one gave a toss that the prime minister's grandson, **Rajiv Gandhi (203 K, 1960)**, had joined school (in my third year). Without being made explicit, it was

Me at Welham Boys' School, 2012, holding up a photograph presented to me of Welham Boys, 1950



ingrained in us that while we were all equal within the school's walls, we were, in some ineffable way, superior to others brought up beyond those walls. This contributed greatly to the sense of arrogance of which all of us were accused.

Thoughts of a Career

Now, there arose the question of a career towards which to orient my higher education. That is when I came across an article by **RD Sathe (32 K, 1937)**, who was just about the first Dosco to join the freshly minted Indian Foreign Service (IFS) after having seen out World War II as a Madras Sapper.

Sathe's first post after Independence was as consul general to Kashgar, in China's Sinkiang (now called Xinjiang) province. But the following year, in 1948, Kashgar got cut off from our embassy in Chungking by Mao's revolutionaries with all contact between western and eastern China sealed off as Mao beat back Chiang Kai-shek to Taiwan; not only did all communication between the embassy and the consulate cease, the consulate general was also deprived of funds to meet their daily requirements. Sathe innovated a system of buying provisions from Kashmiri traders to whom they would hand over *hundis* (letters of credit), which the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) honoured when the traders returned to Kashmir.

When the posting ended, Sathe decided the only safe and reliable way of returning to India in the midst of the Chinese People's Revolution was by trekking from Kashgar to Kashmir. His account of that journey was published in the school's first alumni journal, *Chandbagh*.

I was transported by this account. If this was life in the foreign service, that is what I wished to be part of. I never wavered in that aspiration despite discovering that long treks are not really part of life in the IFS. I had gone on a real-life trek to conquer Bakria at 12,480 feet during my last school mid-term holiday in early April 1959 but sadly didn't manage to scale it. We were defeated by rain, sleet, hail and snow.

When we returned to Dehradun from Bakria, I heard at Kwaliti restaurant, where we were treating ourselves to a final repast, that the Senior Cambridge results were out. We quickly finished

our meal and rushed to school. I stayed well away from the noticeboard, in an attempt to fend off what I was sure would be bad tidings. I had scraped through to a first, but my score was abysmal, placing me almost at the bottom of the first-class rankings. But I had crossed the threshold into admission to St Stephen's College, Delhi University.

It was also in that final term that RL Holdsworth, the acting headmaster in Martyn's temporary absence, was persuaded to let us bring out a students' newsletter, *The Suppressed Echo*. Holdy also sportingly agreed to write an introductory piece for the inaugural edition:

I know all the authors personally and I know that they have not an atom of malice between them. I hope, therefore, that the censor will be merciful to their early efforts. They are the 'bright young things' of the Doon School. They are not equally expert. The authority on the impressive subject of 'The Freedom of the Press' has never read John Stuart Mill [that was me!].

But as soon as Martyn returned, he put a stop to the venture. He thought our efforts were not laudable, but 'nonsense': school discipline would be subverted.

My Solitary School Achievement

It was in the same month that I scored the only distinction of my school days: winning the Bakhle Memorial Essay Prize on the subject 'Many men owe the grandeur of their lives to their tremendous difficulties'. I gave the examples of Napoleon at Waterloo; the assassination of Abraham Lincoln; Marie Antoinette and Sir Walter Raleigh; and Robert Scott, arguing that it was only because Wilberforce and Amundsen did not face 'tremendous difficulties' that they did not become household names like these more famous others. I ended: 'Who are we to disturb the beatitudes of historians by the platitudes of philosophers?'

In my last term at school, **Deelip Surve (69 H, 1957)**, the most dominant personality of our year, played the title role in James Elroy Flecker's *Hassan*, a popular school play as it required a cast of thousands and, therefore, every boy, however hopeless, could be found at least a walk-on role. The play was made into something of a musical by

our music teacher, **Mr Deshpande**, putting some of Flecker's exquisite poetry to (mostly) lusty Indian music. Hassan, the hero, is a kind of chorus, present on the stage throughout and commenting on the follies of men and monarchs. While Surve played Hassan, I was selected for the role of Rafi, King of the Beggars, who is planning a proletarian revolt against the caliph, Harun al-Rashid (quite in keeping with my evolving political thought!).

The play begins with Rafi being caught and brought in chains before the sultan. Opposite me was **Wajahat Habibullah (266 H, 1961)** in the role of Rafi's sweetheart, Pervaneh. It was mortifying to proclaim to Wajahat, in front of 350 adolescent boys who could find sexual innuendo in a peanut, 'I would drown Baghdad in blood to kiss your lips again!'

It was taken for granted that the Gombar Trophy for best actor would be given to Surve. However, my English teacher and first housemaster, SP Sahi, said he had just come from a meeting at which the award was discussed. Apparently, it was generally agreed that I most deserved the trophy, but the final decision was to award it to Surve because otherwise 'it would break his heart'. I accepted the blow but wondered, *What about my little heart?*

Doon School: An Assessment

This is, perhaps, the appropriate juncture to assess the experience of School, the positives and the negatives. First, the minuses. Adolescence is a terribly difficult time. And to have to cope with it without the reassurance of a familiar home and friendly parents is challenge enough. Add the army of tyrannical School Captains, House Captains, Prefects and Monitors, and one gets an insight into why so many in boarding school are burdened by cowering loneliness. With that mix the agony of those like me who were hopeless at sports, in a stifling atmosphere where brawn was certainly celebrated over brain. And, overlaying it all, the oppressive absence of girls just when all kinds of hormones have started sloshing around one's system!

Then why is it that while most alumni agree that we had 'a rotten time of it', we have such sweet memories, so much nostalgia, so much pride in

being Doscoc? First, I would credit the outstanding teachers, especially eccentrics like Holdy and the stern headmaster who knew each of us by name and carefully watched over our nurturing; second, lessons in the dignity of labour at Tunwala village and on the campus; third, the assiduous but subtle cultivation of a sense of community that gives us our well-deserved notoriety for snobbishness and conceit but also the self-confidence to take on the world. But most important was the morning assembly where an eclectic collection of non-denominational prayers and songs ranging from Kabir and Allama Iqbal through Rabindranath Tagore and others gave us a lifelong moral compass, an enduring sense of India's diversity and the imperative, therefore, of a broad, inclusive secular, compassionate outlook.

My final plea was (and remains) to make the school co-educational, but, alas, it stagnates, six decades and more after I left, a unisex, Victorian relic!



Me in December 1954 when I was in C Form, taken at my aunt's house in Agra (I was called Ajit by the family at home)

Mani Shankar Aiyar was educated at Welham, Doon, St Stephen's and Cambridge before joining the Indian Foreign Service. He served for twenty-six years in posts abroad, ranging from Brussels to Hanoi to Baghdad and Karachi, besides two postings at Headquarters in as many as three different ministries. In 1985, Rajiv Gandhi inducted him into the PMO from where he migrated four years later into politics and Parliament. His special interests include Panchayati Raj and Pakistan.



The DSOBS

Post School Scholarship Fund

Empower the Future of Fellow DoscOs

Give your Support to Empower the Future of Fellow DoscOs

The Doon School Old Boys' Society is committed to supporting our fellow DoscOs who studied at The Doon School.

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Please support this important cause. We, as DoscOs, must step up to help our own.

For more information please contact The DSOBS Secretariat at secretary@dsobs.net



Tributes



Mr RD Singh (RD)

Mr RD Singh (RD) 1934-2024

A Revered and Respected Master

Apurv Kumar 638 J, 1979

Regional Representative – Rajasthan, The DSOBS

Raghuvendra 'Donny' Singh 878 T, 1982

Convenor, The DSOBS Sub-Committee – Cricket



Mr RD Singh

We are deeply saddened to announce the passing of Mr RD Singh (RD), a revered and respected Master at The Doon School, on August 27th, 2024. Born on October 20th, 1934, Mr Singh was a distinguished scholar and sportsman whose influence and guidance shaped the lives of countless students.

Mr Singh's academic journey began at Mayo College, Ajmer, where he completed his Senior Cambridge. His exceptional abilities were recognised early when he was awarded the President's Medal as the Best All-Round Boy at Mayo in 1950. He continued his education at DAV College, Dehradun, earning degrees in History, English Literature, and Sociology, followed by an MA in History from Agra University in 1957, specializing in Medieval India.

In 1957, Mr Singh began his teaching career at his alma mater, Mayo College, before joining The Doon School in 1959. For nearly two decades, he served the school with unwavering dedication, particularly in the History Department, where he inspired students with his

profound knowledge and passion for the subject. His tenure at The Doon School was marked by his role as Head of the Department of Humanities and as Housemaster of Hyderabad House.

Beyond the classroom, Mr Singh was a celebrated sportsman who played major games for both school and college. At The Doon School, he ran the football and squash programmes and contributed to the First Aid and Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. As Chairman of the Games Committee from 1968 to 1972, he played a pivotal role in shaping the School's sports culture. Boys often recall seeing him drive out of the campus with his

golf bag on the rear seat.

Mr Singh's legacy is one of excellence, dedication, compassion and equanimity. He was not only an educator but also a mentor and friend to his students, known for his engaging conversations and ability to connect with everyone he encountered. His impact on the lives of those he taught and worked with will be remembered for generations to come.

Mr RD Singh will be profoundly missed, and his spirit will live on in Chandbagh and in the hearts of all who had the privilege of knowing him.

RD: The Sportsman

Ramachandra Guha 7 H, 1973

Mr RD Singh was a man with enormous self-respect yet without a trace of pomposity, who carried himself with grace and dignity. He taught me only briefly - I was a science student in School and came to history much later — but I got to know and admire him as my Housemaster. One of my most vivid memories of him has to do with a game of cricket.



Mr RD Singh

Like some other Doon School masters of the 1970s — such as Mr RP Devgan (RPD) and Mr Sheel 'Shorty' Sharma (SKS, 345 K, 1964) — RD was a magnificent all-round sportsman. By this time his preferred sport was squash, although in his youth he had excelled at football, hockey, and, not least, cricket, even being called for Ranji Trophy trials in Rajasthan. At School, he played just one cricket match a year: the annual Staff versus the Students game.

As for myself, I was altogether hopeless at all sports except cricket, where I could bowl a passable off-break. My spin twin was my H House mate Arun 'Ghodi' Khanna (90 H, 1973), who bowled left-arm orthodox. Ghodi was, unlike me but like our Housemaster, good at all sports, and best perhaps at cricket. He had made the School First Eleven in his C Form itself and was School Cricket Captain in 1973, our final year.

During the annual Staff versus Students match that year, Ghodi got a wicket but then immediately took himself off and put me on to bowl instead. This was not what wicket-taking bowler-captains normally do. However, an explanation soon followed — RD Singh had just come in to bat. In the last two iterations of this match, RD had sweetly struck Ghodi for six. This was in continuation of an ancient custom — ever since he joined the Staff a decade previously, RD had never failed to hit at least one six, and sometimes several, against the Students.

This time, when RD came out to bat, Ghodi joyfully replaced himself with me, so that I might play the sacrificial lamb. I stoically marked out my run-up, and prepared to bowl the over from the Central Dining Hall



Mr RD Singh's first year as Housemaster of Hyderabad House, 1973

Sitting (From L-R): Sunil Goil (16 H, 1973), John Mukhopadhaya (421 H, 1973), Mr RD Singh, House Captain Arun 'Ghodi' Khanna, Ramachandra Guha

Standing (From L-R): Akshaya Kothiwal (124 H, 1973), Ajay Bhatia (261 H, 1973), Umesh Dhanda (241 H, 1973), Harjinder Singh Bawa (9 H, 1973), Raman Kapur (258 H, 1973), Sunil 'Mankind' Khanna, Ranjit Sahni (259 H, 1973)

end. RD played the first two balls defensively, and was beaten on the third. That emboldened me – perhaps age was showing, I thought (or hoped). But then the next ball was struck clean over my head, over the slope at the ground's end, to land on the pebbled path beyond and bounce away somewhere among the trees ringing the CDH.

I suppose at the time I was cross with Ghodi for putting me on to bowl instead of him. Now I feel grateful instead, as I could see RD bat up close, and even with a distance of fifty years I still remember that shot. A firm left foot out to the ball, an absolutely straight back-lift and then a free flow of the bat and the gorgeous follow-through thereafter. It was as fine an illustration of what

makes cricket the most aesthetically pleasing of sports. My second memory of RD Singh has to do with the somewhat more intellectual game of contract bridge. One summer, my friend 'Mankind' (Sunil Khanna, 221 H, 1973) and I both learnt bridge at home in the holidays. We came to School consumed by our new passion, except that no one else in H House knew anything about bridge. One of us made bold as to ask our Housemaster, who said that both he and his wife liked the game but rarely got the chance to play it. So an appointment was made for an after-dinner rubber. When the day arrived we could tell that Mrs RD was quite sick (we later heard that it was a migraine), yet she bravely played on so as not to disappoint two young wards of her husbands. It was an act of exceptional kindness.



Mr and Mrs RD Singh



Mr RD Singh

Shortly afterwards, the monsoon broke, and I fell sick myself with asthma. A series of debilitating attacks followed, whereupon my parents petitioned the school to allow me to move to their home in the Forest Research Institute. That December were my SC finals, and they were worried that I would be in no shape to take the exams if I stayed on in the dormitory. Another, and more rule-bound, Housemaster may have given the request short shrift. However, RD was as kind as his wife. He had the rules waived, and I spent the rest of the term at home, coming to School only on the days of my exams. Had RD and the School not extended this generosity I might never have got the grades to get into the college of my choice.

My last recollection of RD Singh is of meeting him in Delhi, two decades after I had left School. I was walking to a cousin's place in Sundar Nagar, and bumped into RD, who was, as he told me, now Principal of the Delhi Public School on Mathura Road. He joked that the reason I had become a historian was because I never studied history at School. He may well have been right.

A Legend in Our Lifetime

Shiv Dayal Srivastava 454 K, 1974



Mr RD Singh with a canine companion

A kind hearted gentleman, a towering personality, a pedagogue par excellence, and a sportsman non pareil – if you conjure all of this in one persona you have the right measure of a friend, philosopher, and guide, Mr RD Singh. Principal, Mayo College; Housemaster, The Doon School; and Principal of Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School, Bhutan, he moulded young impressionable minds into mature gentleman.

I was lucky to see Sir's imposing personality in 1967 when, as a student at Welham Boys' School, he came to meet his ward, and my classmate, Bhavani Singh. His fair, tall frame with that sturdy physique, sharp eyes, and confidence exuded a charm which captivated me and evoked a deference that was spontaneous.

I was only too keen to enter his tutelage, and that fortified my efforts to clear the Common Entrance Test and get admitted to The Doon School, in order to be taught by Sir. Joining Doon in 1970, and having Sir as our history teacher, was a wish come true.

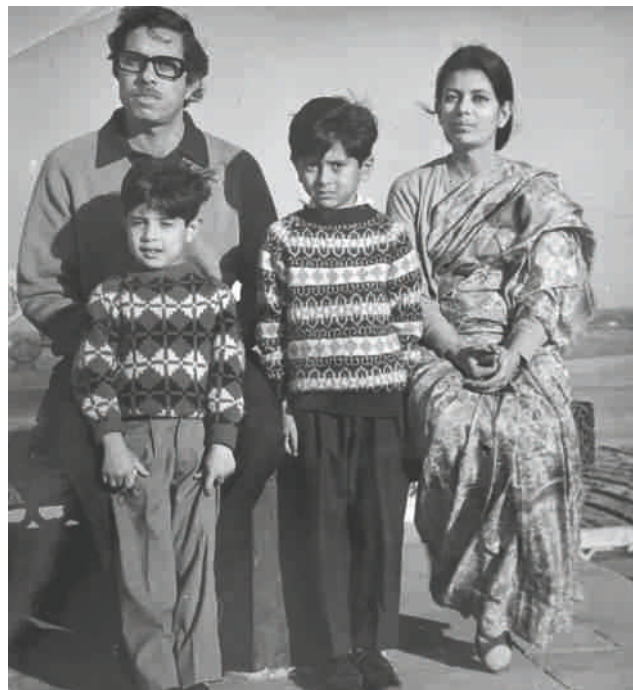
This was the beginning of a lifelong association, which, at the time, I could not have foreseen would evolve from

a teacher-student relationship to that of fraternal bonhomie. This grew from our school days spent together to the time spent walking side by side as teammates at the Rambagh Golf Club, or at Ashok Club enjoying a relaxing evening.

Sir was idolised by the students and the Old Boys community for his multifaceted personality that saw him excel on the games field and at extracurricular activities like the Wildlife Conservation Society and the School Mountaineering Club. All as a strict disciplinarian with a no-nonsense approach. Cricket, hockey, football, and squash were sports that Sir dominated. The ease with which he hit boundaries and scored goals made him the role model for all of us students to emulate.

It is said that in the annual Students vs Masters Cricket Match, Sir had an unequalled record of having hit a six in every match!

Sometimes I got a chance to play squash with Sir and his footwork, parallel shots, and low dropshots just



Mr and Mrs RD Singh with their sons Sahdev Singh (905 H, 1982) and Saumyadev Singh (266 H, 1985)

inches above the board were unplayable and left me stranded midway on the court. The deft shots and my stretched limbs trying to return them rekindle memories of healthy sportsmanship all these years later.

Sir was an avid reader of both *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines whenever I met him in the Library. Naturally, I took to reading both these magazines being inspired by Sir. In fact, Sir conducted the School Annual General Knowledge exam and some of the questions on international current affairs I could answer easily because they sprung from these two magazines.

Later, I decided to pursue the sciences stream in A Form and thus, our classroom interaction ended. But, on the sports field, in the Library, the Central Dining Hall, and the various School functions, all gave me ample opportunities to be in constant interaction with Sir.

School days, especially in boarding school, bring both teachers and students very close and the community is an extended family. As such I remember both his sons, **Sahdev** and **Soumyadev** as kids, sometimes taking them by their fingers to help cross the Main Field. Meeting Sahdev in St Stephens College as an adolescent studying with my younger brother was rejuvenating – making me feel younger by the years.

RD Sir's Jeep was also an attraction. Open to the elements with a 'game net' at the rear – it symbolised his adventurous spirit and love for the outdoors

I completed my schooling in 1974 and moved on from The Doon School to join college, and later, the Law faculty at Delhi University. I, then, joined the Indian Revenue Service – which brought me to Jaipur around the year 2000.

This renewed our association. Our old school ties and years spent together at Doon catalysed the old familiarity instantly and, in no time, RD Sir, in his usual inimitable style, was now referring fondly to his former student as 'Commissioner *saheb*.' I, in turn, with my usual deference told everyone that it required quite an effort to mould me into a person worthy of being in his company and to stand before him as a younger brother. After all, it was Sir who had set me on a steady course to "toil and achieve."

It was RD Sir who recommended me for membership to the Rambagh Golf Club and Ashok Club. I had to play many rounds of golf with Sir to fix my handicap! Our daily early morning meetings at Rambagh Golf Club, conversations over steaming hot cups of tea, and Sir's repartee are some of my most treasured moments. One moment, in particular, stands out. His recounting of an incident when a dignitary from Bhutan was visiting him in Jaipur and on seeing the *ghoomar* (the traditional Rajasthani folk dance) he was so impressed that he too joined... and continued dancing until he had to be requested to stop as all other dancers were by then exhausted and breathless!

These shared times gave strength and joy for basking in the sunshine of the age-old *Guru-Shishya parampara* and which was further accentuated when my son Siddhant, then a student at Maharaja Sawai Man Singh Vidyalaya, won the Best Speaker Award at the JTM Gibson Annual Debate in Mayo College. Sir's happiness knew no bounds because he had revived the debate as the Principal of Mayo College and now one of his students' sons had won the trophy.

The days of my Jaipur posting can never be forgotten. The Rambagh Golf Club evokes rich memories and the spell it cast is everfresh and inseparable from my persona.

As the years passed by, Sir's health was slightly indifferent and one morning at Rambagh Golf Club, while playing, he felt weak and unsteady and Sudhir Kasliwal immediately rushed Sir to the nearest hospital. Luckily, timely medical care restored Sir back to good health. Even now, some 15-20 years later, Sudhir and I recount this incident and I always commend him for his presence of mind in rushing straight to the hospital from the golf course.

Such incidents brought us even closer. Our daily routine meetings were just like before in School when I met and greeted Sir everyday.



Mr RD Singh at the Alumni Cricket for a Cause Tournament in Jaipur, January 2021

My promotion in 2007 meant that I had to move on from the Pink City to the metropolis of Mumbai and that ended our daily interaction, But, whenever I was in Jaipur I never left without meeting Sir, or speaking to him.

Sir's genuine warmth, affection, and concern for his flock – the vast majority of students that came under his tutelage and whom he groomed into respected members of society – are a living testimony to his ceaseless efforts and sacrifice in shaping the formative years of school children. These children who would go on to serve society with integrity, honesty, and impartiality and who, themselves, would become torchbearers to future generations. These virtues can not be attained in a trice as they have got to be worked for from the very beginning.

This is the culmination of a “life of toil, dedication, and the single minded pursuit of excellence” which the *guru* instils – to be a role model for the community.

Sir, you personified these virtues and imbued us with the same desire – to live with honour and dignity and better the best.

In your passing away and moving on to your heavenly abode, we are deeply saddened by the void that you leave behind. But, the beacon that you are will shine bright from the heavens and in the evening sky your aura will be the brightest. And, if I can sum up pithily, it will be 'Aura Indica.'

Gurus are immortal. The footsteps they leave in the sands of time inspire generations. To live on in our hearts is, in itself, unending.



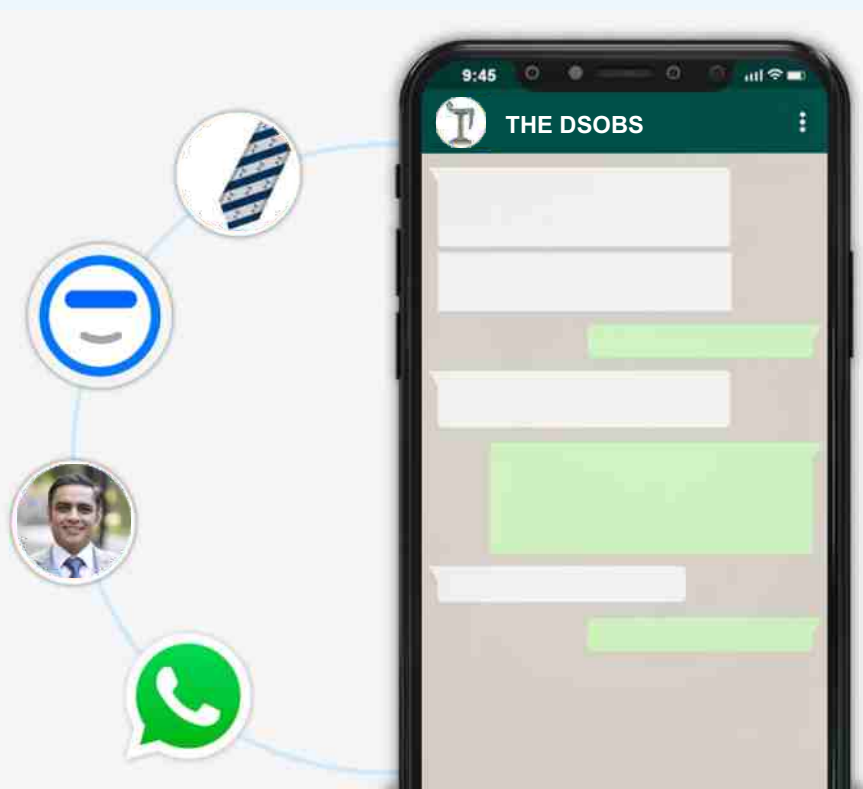


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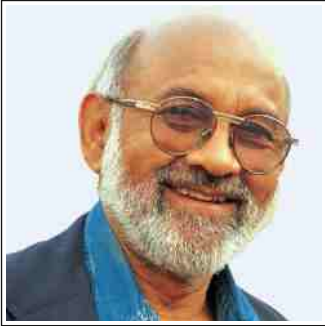
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In Memoriam



With much sadness, we inform you of the passing of **Mr Shomie Ranjan Das (SRD, HM, 165 H, 1951)**, father of Rohit R Das (165 H, 1979) and Nishad R Das (950 H, 1982), grandfather of Robin Das (565 H, 2020), and father-in-law of Bhaskar Vira (286 J, 1985), on September 9th. Mr Shomie Das was the grandson of the Late SR Das, Founder of The Doon School. He served as Headmaster of the School from 1988-1996. Our heartfelt condolences to Rohit, Nishad, Robin, Bhaskar, all members of the family, and the entire Dosco community.



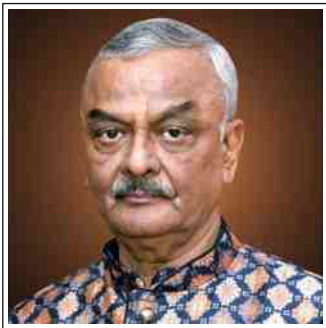
With grief, we inform you of the passing of **Mr RD Singh (RK Rajendradeo Singhji of Poonch) (RD)** – Affiliate Member, father of Sahdev Singh (905 H, 1982) and Saumya Dev Singh (266 H, 1985), on August 27th. Our deepest condolences to Sahdev, Saumyadev, and all members of the family and loved ones. A tribute to Mr Singh follows later in this issue.



With profound sorrow, we inform you of the passing of **Vinaya Kumar Gupta (36 K, 1951)**, father of Rahul Kumar Gupta (570 K, 1988), and brother of Rear Admiral (Retd) Santosh Kumar Gupta (284 K, 1952), on August 11th. Our deepest condolences to all members of the family.



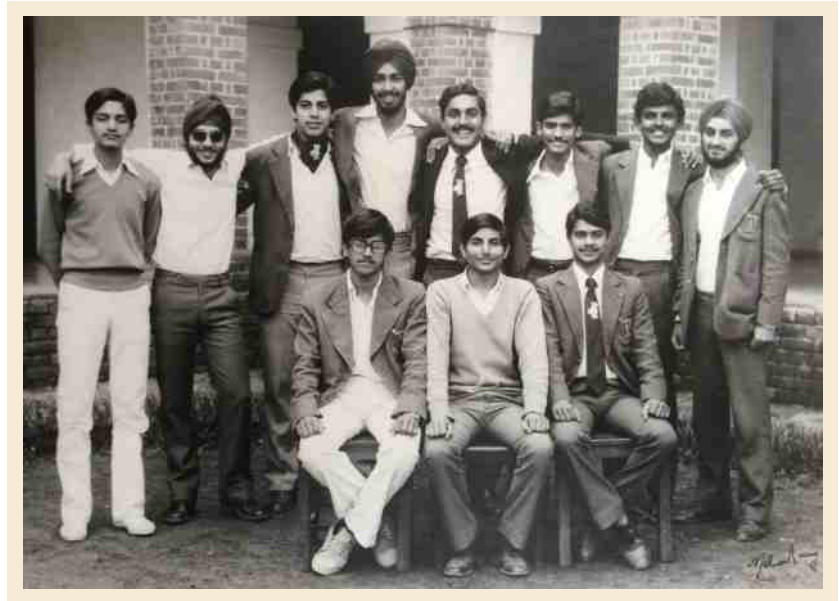
Pradeep Kaul (13 J, 1960) passed on September 8th. Our sincerest condolences to his family, friends, and loved ones.



With grief, we inform you of the passing of **Dr Ajit Singh (322 K, 1971)**, brother of Shekhar Singh (457 K, 1975), father of Utkarsh Singh (457 K, 2000), and brother-in-law of Pushkar Shahi (801 H, 1981) on July 1st. Our deepest condolences to all members of the family.



With deep regret, we inform you of the passing of **Rakesh Jha (700 T, 1982)**, brother of Rajesh Jha (358 T, 1979) on June 24th. He is survived by his wife Swapna and daughters Aayushi and Anshika Jha. Our heartfelt condolences to all members of the family and the friends he leaves behind.





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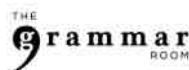
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Main Building (Chandbagh) of Forest Research Institute, Dehra Dun, circa 1930s
Dehra Dun, UP
Neg No S 879
Photo RP Dalley
Photo Courtesy: The Doon School Archives

From the Archives

The Main Building

Abia Qezilbash (ABQ)
Archives Supervisor, The Doon School

This photograph was procured from the Forest Research Institute (FRI). The photograph depicts a campus which was still part of the FRI and hadn't become The Doon School yet.





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