

Reminiscences by Dipanwita Bhowse

This was read out by the writer herself on the 4th February, 2007, Sunday, in the function held on the boulevard, opposite to Nalanda Bhavan, on the occasion of felicitation of the Teachers.

I joined Nava Nalanda in February 1971 when the school was still in an infant stage. There was only one building i.e., 25 Southern Avenue and Mr. Mitra & Mrs. Mitra, who were at the helm were young, energetic and full of dreams and aspirations, Some of the staff members were already there and I joined forces. From then onwards my life, as a member of Nava Nalanda family (that is the way Mr. & Mrs. Mitra both have always preferred to call it) started,

Thirty five years have passed since then and for the last few days I have been absorbed in a stream of thoughts and reminiscences and a thousand evanescent memories of happy days have come alive in my mind. It seems as if it was just the other day that the children and all of us, the staff members, would assemble at the back courtyard in the morning. The children would sing the prayer song with Liladi playing the piano from behind. Mrs. Mitra never failed to attend this morning assembly and wish the children 'Good Morning'. The song which was her most favourite was '.....'. I was then the class teacher of class – II and had about 20 children in my class. In fact the school had only a handful of children and it was quite easy to manage them and maintain strict discipline. Even today I can recall some events vividly and can help narrating the same to you. One of the boys of my class was not perfectly normal and would be under heavy medication because of which he would often fall asleep in class. In those days, parents became very well acquainted and familiar with us. One day, I suddenly noticed that the mother of that particular boy was heading towards my classroom. Classes were in full swing and seeing her rushing into the room I became totally dumbfounded. She justified her action by saying that during her afternoon nap she had a bad dream about her son and so she hurried to school to check whether he was O.K. The child was, of course, sleeping peacefully. I was on the horns of a dilemma as to what I should do. Anyway, with much difficulty I persuaded her to leave the class room and immediately ran to Mrs. Mitra to inform her about the incident. She obviously had no inkling of what had happened. But what she told after hearing me was even more surprising. Mrs. Mitra said that she was already aware of the lady's whimsical ways as the lady concerned gave a wake up call to her every morning through her rendition of Rabindrasangeet over the telephone. It was definitely a torture for Mrs. Mitra but she had no other option but to listen to her patiently.

Mr. Mitra has always been very soft and lenient with everyone. He too is a man with admirable patience. Unlike any other Rector, he can never be harsh or rude with anyone, whether it be a student or an employee. Once, long time ago some of the senior boys turned so rowdy that it became almost impossible for us

to control them. We decided it has high time Mr. Mitra intervened and take some stern steps. We complained to him so bitterly that he took the matter seriously and reacted. He applied physical force and punished them severely. But while he went back to his office, to our astonishment, we heard a sarcastic remark, "Are you all happy now!" We were perplexed at the turn of events. He did not come to school for the next two days. When we enquired, Mrs. Mitra said that he was suffering from 'Narayani' complex. We did not know whether to laugh or cry.

So it has been great fun all the way and there was never a moment of boredom or monotony. We had fetes, exhibitions, cultural programmes, various competitions, debates, quizzes and so many other events, but all in that historical building i.e. 25, Southern Avenue and we enjoyed every bit of it. The programmes were perhaps, not so gorgeous and colourful as they are today but they were definitely done with deeper involvement and had a personal touch. The school would be bustling with activity before each function and Mrs. Mitra would be seen supervising every detail personally, with brisk energy. Her very presence gave us a comforting reassurance. She was an exacting taskmaster, no doubt, but had the power to instill such enthusiasm that it ran like a fever in us. Her constant guidance and inspiration has taught us to be what we are today. The appreciation and support that we have received from her for whatever we did has given us the impetus to work all these years. For a long time the arrangements remained the same. But gradually the school earned a name for itself and the number of students increased. Within a short period another building was acquired to accommodate the teeming students. It did not stop there for more and more buildings were taken to tackle the situation. As a result, we saw less and less of Mrs. Mitra. Of course, we resented it vehemently and every time she came we were extremely happy but expressed our disappointment at her long absence, She, with an indulgent smile, pacified us by saying that the other departments needed her presence equally. We would see Mr. Mitra more often as he taught History in the senior classes. Mr. Mitra is an excellent teacher and the students benefited immensely from his teaching. How meticulous he was in correcting answer scripts is beyond anybody's imagination. Our Madhyamik results were always good and they became increasingly better till Amitesh Maity stood in 1980. That was the beginning of a new era and it has been success all the way since. Every year a feather was added to its cap. Then, a day came, when we were informed that yet another building had been bought at Kabir Road and we would be transferred there. The day of shifting was a sad one and we left 25 Southern Avenue with heavy heart. We missed the old building and become nostalgic about it even today. A few years back the Higher Secondary department was opened and our long cherished dream and hope was ultimately materialized. Our school reached the pinnacle of success and we are proud of it indeed.

Our relationship with Mr. & Mrs. Mitra has always been very warm, cordial and deep. Differences and disagreements there have been and there was a note of discord in the atmosphere. But they were amicably settled at the end and there

was no trace of malice. The cordial relationship was restored once again. Mrs. Mitra has always been a remarkably dignified figure with exquisite graciousness of manner whereas Mr. Mitra impressed one and all by his modesty, gentility and refinement. And both have unlimited patience. Our group has always been the privileged lot, for we had and still have free and easy access to both. Mrs. Mitra has given a sympathetic hearing to all our problems and grievances and found satisfactory solutions to all. In fact, till today, in spite of her frail health, she retains the power to find an answer to the most perplexing problem. Her tremendous resilience and dauntless courage has carried her through all the obstacles and difficulties that the school has faced. Their genuine concern for everyone and catholicity of spirit has earned them intense goodwill. All these sterling qualities have been the keynote of their success. Today, this institution can take pride in its remarkable achievements, which has been possible only because of the intelligence and insight of its founders. They both have been the embodiment of culture. Their life-long adherence to Tagorean ideals has brought Nava Nalanda to such eminence. The institution has gradually become the seat of learning and culture as the name suggests.

We express our deep admiration and regard for Mr. & Mrs. Mitra and sincerely wish and pray for their good health. Let Nava Nalanda attain more glory with their ennobling presence and guidance in the years to come.

Dipannita Bhose



SHAPING TOMORROW