

OTHER MILESTONES

There were many events and incidents between 1954 and 1960 (my school years), which influenced my attitude and aptitude. These events were small but nonetheless their impact and influence on shaping our personality was considerable. This influence was at times direct, sometimes indirect; at times perceptible and often subtle. I had not visualized the importance and significance of these happenings at the time of their occurrence. Now, half-a-century later, I am able to appreciate and appraise their play in my life. Some of these events are etched vividly in my memory and I shall like to share them with fellow NOBs.

One evening Pradhanji, Shri Charles Napier, came to our house, Shanti Ashram, unannounced. He was wearing the regular evening dress ie Khadi Kurta-payjama and pathan chappals. Winter was about to set-in. There was a nip in the air. To ward it off he had draped a pashmina shawl around his shoulders. It was his first unscheduled visit to our house. Naturally it aroused our curiosity. What could cause this surprise visit?

What really puzzled us was a small box perched on his shoulder. Why was Pradhanji lugging this box himself? It appeared to be quite heavy. Shri Napier's left shoulder was pressed down by its weight.

Netarhat set great store by dignity of labour and self-reliance. We carried our personal belongings ourselves. Even on railway platforms we lugged our hold-alls and steel trunks. Hiring porters was considered un-manly. However, school did employ porters and orderlies to carry heavy packages. Pradhanji had the exclusive services of Shri Kashyap, the Sevakji, attached to his office. What necessitated then to make the white man carry the black man's burden?

The mystery got unravelled soon. Pradhanji called all of us to join him in the Recreation Hall. He put the box on the floor and sat down in front of it. We formed a semi-circle around it. Shri Napier unlocked the box and lifted its lid. We saw two large spools of tape on its top surface.

"This is a tape-recorder," Shri Napier explained." It records sound

instantly and plays it back. It is like a gramophone but with a big difference. For the gramophone sound is recorded on a hard-disc. Recording requires a studio and recording machines. Moreover a disc can be made for only one set of sounds, be it a song or a speech. You can not re-use it for another set of sounds.

“A tape-recorder uses a magnetic tape to record sound. Any sound, music or speech or even chirping of birds, can be recorded instantly. This box is a studio and a gramophone combined.

“Moreover, you can use the same tape again. You can erase the previous sound-track and record a new piece of music.”

Shri Napier was explaining the functioning of the tape-recorder in chaste-Hindi. He used a number of Hindi technical terms which were beyond our comprehension. Shri Napier must have prepared and rehearsed the short speech well. His presentation was effortless. One thing all of us understood clearly - this small machine recorded and produced sound instantly.

“Any volunteers?” He asked us with a chuckle.

Involuntarily my right hand shot-up. It acted on its own. My mind was still grappling with the new concept of instant production of sound. The excitement of the prospect of listening to my own voice suddenly raised the adrenaline level high in blood and caused this reflex action.

Today cassette players and CD players are common place. I have come across them in the remote villages of Laddakh and Manipur. But, in 1954 a tape-recorder was a rare object. None of us had seen one earlier. Later we learnt that tape-recorders were then used by AIR stations. Having a tape-recorder was a great privilege for a school. I do not think any other school in Bihar had one — Vikas Vidyalay might have been an exception.

Half-a-dozen other boys had also volunteered. Since I was the first to raise my hand, Sri Napier called me up, handed me a tiny microphone and instructed, “hold it three inches away from your mouth and speak into it.”

I went blank for a moment. No poem or line came to me. However, I drew a deep breath and intoned the shloka taught to me by my mother, “Mookam Karoti Vachalam’. The Lord literally came to

my help and transformed the 'Mook' (dumb) into a 'vachal' (voluble). Once I had shaken off the hesitation, there was no problem. Shlokas tumbled out of my mouth one after the other. After a few Pradhanji raised his palm to stop me. He switched off the machine and remarked, "There are some more in the queue."

Renderings of half-a-dozen more volunteers were fed into the tape-recorder. I recall our house-master, Shri Ramdev Tripathi and Mataji (house-mother) had also spoken into it.

Shri Napier re-winded the tape and pushed the button 'Play.' A hesitant rumbling voice emanated from the machine sounding the hymn 'Mookam Karoti Vachalam'. It took me a couple of seconds to realize that it was my own voice.

Soon the tremble was gone but the heavy monotone remained. Prior to this experience I believed that I possessed a melodious voice. In fact I was very cross with Saxenaji when he had not included me in the school-choir. One day he would realize his mistake and award me the due recognition for my musical talent, was my firm belief. The tone and tenor of the voice that came out of the tape-recorder dashed all my hopes for a career in music.

The day was won by Vidyanand Upadhyay. He had sung a song from 'Nastik', a popular film of Fifties: 'Dekh Tere Sansar Ki Haalat Kya Ho Gai Bhagwan". His rendering was true to every note of the original. It was a delight to hear him sing. He had a matured silvery voice. The tape-recorder faithfully played back the song. We were thrilled. At the close of it we automatically clapped. He was the only one to get this honour. We congratulated him heartily. It was a pity that Vidyanand did not pursue the muse later.

About two months were gone when we came to learn that we were going to have a cultural evening. It was also learnt that the show would contain a one-act play also. It broke the tedium of the daily grind and created great excitement. We eagerly looked forward to it.

Netarhat did not possess an auditorium then. The recreation rooms of Ashrams were not big enough to accommodate all. So, the ground floor of the main hall of the Chalet was used to host this programme. A set depicting a village hut was set-up in one corner for the one-act play 'Taimoor Ki Haar' (Defeat of Taimoor) by Dr

Ram Kumar Verma. Sri Paritosh Sen, our Art-Teacher had beautifully decorated the set.

Shri Mithilesh Kanti had directed the play. Naresh Kumar, Narendraji and Anil (he left the school soon after) were in the leading roles. All the actors did their roles with great elan and aplomb. Their performance won applause of all.

Naresh Kumar, now settled in US, was in the leading role of Tamerlane or Taimoor-Lung. As the very name suggests he was lame in one leg. To live up to the role Naresh had to develop a lopsided gait. He did it so well that it was difficult to accept the fact that he had good use of both of his legs. Even after the show Naresh would walk around dramatically in this style. The teachers had to do some serious talking to rid him of this lame-duck gait.

About five decades later I visited Samarkand where Tamerlane is buried. Now he is the greatest Uzbek National hero. You can see a number of his statues in Samarkand and other towns. After the Russian Revolution the Soviet scientists wanted to verify whether he was really lame or was it only a myth. They dug up his grave and exhumed his skeleton. They found one leg shorter than the other. The day this marauder's skeleton was exhumed the Second World War broke out. Even in his death Tamerlane was deadly. The scientists hurried to bury him again. When the dead Tamerlane proved to be so dangerous what a ghoul he must have been when alive! The teachers did well to stop Naresh from walking on his foot-prints.

A friend of Shri Sen from Calcutta had come to the show. When it became known that he was a good singer, we requested him to sing a song. He gave us a 'Pada' (song) of Kabir. He proved to be a really accomplished classical singer. The 'Nok-jhonk' (sparring) between him and Saxenaji, who was accompanying him on Tabla, made it most enjoyable.

Shri Sen also gave us a song. It was a hilarious one. It was an elegy for a donkey: "Mera Pyaara Bechara Gadhaa Mar Gaya" (Alas!, My lovely donkey is dead). We all happily clapped to the beat.

The success of this show spurred us to stage plays regularly. On next occasion all the three houses - Shanti, Prem and Ashok, put up plays of their choice. The stage was the terrace of the Chalet on the tennis-court side. The spectators were seated on the

tennis-court ground. All school employees and their families also flocked to it. This was the only entertainment readily available to them.

It was a great experience for me. This was the first time I acted in a drama. I did the role of a charlatan in 'SAB SE BADA AADMI' (The Greatest Man), a one act play by Bhagvati Charan Verma.

I had memorised my lines well and rehearsed my movements umpteen times. Our director, Kantiji — a hard one to please, was fully satisfied with my acting. When my turn came I confidently stepped on to the stage. After the delivery of the first dialogue I turned to face the audience. I was bewildered to find that I could not see anyone. The foot-lights blinded me. It put me off for a moment. Soon I collected my wits and plunged into my role. The strong foot-lights, in fact, proved to be helpful in shaking off the stage-fright. Never did I suffer from stage-shivers again.

Our play was held to be the best. I am sure old-boys of Prem and Ashok would hotly contest this claim of mine but this is the honest truth. Modesty prevents me from recounting the plaudits that I got for my performance.

Now cultural shows which invariably included one or two plays were staged on every conceivable occasion. Every year we had at least half-a-dozen such cultural programmes. All kinds of plays - from full-fledged drama to mono-act and shadow-play, were staged. Balram Sharma excelled in reciting poems with expressive gestures. His recitation of 'Geet-Farosh' (The Seller of Songs) by Bhavani Prasad Mishra and 'Krishna as the envoy of Pandavas in the court of Kauravas' by Dinkar are yet clearly etched in my memory. So is the shadow-play by Shashi Ranjan (of my batch) as the Yaksha of Megha-Dutam of Kalidasa.

Two plays are still remembered and talked about by all those who had the privilege of seeing them. One of them was 'Konark', a multi-act drama by Dr Jagdish Chandra Mathur, ICS, who happened to be one of those persons who had conceived the Netarhat project for promotion of excellence. Elaborate arrangements had been made for proper staging of this drama. The workshop stage was done-up properly. Drapes and curtains of satin and velvet were purchased. A huge cut-out of the sun-temple of Konark was made of ply and

hardboard. Sri Prabhat Niyogi, our Art Teacher, painted the sculptures of Konark on this backdrop. Since it was a period drama — the story revolved around the construction and demolition of the Konark temple which had happened in the mid-thirteenth century AD, suitable costumes and accessories were procured. Sri MN Saxena took great pains to compose the background music. It was recorded in the school tape-recorder. To incorporate the proper sound-effects a big tub was half-filled with water and shaken vigorously. When the tape was played one could hear the sea-waves crashing against the outer-promontory of the temple.

To direct the play a gentleman — unfortunately I am not able to recall his name, had been brought from Deoghar by Pradhanji. I understand he was a professor of Hindi in a local college and had successfully staged 'Konark' at various places earlier.

A board was constituted to select actors for the play. Kantiji, Mehrotraji and the Deoghar professor were its members. A good number of boys had volunteered. I was also one of the aspirants. Others had chosen specific roles. I auditioned for all roles - from king to the doorkeeper.

The selectors did not take much time to make the choice. Soon the result was out. Vijay Jha got the hero's role. Other roles were also allotted quickly. I did not figure anywhere. Tough luck! I got up to slip away quietly.

"Hold on for a moment," Sri Mehrotra stopped me." We haven't yet decided about Chalukya (the villain). Read his lines again."

I was made to read his part again and again changing the inflexions and accent. Finally the Board decided to make me the villain.

I was delighted. A villain's role is next to hero's in importance. Ram cannot be a hero without Ravana. In Konark also Chalukya had a pivotal role. I put my heart and soul — if a villain can be credited with a soul, into the act.

The director was a perfectionist. He made us to rehearse our acts endlessly. We had to memorise the dialogues fully. No prompter was allowed. He would explain each and every word's nuances and their relevance. The gestures and the delivery of dialogues had to

be to his full satisfaction. If anybody faltered, he stopped the rehearsal and started it afresh. He would go on till he was satisfied fully with our expression. Both, body-language as well as the spoken one, were required to be perfectly synchronised. In short he made us to live the role.

It was quite a grind but none of us minded it. Love for drama was not the reason for our commitment. It was tea. In those days tea was a taboo in the school — I wonder what is the situation now. It was available in the canteen, but the canteen, the sole tea-outlet, was out of bounds for us. Rarely, literally once in a blue moon, a teacher offered us a cup of tea. We sipped it slowly, rolling every drop around the tongue and the palate, savouring its bouquet, flavour and taste. The greatest devotee of Bacchus would not have ever given such attention and love to his drink. Now, this nectar of gods was available to us and in plenty. The Director was a tea-addict. Every now and then he would call for the tea and all of us would have a round. He was also a chain-smoker. However, he never offered it to us. Those days smoking was not the reviled thing which it is today. It was considered to be a hallmark of maturity and adulthood. Generally a person tried his hand at it after graduation, never in the school years.

The chain of tea-cups kept us in high 'tempo'. This word 'tempo' was the most favourite word of the Director. If he was dissatisfied with anyone's performance he would say that the tempo was low. If he felt like taking a break he would announce, "let the tempo build up slowly." The word 'tempo' substituted mood, expression, temper — virtually every shade of human emotions. Later on I came across this term during hostel, college and University Unions' election campaigns. Every candidate's supporters shouted the slogan "A'ka tempo high hai" The Director must have been a hyper election campaigner.

The final day arrived. It was winter-time. The evening air had a chill. Our costume did not permit any upper garment except the 'Uttariya', a flimsy wrap. Grease-paint, the regular theatrical make-up was applied to our face and body for the first time. We had to sit motionless for long toppers. Kantiji and Mataji (Smt Kanti) worked furiously to complete the job as fast as they could. Even then it took considerable time. To ward off the chill Shrimanji ordered hot tea.

We could have as many cups as we desired. Extra spoonfuls of sugar helped greatly in warding off the chill. I must have had a kettleful. What a fortune!

The play was a big success. For days, nay years, people talked about it. Even now mention 'Konark' to the old boys of the first five batches and see the twinkle in their eyes. There were talks of staging it at Ranchi and Patna for public viewing. However, nothing came out of it.

The second was the staging of a part of 'Julius Ceaser', one of the famous works of William Shakespeare. It was directed by Dr Devendra Verma, an English professor of Patna University, who had specialised in Shakespearean drama. He was an accomplished mimic and actor. He could talk back to you in your own voice and accent. There were many stories about his mimicry. It was said that he had sought an appointment with Pt. Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India and was granted five minutes. Pt Nehru found conversation with him so refreshing and interesting that the interview went on for more than an hour. Dr Verma had talked to Nehru in Nehru's own voice. Later he migrated to UAR — for some-time Egypt and Syria had united to form tthe United Arab Republic but it did not last long, and became the professor of English in the University of Damascus. Subsequently he migrated to Canada. It was said that he had been a part of the Royal Shakespearean Theatre of Stratford-on-Avon for a considerable period.

He selected the scenes related to Caesar's assasination and specches of Brutus and Anthony. Since our final examination was close-by, roles were given to the boys of the second batch. The drama was staged in Kishore Ashram. Unlike Konark, the stage props and backdrops were simple. Lighting, make-up constumes etc were also simple. It was staged as the dramas were staged in the days of Shakespeare.

The drama was very successful. The actors did their roles superbly. The dialogue-delivery was superb. There was no trace of Bihari accent. It provided for audience participation also - a novel experiment. When Brutus and Anthony put questions to Romans, the audience acted as the Romans and replied back as such. The impact of the drama lingered for days. I wish I had been a part of it. I would have gone for any role, even that of Cassius, the villain.

I did the next best thing. After the examinations I read up all works of Shakespeare in original. I recommend them heartily to all readers.

One evening Shri Dar summoned me and the boys who hailed from the tribal belt of Chhotanagpur (now Jharkhand) — Krishna Kumar Nag, Eric Ekka, Gabriel Purti, Paul Guria etc, to the Chalet. He introduced us to a gentleman from Kanke. Kanke, a suburban town of Ranchi, is famous for its lunatic asylum. This gentleman had, however, not come to examine our heads. He ran a folk-culture club called 'Dhumkuria'. Prior to the spread of the missionary influence every tribe had a youth club where young boys and girls interacted with each other. Gonds called it Ghotul and Oraons called it 'Dhumkuria'.

Shri Dar was keen that our cultural shows should have some local tribal inputs also. Hence he had brought this gentleman from Kanke. For next one week every evening we practised the steps of tribal dances under his guidance. He taught us two dances. One was set to a modern song praising the spread of education and had simple steps; something akin to hop, skip and jump. The other was attuned to a real folk-song of the yore which told of the coming of the railway to the tribal land. I find that train's arrival created folk-songs all over the world. The size the length, the whistle and the rhythm of its movement appear to have inspired folk-poets and musicians everywhere. It had an intricate pattern of foot movements and imitated a train's movement around a zig-zag hilly terrain, huffing, puffing, swaying and chugging along. 'A train is definitely a much better conveyance compared to a horse-cart', was the conclusion of the song-writer: 'Rail-Gadi Eka Se Nagad'.

Subsequently in every cultural show a tribal dance item became a must. We donned the tribal apparel — an easy affair; strip off and wrap a coloured piece of cloth around the waist and you are ready, and frisked around the stage. After a couple of shows we decided to improve the costume. The American Encyclopedia proved very helpful. We borrowed heavily from Hopewee's, Apaches, Pocohontas and Amazon Red-Indian tribes who had the most resplendent costumes among all tribals. In later shows our costume was as gorgeous as any other performer's. Fortunately no local Oraon or a Red Indian saw our dances. An Oraon would have wondered as to why Red Indians were singing an Oraon sang and dancing to it and vice-

versa.

In spite of its remote location and poor connectivity Netarhat attracted visitors of varied calling. Shri Napier seldom invited them to meet or address us. To him they were more of a nuisance. Shri Dar reversed the policy. He would invite persons of different professions to talk to us. They were treated as school guests. Parents and guardians were also welcome. He imposed only one condition upon them. If they desired to bring any eatable then it had to be for all, at least for all inmates of the ashram to which their son or word belonged to. 'Cream-chop of Sweet-Palace of Ranchi was a great favourite. Due to this rider, we used to have 3-4 rounds of this delectable sweet in a year.

Dri Dharendra Verma, an eminent Hindi philologist and critic was the first important person to address us. He was then a professor of Hindi in Allahabad University. I understand Kantiji had been his student. He had come with his daughter. He talked to us in the recreation room of Shanti Ashram. Raj Kumar Prasad — now an oil tycoon in Texas (US), where he has re-arranged the alphabets in his surname and made it 'Persaud' to suit the American tongue, had delivered the welcome address. Dr Verma had talked to us about the evolution of Hindi and its role in free India.

Next important person to visit us was Dr Ramchandra Ranganath Diwakar, the Governor of Bihar. He was a renowned Gandhian, a freedom-fighter as well as scholar. A meeting was arranged on the Chalet's terrace adjoining the tennis-court. A big duree was spread on the floor for us. We were drilled in getting up and sitting down without brushing off the dust from our seats lest it lodges in the eyes of the fellow standing behind one. A wooden 'takhat' (cot) with a white Khadi counter-pane draped over it was placed in the middle of the terrace for the Governor to sit on. A round bolster was to provide the back-rest. The Gandhian spirit of simplicity and austerity was in vogue those days.

He talked to us about the aims and objectives of the Netarhat experiment. He spoke in the lighter vein.

"We have set-up this school in a jungle to train the monkey-brigade (Vanar-sena) so that in time of need it builds the Setu-Bandh (the bridge over the sea). To keep the young monkeys in proper discipline we have selected the monkey-commanders from

all over the country and to preside over the whole exercise we have imported a big monkey from abroad,” the Governor said with a chuckle. His remark created a ripple of laughter amongst us. I wonder how Sri Napier took his depiction as ‘the big monkey from abroad’! British are known for their sense of humour. However, Sri Napier did not show any reaction. If he enjoyed the wit, it must have been inwardly. His face maintained a stoic stance throughout the address.

Shri KP Sinha, the Director of Public Instruction (DPI), Bihar, was also one of the early visitors. He was also the father of Shri BK Sinha, our Chemistry teacher. He talked to us about the British Public Schools and their values. He also told us about his Cambridge days.

Later a large number of visitors addressed us. I have written about Dri Zakir Hussein’s memorable visit in an earlier chapter. The visit of a delegation of three eminent educationists was another such event. One of them was Shri MN Kapoor, the Principal of the Modern School, Delhi. Shri Kapoor was a very impressive person. He was tall and handsome and possessed an imperial air.

He complimented us on our excellent Hindi. However, his compliment had a satirical touch.

“I was a student of Hindi and Sanskrit in my college days,” he remarked, “hence I have no difficulty in understanding your Hindi. However, if you wish to make yourselves intelligible to common people, then you should tone it down a little.”

He also stressed upon the importance of English and exhorted us to acquire proficiency in it also. His advice was pragmatic and down-to-earth. I suspect Shri Dar might have prompted him to stress upon this point. Left to himself, a suave and sophisticated person like Shri Kapoor would not have made such a critical remark.

I remember the visit of Sri Purani, a scholar of Indian philosophy and an acolyte of Shri Aurobindo for personal reasons. He had spoken for about half-an-hour about the life and philosophy of Shri Aurobindo. His speech was in English. On conclusion he felt that his speech had gone over the heads of many students, specially the younger ones. He requested Shri Dar to depute someone to provide the Hindi translation.

Shri Dar commissioned me to do the job.

It was a bolt from the blue. I had not been sounded about any such task. Fortunately I had been listening to Shri Purani's speech attentively. Before the trepidation could take over, I got up and embarked upon the job. Later Shri BD Pande complimented me for having done the job well. He told me that Shri Purani was happily surprised that my translation had been true to the original speech word-by-word from beginning to the end.

I exulted at my success. But, now I had to be on guard lest I fail in any future test. Subsequently on many occasions Shri Dar asked me to do the impromptue translation. In fact I became the school translator or interpreter.

This incident brought home to me the importance of the listening skill. I honed it up in following years and it paid me very good dividends in my professional life.

Another memorable visit was of Mr Kohli and his family. Mr Kohli was the Chief Pilot Officer of the Calcutta Port Trust.

He gave us a long lecture about piloting ships from Bay of Bengal to Calcutta docks. He had prepared hard to make his presentation. He had sketched out Calcutta docks, the course of Hooghly river and the ship-routes on a black-board with chalks of different colours. He, evidently, enjoyed his job and explaining its importance to others. I also suspect that he had not had the privilege of addressing a large attentive gathering for quite sometime.

"Hooghly and Hudson are the two most difficult rivers in the world for navigation," he informed us." Sandbanks and mud-flats, some visible and some sub-merged, form overnight and shift incessantly. In the past these two rivers caused many a shipwreck. Even now ships have to be piloted very carefully. A minor slip of the pilot can stall a ship midway and even lead to its abandonment."

His talk was excellent but his visit is not remembered by my contemporaries for that reason. His visit was made memorable by his young, pretty and smart daughter. She was the first young woman to appear in flesh and blood in a mini-skirt before us. By present day standards her dress would be classified as modest but for us in mid-Fifties it was the haute-couture. The young Miss Kohli played a good hand of tennis. For one week — Kohlis stayed only for

a week, tennis was the rage. Even the linesman-ship was a privilege.

A number of Bihar ministers and officers visited Netarhat. On these occasions a song composed by Ram Biranjan Singh was invariably presented. This song — ‘Dhan-Dhan Samudayik Vikas Yojna’, was in praise of the Community Development Programme in Bhojpuri. Like Chandra Dhar Sharma Guleri who became famous by writing one short-story ‘Us Ne Kaha Tha’, Ram Biranjan also attained all-time glory by composing this ditty. It must have been sung on more than two dozen occasions. All these government visitors, the freebooters, were much impressed by our awareness about the developmental process.

Shri Dar was a great showman and an adept in public-relations. He had something for every visitor’s taste ranging from classical music soirees to tribal dances. Had he written a book on ‘How to Win Friends And Influence People’ — he would have out-matched Dale Carnegie.

The most memorable of all these visits was the visit of Dr Shri Krishna Sinha, the then Chief Minister of Bihar. Besides being an astute politician and a statesman of vision — he was the founder of our school, he was an erudite scholar also. He visited us in the last lap of our stay. Only my batch was staying on at Netarhat for the final examinations. He was not keeping well and had come to Netarhat for rest and recuperation.

The school hosted a lunch in his honour. Shri Dar had come to know that Shri Sinha was partial to chicken-roast and other such delicacies. He hired a chef to prepare a special meal for the chief minister. However, Shri Sinha declined to have any of these and requested for ‘Geela Bhat’ and ‘Aloo Ka Chokha’ (soft rice and mashed potato). It was arranged hastily. We did full justice to the chicken-roast and other dishes. The proverb that “Dane Dane Par Likha Hai Khane Wale Ka Nam’ (on every morsel, the name of the eater is inscribed by the Providence) proved to be correct.

After the lunch we all assembled in the recreation room. Shri Dar suddenly asked me to recite a poem. It was so sudden that for a moment I was tongue-tied. In a moment I collected my wits and recited the famous poem, ‘Ek Pushp Ki Abhilasha’ (Desire of a

Floower) by Makhanlal Chaturvedi. This was a poem which was familiar to all freedom-fighters and apt for the occasion.

A cultural programme was to be put up in the evening in the auditorium at the workshop. The stage had been made ready. Unfortunately a fire broke out in the afternoon and in spite of our best efforts gutted the entire stage. Shri Dar was advised by the local officers to cancel the show. The chief minister had been informed about it. He would not take the cancellation amiss, they argued. As it was, he had come to Netarhat primarily to rest and would have welcomed a few hours of solitude, they argued.

Shri Dar was one of those indomitable persons who never say die. Adversity tests a man — “Dhiraj Dharma Mitra Aru Nari, Apat Kal Parakhiye Chari (Perseverance, righteousness, friendship and marital fidelity are tested by adversity), he believed. He directed that a stage should be improvised in the open veranda of Prem Ashram and the show should be presented.

So was it done. Everybody was full of praise. Dr Sinha mentioned this in his address and acclaimed it as the true Netarhat spirit.’

As the new batches arrived extra-curricular activities proliferated. Annual athletic competition became a very important event. Eric Ekka was the star of this annual meet. He was an undefatigable runner and excelled in all long runs. He could just run on and on. On Sunday he would run down to Banari and run back to school. He was the right material for Olympics. Unfortunately instead of worshipping Zeus he became an ardent devotee of Bacchus. When I met him at Imphal after three decades I found that he had turned into the shadow of his previous physique.

A fancy-dress competition was held on the last day of the Meet. Students as well as teachers participated in it. One year Kantiji and Mehrotraji came in the garb of Buddhist monks. In the yellow robes, with palm-leaf parasols over their heads they looked much like Burmese Bikshus. I understand they had obtained the costume at Bodh Gaya during the school trip. Once Shri BK Sinha came disguised as a small child in Asha’s pram. Dressed in a frilly child’s dress he was pulling at a milk-bottle. Sri Sinha was a tall person. How did he fit into the small pram of his daughter is still a mystery. He remained in that cramped position for about half-an-

hour. Next year he came in the guise of a policeman with Shaileshwar in tow. Shaileshwar had taken the guise of a thief and did the role superbly. He looked a thief every inch.

These extra-curricular activities forged the strong emotional bonds between the students and the teachers. The NOBA spirit which holds the old-boys' community together today is the outcome of these activities.

We stayed on for a couple of days after the examinations to complete the school leaving formalities. We roamed around the plateau bidding adieu to all friends the magnificent Arjuna tree close to the Chalet, the Weeping willow trees near the green-house, Panchavati (the clump of five trees near the oval), the lower-Ghaghri, the upper Ghaghri, the pine groves etc. Our emotions were akin to those of Shakuntala while taking leave of the flora and fauna of Kanvashrama. I wish I had the talent of Kalidasa to describe our feelings of those days.

The last important activity at Netarhat was founding of the Netarhat Old Boys Association. Sri BK Sinha provided the expert advice in framing the constitution and rules of the Association. He was elected its first general secretary. I had the privilege of being elected the vice-president.

