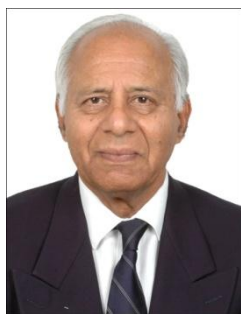


School (?) days in Lahore and Okara



Anand Sarup

Born in Lahore on 5th January 1930 to Savitri Devi and Shanti Sarup. Brought up in an open environment, chiefly under the influence of a learned and iconoclastic grandfather who had, after much study and reflection, decided against denominational commitment. Anand Sarup developed a deep commitment to democracy and freedom because his family participated actively in the freedom struggle. In 1947, together with his family he went through the trauma of losing all, and then assumed an active role in rebuilding a new status and identity for the family. He joined the IAS in 1954 and held many unusual assignments including the Vice Chancellorship of the G.B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, which, in gratitude to his bailing it out of a system breakdown, conferred a D.Sc. (Honoris Causa) upon him. He retired in 1988 as Education Secretary, Government of India. Later, he became Chairman, National Book Trust. Also co-authored, with Sulabha Brahme, *Planning for the Millions*.

There were a lot of problems with my schooling, but, in the end, none of them mattered much.

The first memory I have of a school is in Lahore when I was about three years old. I was all spruced up, wearing a round gold-embroidered cap, on the wicket gate, waiting for my guardians to come and pick me up and take me back home.

My next memory is of a school in Okara, later identified as the M.B. High School, where I had gone perhaps for a few days. I remember it because one of my teachers had brought me to grandfather's house and casually reported that I was making good progress. My teacher showed my grandfather how well I had written the Urdu alphabet on my *Takhti*, a wooden board covered with *Gajini mitti* (clay soil).

After this brief stint in this school, my next memory of a school is of DAV Primary school in Gwalmandi, Lahore, near where my family was then residing.

(One thing I remember about this house was that it was in the Bazaar. We lived on the first and second floors. My grandfather occupied the second floor, where he sat and studied and wrote in Urdu. He always had a calligrapher ready, who would prepare print ready manuscripts from the materials my grandfather gave him. I also remember that we periodically got parcels from Hyderabad Deccan. Much later, I learnt that the parcels contained Osmania University (Hyderabad) M.A. Philosophy answer books for evaluation. My grandfather, who did not have any college degree, had been appointed an Examiner by the University, because his self-learnt scholarship was widely acknowledged and respected. After my grandfather had graded the answers, we would tear off the blank pages, which were turned into notebooks.).

Two things are memorable in the context of my school education at this stage. Once I was asked to sing, and I tried to sing, K. L. Sehgal's *Balaam Aye Basso more man mein* (*Editor's note: This song, [available here](#), was released in 1935.*) The other memory is of my trying to get on to a moving Tonga from the front, and being run over by one of the wheels with painful consequences.

Around this time, when I was all of seven years of age, I was admitted to the D.A.V School in *Bhattarian di Gali*. (Bhattaras' lane.) Bhattaras are the offspring of courtly jokesters, who once were maintained by the nobles of courts and other people of substance, to carry stories praising them and otherwise keep them amused. In the 1940s, with the disappearance of 'nobility', the Bhattaras lived by their wits and occasional performance at festivities. As one entered the *Gali*, one immediately became conscious of raucous voices, people quarrelling, off-key singing, and some people playing the

dholak (drum). I got the impression that none of the Bhattaras sent their children to the school. It did not fit into their itinerant life style.

This school was cut off from outdoor life. Within its walls was a quadrangle of paved bricks, shaped like a postage stamp, in which the children and the handful of teachers congregated in the morning to prayers and then dispersed to their classes. During the mid-day break, boys took out their packets of food and ate it in the noisy half hour. There was no tuck shop.

I was not a good student. Yet, because this sort of thing was encouraged at home, I asked any question that came into my head. My class teacher believed that I deliberately obstructed the class. He had this wholly ineffective foot rule, with which he tried to discipline his class. I was punished in his class every day. It was no big deal for me.

One day, I ran into real trouble. During the recess, while wrestling with some boys, I dislocated my arm. I did not report it to anyone and, with some friends, quietly went home, where my mother gave me and my friends some carrot Halwa. Later, my father re-set my shoulder without any fuss.

Next day in school, I was taken to task for going off from school without reporting the dislocation and without permission. So, this time I was punished good and proper with a cane. Naturally, I went home quietly, crying bitter tears. When my grandfather found out, he was extremely angry: why did the school punch me when I had committed no crime? In any case, why should students be beaten up at a time when education was supposed to be imparted without corporeal punishment?

Next morning, my grandfather came to the school and discussed the whole incident with the Headmaster. Though he was very respectful towards my grandfather, he did not budge. He explained that many of the boys were so rowdy and disinterested in studies that they had to be brought in line with a firm hand. I do not know the details of what happened but my grandfather returned home very unhappy.

Next morning when I got ready to go to school, my grandfather asked me if I really wanted to go to school. Who wants to go a school where daily rapping on the knuckles was inevitable? But I kept quiet till my grandfather said that if I did not want to go to school, I needn't go. Then, I said "Hurray" under my breath, threw my satchel and went back to my mother.

This happened when I was seven years old and in class three. During the next five years, I did not join any regular school. The main reason was that my father changed jobs twice, and both the jobs involved change of residence to the outskirts of Lahore City. First, we went to Badaami Bagh, where my father took over as the Manager of Saraswati Industries Ltd. We lived within the campus of the factory manufacturing cold start crude oil engines. Our house was very nice and commodious and had a very nice lawn in front. But, there was no school nearby. So, my elder sister, my younger sister and I lived by ourselves.

We were never bored. There was so much happening all around and besides, if we went upstairs, we could see steel rods being made with a battery of Rolling Machines into which red-hot iron rods were fed to get the rods of the thickness required. The system was very noisy but no one minded the noise after a while.

When my mother delivered my younger sister Pratibha at home, the senior employees of the factory expressed disappointed. They said if a son had been born, they would have got sweets to eat but now like the family, they had to accept God's Will. Immediately, my father sent for a lot of *Laddus* and *Barfie*, and distributed these to everybody, saying that in his house, there was no discrimination between a boy and a girl child. This little girl became a great favourite of the compound and I remember her standing at the edge of the veranda and spitting down outside and exclaiming: "*main wee chittie merie thuk wee chittie*" (Look, I am fair complexioned and so is my spittle.)

Whenever I wanted company, I walked over to the factory, looked at what was going on and playfully joined the workers in whatever they were doing. The moulding shop with its pattern maker's cabin and its core burning chamber together with the bid iron melting furnaces were the closest to our home. It was fun watching the intricate work of making beautiful moulds and readying these for pouring golden red molten caste iron into the moulds and then waiting for the next twenty four hours for digging and extracting the grey coloured shapes to be worked on later into parts of the Oil Engines.

Because it was somewhat risky business, standing near the site of the operations of melting and pouring molten iron into the moulds was extremely fascinating. As the molten iron liquid came out of the furnace and was being put into giant pots, sparks flew all over the place. One of these sparks landed on my left foot and marked it for life. Yes, it was painful but it made me feel like a hero.

I did watch the men working on lathes, sawing and shaping machines, and the heavy press at work. But it was much more fascinating to watch the work in the smithy shop. Here the master smith took a piece of steel block, heated it in a fire kept going at very high temperature by a blower, hammered it into the desired shape initially with a heavy hammer, and then gave it final shape with a smaller hammer. The master blacksmith, Lachhman Singh, was always very kind. He always obliged me by letting me participate with a medium sized hammer and occasionally let me break big blocks of coal into smaller pieces. This gave me a sense of achievement.

This was all very nice until my mother sent for Lachhman Singh and berated him for making me, her only son, sit in the hot sun and break coals! Her anger abated only when Lachhman Singh cried bitter tears of contrition and pleaded that he was only carrying out the orders of my father to let me also learn something about his work. Of course, this merely shifted her sense of outrage towards my father whose pleas that if I was going to manage a factory in later life, these experiences would stand me in good stead, did not propitiate her anger. After this blowout between my parents, my mother got her bags ready to go to her father's house. There she sat on the suitcase, looking like a tigress but we knew that she wouldn't go because my father had only to make some peace-making gestures for her to melt till their next quarrel.

In these quarrels, we children were all with my father. He was a bit of a hero because he had made such a big jump from being a Head Accountant to the Manager of a mechanical workshop. He was bringing in new equipment all the time to remain ahead of the competition, and I was watching this process of transformation with great fascination. Who, in these circumstances had the time or the inclination to look at books, especially when one could also watch the big male duck go squawking after the dispersing trespassers out of the compound!

Once the factory successfully started producing cold start engines, my father's previous boss (with whom he had been working as Head Accountant on three years earlier) requested him to take over the management of a hi-tech workshop he had started, across the Lahore City, on the Amritsar side of Lahore, at Moghalpura. Here again, though our home was a rather small portion of the office, we had access to a phone, which became available for our use after office hours. The factory here was in a huge shed, used for housing old Ditz Engines brought in for repairs. Of course, there was a foundry, an elaborate fitting shop for precision work and a very elaborate turning shop with high quality lathes, a big Shaping machine, two or three Milling Machines and several apparatuses for Gas and Electrical welding. It was war time, and this factory was producing shells and also stirrup pumps for supplies to the defence establishment.

As a kid of around ten years, there were plenty of things to do. One of the pastimes was to clamber up on the *Shahtoot* (mulberry) vine, and *Shisham* trees, when everyone else was looking the other way. Another great attraction in Moghalpura was the Tonga provided to the Manager for commuting to Lahore. Most of the time we made the trip by rail but, occasionally, we got a chance of travelling by Tonga. One of the reasons why riding on this dandy Tonga was a treat was its enormously tall horse and a big foot pedal bell, whose martial tone made people scramble out of the way of the Tonga.

During our stay in Moghalpura, my elder sister Leela and I did start going fitfully to an experimental school on the Nisbet Road, a good five miles from our home. However, we could not continue for long because travelling to and fro, either by a bicycle on which I carried my sister on the carrier or by train, was difficult. So, we lazed at home except for some lessons in Mathematics from Rishi Ram, a very competent ‘turner’ and a matriculate, who commanded no real authority over us. The only thing I remember about these lessons is that quite often, my elder sister Leela upturned the lightweight sofa and then punished me by holding me down on it and finally sitting on me, for some real or imagined misdemeanour.

The next major change in our lives came when my father abruptly quit his job because he felt that his employer had made a disrespectful remark. The employer wanted to stop us from leaving but, being a determined man, my father left the factory premises quietly at night to a house he had hired in Qila Gujar Singh of Lahore. From this place, he tried to start an enterprise of his own. (His erstwhile employer advanced him the money for it). In the meantime, my sisters and I waited for getting settled in some school. By then, I had become twelve, old enough to go back to school and prepare for my matriculation examination in which I could appear only as a regular student of some regular school.

At this stage, I was taken for a pre-entrance examination for the DAV High School, which was the most prestigious non-government school in Lahore. Even today I wonder how I managed to pass the pre-entrance examination. I was happy to get in but soon got into trouble because I was unused to regular classes. However, except for Sanskrit, Physics, Chemistry and *Dharmashiksha*, I did quite well. In the Dharmashiksha class, my teacher, Mastan Chand, used to pull my ears and pinch me really hard for arguing with him. He always started with the recitation of Vedic Mantras in Sanskrit and expected the students to memorise these. Invariably, I protested. Why did he want us to memorise the Mantras in Sanskrit, which did not make sense to me? Why could he not tell us the mantra ~~instead~~ these in Hindi, which we would understand? For him, this argument was dangerously negative and it was against Sanskrit – the best of all languages to boot!

Our Sanskrit teacher was quite good. Without his knowledge, I picked up some of the basics which have stood me in good stead all my life. Of my Sanskrit teacher, I may live to tell a very interesting story about his surprise to see me at the Convocation in 1953 at Ambala.

Anyway, before I could settle down in DAV High School Lahore, another cataclysm interfered with my schooling. My mother, my sisters and I were with our maternal grandparents when we read in the Daily Tribune of August 20, 1942 that both my father and my uncle had been arrested. They had been caught red-handed with the cyclostyling machine and the Stencil (*Editor’s note: These were used to print multiple copies of a document*), preparing pamphlets about the resolutions passed by the All India Congress Committee, on 9 August, 1942, urging all citizens to participate in agitation against the British Rule in the spirit of Do or Die.

The whole family rushed back to Lahore to be present during their trial. During this period, I discovered many things: not to be afraid of the Englishmen or their policemen, the bravery with which Congressmen stood up and owned what they had done, and the respectful attitude of the British Officers towards the freedom fighters. The officers looked at the trials thus: Just as they were doing their duty, by arresting and trying the Indian agitators, the Indians they were trying too were doing what was honourable as Indian Patriots. Anyway, both the brothers were sentenced to three years of Rigorous Imprisonment, after they stated in court that they had committed no crime, whereas the British were committing the crime of denying Indians their birth-right to freedom.

Even as children, my siblings and I felt like heroes. Notwithstanding this, very soon we had to abandon Lahore. The family got divided: two of my sisters and I went to live with our paternal grandparents in Okara, and my mother and my other siblings went to live with my maternal grandparents in Montgomery.

I had to join the M.B. High School in Okara in the ninth standard. I was quite comfortable with this. Most of the teachers, and also the Headmaster, had been my grandfather's students. They were very encouraging and indulgent. They encouraged me to participate in sports. Lo and behold, though a city boy – a sissy, by definition – I stood first in the Long Jump! Surinder Nath was an outstanding History teacher. Our Science teacher too was a gem of a person who generated a lot of enthusiasm for the study of science to understand life around us. I also recall how our Geography teacher used maps, charts and a large globe to help us understand natural phenomena.

I also enjoyed my status in the house. My grandfather had always had his head in the clouds. He had never gone to the market to buy the requirements of the house. So, I became a sort of man of the house. I bought the vegetables and other provisions – and also the fodder for our gentle and generous Sahiwal cow. I tried to learn to milk the cow but did not succeed.

Even though I was quite contented and happy at Okara, my sisters and I had to return to Lahore when my father was released for a few months on parole, after he was injured in a lathi-charge in the jail.

In Lahore, I re-joined the DAV High school, this time in the tenth standard, to be taught by the same teachers. I happily readapted to the environment. However, when the third quarterly examination was held, I failed in Physics, Chemistry and Sanskrit. Following the custom of those days, my name was put up on the notice board as one of the students who would not be allowed to appear in tenth standard of the Board Examination, commonly called the Matriculation (or Matric) exam.

I went in appeal against the order and sought an interview with the Principal, Lala Suraj Bhan. When I appeared before him, he asked me why, in spite of such poor results, I expected to be allowed to appear in the Matriculation exam. When I told him how I had had to leave and go away because of my father's arrest and incarceration for participation in the freedom struggle, he told me that I should forgive the school for its lapse of memory. He said that not only would I be allowed to take the exam, but also I would be treated as a school project, to be given special tuition and enabled to make up for lost time. Later, Lala Suraj Bhan became a very distinguished Vice Chancellor of Punjab University. When I told him that but for him, I would never have got the chance to become the Education Secretary for India, he had a hearty laugh and told me that here was one Education Secretary, he could claim owed his position because of his initial contact with him.

I am happy to conclude this story with the fact that I passed the Matriculation exam in the Second Division, getting 10 marks short of the First Division. (*Editor's note: Getting a First Division was considered a very high level of achievement at that time, and a 'high Second Division', which the author got, was a high level of achievement.*)

Epilogue

Looking back, I feel that what I missed by not going to schools for many years was not very important. During the days when I was supposedly wasting my time running around, and going in and out of the workshops, I was learning not only by observing others at work but also through my own casual participation. More importantly, I acquired respect for physical work, understood the relationship between various steps in manufacturing processes, and realized the value of non-academic activities. I am also disposed to think that my grandfather and my father had a well-considered plan to give me holistic education, which seemed to have been influenced by the examples of Rabindranath Tagore, and, of course, their own experiences.

My grandfather was a very learned man who educated himself, according to what were the needs of his situation. My father too had failed in his Intermediate examination (*Editor's note: The Intermediate examination was for a college degree at a level lower than a Bachelor's degree.*). Nevertheless, starting as a self-taught journeyman electrician, he went on to become a very competent accountant and then managed to steer a loss making factory, after dismissing the graduate engineer, into a profitable concern in a matter of two years.

Both these gentlemen were convinced that rather than absorbing what the educational institutions offered, it was better to generate an interest in learning and at the same time use everyday life as a sort of laboratory to look for solutions from wherever these were available. My grandfather always had a large library of books; he loved to sit there and let me ask whatever questions were bothering me at a given time. What was even more remarkable was that he readily admitted when he did not know the answer and always promised to look for the answers for my benefit.

Unlike my grandfather, my father was a man of action. However, he was rather shy of displaying his vast repertoire of knowledge. He was a tough man and was determined to make me a toughie. I recall that when the organiser of a Winter Camp brought me home after I nearly drowned, he only asked him that since I had been rescued and was alright, was there any point in bringing me back. So, without much ado, he sent me back to the camp with a sheepish rescuer who had brought me back.

He always insisted that learning on the job was more practical than bookish learning because someone wanted to teach me something according to his plans. He was convinced that most of the schools had some curriculum of their own making and were busy pouring their knowledge down the pupils' unresponsive throats. If he were a rich man, he would have got tutors who would be sitting and waiting for me to pop my questions or get stuck so that they would participatively help me with solutions.

I have managed to get out of many tricky situations by learning on the job but somehow, except for arithmetic, mathematics has evaded me because it seems to require a very systematic structuring of learning which nobody helped me acquire. I am deeply conscious my failure in this matter. If there is another birth after death, and I am born again (not as a toad but as a human with opportunities of learning and study), I hope I will have the opportunity of becoming a mathematician!

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