

Weekly Zoroastrian Scripture Extract # 259: A Grateful Graduate Reminisces the Wonderful MFCAI - and Oliver Goldsmith's poem: The Village Schoolmaster!

Hello all Tele Class friends:

Standing at the open door of the slowly moving B.B.&C.I.R. train from Ahmedabad to Bombay, a distinguished Mobed in flowing beard beckoned a Cooley to carry an old metal trunk and alighted on the Andheri station platform with his tender age son. The three slowly walked up the hill across the street to that magnificent architectural Boarding School building.

The mango trees on the vast grounds were heavy with the fruits. The Mobed was ushered in the Acting Principal Faramroze P. Patel's office. After exchanging greetings, the son's name was duly registered with his entire details of birth date, grandfather's name, the Mobed "Panth" (family) etc. in Patel Saheb's one and only complete School register as the 70th student this year in the School and 288th overall from the beginning!

Then he strikes the metal plunger bell and orders the assistant Keshoo to bring the first standard teacher. And here comes a Gujarati gentleman, in his Dhoti with a wonderful smile, the most respected, loving, wise, the one and only teacher Kantilal M. Upadhyay!

Kantilal Saheb escorted the young recruit to the last class room, informing on the way that he has taught all his 4 brothers before him and they were very good students! We entered the class room with all the students standing up for the teacher and Kantilal Saheb introduces me as Soli Pirojshah Kawasji Dastur from Tarapur and requests me to occupy the only empty desk left! After a few minutes, Kantilal Saheb had to leave the room and he brings his "Dhoko" (club) to me and says: "Sorabji! You are the monitor of this class and take care of it in my absence!"

Thus started my initiation to this magnificent Boarding School, The Muncherji Framji Cama Athornan Institute (MFCAI)! The fateful day was June 20th, 1945 and it started the most formative 9 years of my life until I passed the S.S.C. (High School) exam in March 1954! And all that I am today is due to the wonderful training we all had in this Institute, under the tutelage of those unbelievably dedicated Teacher Sahebs like Kantilal, Kaikhushroo S. Daruwalla, Rustomji S. Sanjana, Mobed Tehmurasp P. Sidhwa, Acting Principal Faramroze P. Patel, Dr. Peshotan K. Anklesaria, Rana, Khambata, and many others! And as a monitor of this unusual class, I was fortunate to have as my class mates, nay as my brothers, in our last years, Ervads Dr. Kersey Antia, Dastoorji Feroze (Faramroze) Kotwal, Noshir Bharucha, Late Gustad Andhyarujina, and many others!

Alas, gone are the glory days of this Institute with 70+ students and 12+ teachers with teeming activities around the clock from the peel of 100 bells at 5:20 AM to "Khudaavind Khaavind Parvardegaar" Monajat at 9:00 PM before going to sleep!

The Village Schoolmaster

Whenever I think about our wonderful MFCAI, I always remember that beautiful poem The Village Schoolmaster by Oliver Goldsmith from his book: The Deserted Village. Besides bringing the memories of MFCAI, the poem also brings back the memories of my small Tarapur school where we had our first 2 – 3 years of education. I am sure it will bring back similar memories of your school to many of you.

This poem brings back the vivid memories of what the school was in its glory days when I was a student and what has become of the school today: a magnificent structure with no student and one Principal (?!), unkept, not maintained and left empty to itself! ([please see the attached photos of the school in 2004](#)).

Whenever I visited the school in recent years, it brought tears to my eyes to see the deplorable condition it is left in. Changing the last two lines of Goldsmith for MFCAI:

“But past is all (its) fame. The very spot
Where many a time (it) triumph’d is forgot.”

So, here is that beautiful poem by Oliver Goldsmith:

The Village Schoolmaster

by [Oliver Goldsmith](#) (1728 – 1774) (read by Tom O'Bedlam)

([please hear the video youtube file of this beautiful poem at:](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsVH954vmZ8>)

Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way,
With blossomed furze unprofitably gay,
There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,
The village master taught his little school;
A man severe he was, and stern to view;
I knew him well, and every truant knew:
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace
The day's disasters in his morning face;
Full well they laughed, with counterfeited glee,
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;
Full well the busy whisper, circling round,
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned;
Yet he was kind, or, if severe in aught,
The love he bore to learning was in fault.

The village all declared how much he knew —
'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too;
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
And e'en the story ran that he could gauge;
In arguing, too, the parson owned his skill,

For, e'en though vanquished, he could argue still,
While words of learned length and thundering sound
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around;
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew
That one small head could carry all he knew.

**But past is all his fame. The very spot
Where many a time he triumph'd is forgot.**

SPD Explanation:

1. The school has meant to all of us a steady influence throughout our lives, in thick and thin, and we owe everything that all of us have accomplished to that great philanthropist and far-sighted Parsi Zarathushtri, late Meherwanji Mancherji Cama who built this Boarding School for the uplifting of the Athornan families! Many of us school graduates still remember late Meherwanji and his father Mancherji in all our Afringan Deebache even up to this day, a tribute of our gratitude to them!

Addendum

2. The alumni of the Institute form the bedrock of priests on this Continent, to name a few: among them are Ervads Kersey Antia, Kersey Bhedwar, Noshir Karanjia, Parvez Patel, Adi Unwalla, Peshotan Unwalla, Behram Panthaki, Dara Sinor, Kobad Jamshed (Andhyarujina), Tehmtan Mirza, Jimmy Panthaky, and Soli Dastur

3. This institute has produced three Dasturs: Dastur Navroze Minocher Homji, Dastur Feroze Kotwal, and Dastur Peshotan Hormazdyar Mirza. Dastur Minocher Homji and Ervad Manecksha K Panthaki, the father of Ervad Behram and Ervad Gustad Panthaki were the first batch of 36 students enrolled in the institute in 1923 and Ervad Manecksha was the first Navar from this Institute on 2/11/1928.

4. In addition there were two Mobeds from Iran, Dastur Firooz Azargoshasp and Dastur Rostam Shahzadi, who also received their training at the Cama Athornan Institute. They were sponsored by the Yazd Anjoman e Moobedan and the Bombay Irani Anjuman, under the leadership of the late Dinshaw Irani.

5. Now the MFCAl Ex-Students are trying to revive this Institute and they deserve all the help from our community worldwide! They used to hold 2 weeks Refresher Course on Religious Prayers, Rituals, History, etc. with Guest Speakers coming to speak. However, the Principal and the Trustees stopped

them to hold these annual course for some flimsy reasons and the MFCAl is not involved in any Zarathushtri Programs.

6. Now they are holding these courses at Cama Baug. We wish them all success, and help!

7. And finally, I leave you all with that haunting echo in my ears of the last lines of our nightly “Khudaavind Khaavind Parvardegaar” Monajat: “Maneh Paasbaani maa taari suwaad, Bhalaa kaamo karvaa savaareh uthaad!” (Let me sleep under your watchful eye and wake me up in the morning to do good deeds (again)!”

May the Flame of Fellowship, Love, Charity, and Respect for all burn ever eternal in our hearts so we can do HIS work with humility, diligence, and eternal enthusiasm!

In HIS Service 24/7!

Atha Jamyat, Yatha Aafrinaamahi! (May it be so as we wish!)

Love and Tandoorasti, Soli