Memoirs of S.V. Venkatachalam (Venks Sir)

Memoirs of Venks sir

1.	Teaching in schools, the last career option:	1
2.	Teaching children is just not a 'job' to be finished	1
3.	Why did i decide to take up 'teaching' as a career?	2
4.	Attempt to get teacher's training	3
5.	At the teachers' training college	4
6.	What next after b.ed:	5
7.	Response for my application:	6
8.	Called for interview:	7
9.	The interview and my first job:	8
10.	Far from the madding crowds:	9
11.	The foundation for new education	10
12.	Onerous responsibility:	11
13.	Learning through observation:	12
14.	School, nay "home"	14
15.	The old dining hall:	16
16.	House activities:	18
17.	Rishi Valley Scout Troop:	20
18.	IPSC Adventure Course At Ajmer:	22
19.	Adventure course at Khadakvasla.	24
20.	Organizing a Hiking Club	25
21.	Abundance of spots for exploration:	27
22.	Preparation and precautions	30
23.	Part 1: Signals from the Signal Rock to Rishi Valley at night	31
24.	Part 2: How we got lost in a jungle at night	33
25.	Memorable events	34
26.	M.S. Visits RV	36
27.	Ahsan	38
28.	Ashok on Lion Rock	41
29.	Blackie – a real darling!	42
30.	A strange welcome for the Princi:	44
31.	Recovery of the lost Bugle	46
32.	Escorting students during vacations	47
33.	Hiking club – walking expedition to Tirumala	48
34.	Ballabh gets into trouble during an excursion	50
35.	Kishore Namjoshi	51
36.	Singing with KrishnajI	52
37.	Padma Akka	54
38.	Sathi Bai Akka	56
39.	Cricket Coaching, International Folk Dancing And Assemblies At RVS	58

1. Teaching in schools, the last career option:

Recent reports in newspapers mentioned that choosing to take teachers' education courses happens to be the last option. Everyone wants to be a doctor, an engineer, an IT professional, a pilot or a businessman. Hardly anyone chooses to take up B.Ed., studies as an option.

I remember an occasion when a member of the KFI Trust was talking to a group of students in RV during the 60's and asking them what they would like to become when they grow up. Most of the students mentioned the options stated above, but no one wanted to be a teacher. Surprisingly, Arun Joshi, (brother of Vinayak Joshi of Thane) stood up and said with a smile, 'I would like to become a clown'. All of us had a hearty laugh.

2. Teaching children is just not a 'job' to be finished

The teaching culture in many of the schools run by state governments and municipalities is the demotivating factor for aspirants who wish to pursue teaching career. Most teachers in such schools happen to be just pass-outs. They have far too many students to teach in a classroom they do not have the talent to get the children interested in what they wish to teach nor the strategy to be adopted.

Teaching is not about dumping information from text books into the vacant heads of children. A teacher is a facilitator for the children to discover facts and is just a co-learner. Children are curious by nature to find out the 'why' and 'how' of their observations in nature and in life situations. Their curiosity comes in handy for the teacher to encourage them to ask questions. There should be no attempt to stifle them. More than just a statement of facts, a story, a demonstration, a simple experi-ment, relating a relevant story, recitation of a poem, a song or a video picture would go a long way in helping children enjoy learning. An affectionate and a happy teacher who will take them outdoors to observe the facts of nature would certainly be one whom children would love learn from.

In the late 70's, I happened to take charge of a school (in Tamil Nadu) and happened to appoint a teacher on probation to teach the junior classes, arithmetic. I used to take rounds in the corridors to see what was happening in class-rooms. I noticed this teacher keeping his head on the table and happily enjoying a nap. The children had been asked to solve some problems in arithmetic.

I walked into the classroom quietly and took away the spectacles of the teacher and told the children to carryon their work. When the period-over bell rang, he must have found out from the children that the principal had walked in and taken away his spectacles. He walked into my office with his head bent in shame. Needless to say, his services were not required from then on.

3. Why did I decide to take up 'teaching' as a career?

When my brothers and I were young, our mother had the good practice of happily distributing whenever she prepared - yummy items - to all of us and finally taking the last bit for herself. I used to feel very much impressed by this nature of hers and as I grew up, I felt that I should likewise share with my friends any good training I was able to pick up.

During my college days, I got a feeling that I was being influenced to believe that the right course of studies would be to jump onto the band wagon of studying for Inter B.A./ B.Sc., B.E., I had no interest in this pursuit and would have rather chosen to do M.A., in Sanskrit, but unfortunately, it was not permitted by my parents.

During my younger days, I had several opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities apart from those available in the schools. The training I received from them and the several inputs I could gather from my association with them, gradually built in me robust confidence in my ability to chalk out my own plans for a career. Here are a few opportunities that greatly impacted me:-

(a) Opportunities I had in the elementary school to lead the rest in the school assembly-singing and cultural activities as well as amateur dramatics while in college.

(b) Intensive training I received in the Scout Movement, as a scout in an open unit, the Chamundi Scout Group in Bangalore, where I had opportunities for leading the scouts, and the encouragement I received from veteran scout masters who were my role models for getting trained to lead the group, training in first-aid and stretcher drill, signalling, camping, trekking, and participation in social service camps and in folk dancing. I received recognition from the State Headquarters and an award for excellence as well as a certificate for completing the 'Wood Badge' course successfully.

(c) Association with institutions like the Ramakrishna Math partici-pating in their devotional singing, a Gandhian library where we had opportunities to interact with great men of Kannada literature.

(d) 2 years of rigorous training in the college N.C.C. unit in marching and field craft. I was given the rank of Company Sergeant Major for leading 300 cadets successfully.

(e) Study of Sanskrit from the middle school stage to the B.Sc., level and also in a Veda Paatashaala studying literature and grammar.

In the next write-up, I shall narrate how all these helped me to take a decision regarding my choice of a career.

4. Attempt to get teacher's training

In 1953 I secured my B.Sc., degree in Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics from The Central College, Bangalore. I went to meet the Officer Commanding of N.C.C. to collect my certificate. The Officer congratulated me on my excellent performance during the 2 yr training and asked me whether I liked to join the Indian army and if so he would see that I got a direct commission to join the armed forces. I thanked him for his interest in my career plans and told him that I had decided to take up teaching and if I happen to fail, I would consider joining the army. Such a situation never arose.

The next step was to choose a suitable school for effective teaching wherein the students could benefit from my learning experiences. There was no point joining Government or Corporation schools. since I disliked the culture in them It had to be a privately-managed school with junior and secondary divisions since that would the right age-group of students who could benefit from the learning situations both in the classrooms and on the play fields. I came to learn that in order to be a teacher of the secondary classes, one had to be a trained graduate, a B.Sc., B. Ed., I sought my father's permission to take up teachers' training. He was not happy with my choosing a teacher's career. His objection was that teachers were not being paid a decent salary. During the 50's and 60's, they would just receive Rs 80 or 90 per month. I said I was not bothered about the salary part but would love to teach children. So it came to a point when I had to do something to achieve my objective.

I managed somehow to get an application form for admission to the Govt. Teachers' Training College, Mysore, as that was the only recognized college for getting a B.Ed., degree. Till 1953, the course was named as B.T. and from 1954 the name was changed to B.Ed., I came to learn that the college would admit only working teachers of Govt. and Corporation schools, recommended by their institutions. I had to find some way of securing admission. I requested my mentor, Sri. S Krishna Sarma, a highly respected writer and well known in literary and educational circles to give me a letter of recommendation for admission to the Principal of the college, Dr. A.c. Deve Gowda. Fortunately for me, I received a call for an interview. I approached my parents and elder brothers to allow me to appear for the interview. They relented and I appeared for the interview. The Principal and the professors told me that private candidates were not admitted to join the college. I pleaded with them and said that I will perform well and even better than the deputed candidates. I GOT SELECTED!! I went back to receive blessings from my parents. My brothers were ready to assist me in meeting the expenses for stay in a hostel and for boarding. My joy knew no bounds. I joined the college in June, 1953.

5. At the Teachers' Training College

The Government Teachers' Training College in Mysore is well-known for its quality of instruction. I joined the college in June, 1953. There were eminent professors of education on the staff. I stayed in a small hostel- privately managed - and occupied by 30 students of the Govt. Medical College, Mysore. I happened to be the lone hosteler from the teacher's college. My hostel mates were friendly and regarded me as their 'guru', because being a teacher, I was respected by them.

I liked the instruction in the classes, both theory and practice. The subjects studied were Principles of Education, Educational Psychology, Comparative Study of Educational Systems, School Organization & Management, General Methods of Teaching and Special Methods of Teaching English & General Science. The practice teaching classes were observed by one of the professors. The professors would always say, ' If the student has not learnt, then the teacher has not taught'.

After the college hours, I used to take walks to the Maharaja's Palace or visit the Jaganmohan Palace containing a vast collection of great art works but on most days I used to work on a project expected to be submitted before the final examination. On days when I was free, I used to engage in conversation with the hostel mates. Once it so happened that when one of them asked whether I knew palmistry, inadvertently I said that I had tried to study palmistry. It resulted in a sensation among the hostelers, everyone wanting his palm to be read and told about what future had in store for him. In the evenings 3 or 4 of them would sit near me and ask me to read their palm. Actually, I had learnt to study only some major lines but I was not sure of the correctness of what they meant. In fact, there was one person who approached me with a plate with a coconut, betel leaves and a fruit!! I had become 'famous'!

I happened to read in a Kannada newspaper in the hostel common room, that there was going to be a competition in singing Kannada folk songs at the auditorium of the Maharaja's College. I sent intimation about my participation as a representative of the Teachers' College. When I went there on the day of competition, I noticed that the auditorium was packed with about 1500 students of the college waiting to cheer or hoot. When my turn came, the announcer said that I was from the Teachers' College. I was wearing a kurta and a dhoti in the "PACHAKACHCHAM" style. There were loud shouts and hoots saying, 'Oh, here is a school master'. I did not get flustered and remained silent with a smile on my face. Seeing how calm I was, they all became silent, with some of the saying, ' Let us allow him to sing'. I countered them by asking' Is the hooting over?' They all remained quiet. I started singing my favourite folk song and at the end of it there were loud cheers and shouts of 'once more'! I am not sure if they were bowled over by my singing or it was the effect of the song. In the end I was chosen for the "Best Singer" Award. AHEM!!

6. What next after B.Ed:

The examination for B.Ed., degree was over in March, 1954. The results were out by mid-April. I passed with fairly good marks. My parents and brothers congratulated me and appreciated my determination to become a trained teacher. The next step was to search for a suitable school where I could happily pursue my career in teaching.

I had an aversion for seeking a teacher's post in schools run by the Government and the Corporation. I had heard a great deal of criticism about the way they functioned:-

* They had student strength of 70/80 in each section of the classes. This makes effective learning not possible.

*This rules out any possibility of giving individual attention.

* The stress is always more on 'what to think' than 'how to think'. This leads to rote-learning, because questions in the examination papers are always based on what is printed in the text-books and the students reproduce the answer verbatim.

* Students who do not benefit by the classroom teaching resort to depending on guide-books from the market or attend tuition classes in the evenings.

* Inability of the headmasters to take strict action on erring teachers, because of interference from the higher authorities who endorse just a warning.

* Rampant communal approach with regard to appointments, promotions and also vindictive transfers due to personal likes and dislikes.

I happened to attend an interview for a teacher's post in a privately-run unaided school but I decided not to pursue the offer because of the lack of proper infrastructure and playgrounds And for some reason or other, I had never attempted to get to know anything about boarding schools and public schools.

A few days later, I had gone to the Central College to collect a certificate of my date of birth and a testimonial from the Principal. I was cycling back home when my college classmate A.V. Srikantthiah stopped me for a chat. He asked me what I had been doing after graduation. I told him that I had chosen to pursue teaching career and had got myself trained at the Govt. Teachers' College, Mysore. He enquired whether I had sent an application for the post of a teacher of General Science to the RISHI VALLEY SCHOOL in Chittoor Dt. of Andhra Pradesh. I told him that I was not aware of this advertisement. He insisted that I should see the advertisement that appeared in 'The Hindu' newspaper a few days before. I lost no time in getting back home an d took my father's help in tracing the newspaper. He was given to preserving the newspapers systematically and keep them safely date-wise.

The name, RISHI VALLEY somehow struck a chord in my heart, perhaps because of the great respect I have for our Indian Cultural Heritage and having studied deeply Sanskrit literature. I lost no time in mailing an application to the school for the post of a teacher of general science along with my curriculum vitae. I was hoping for a favourable response by the end of May. In the meanwhile, I happened to join the family in going to Coimbatore for the marriage celebration of my elder brother in the first week of May and returned to Bangalore after 10 days.

7. Response for my application:

While I had to wait anxiously to get a reply from the Rishi Valley School, I happened to try and find out the exact location of the town nearby, Madanapalle in Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh. I referred to a large map of South India and was able to spot it in Chittoor Dt., close to the border of Andhra and Karnataka. The road map showed the route as from Bangaore via Kolar, Srinivasapura, Rayalpad to Madanapalle. The distance was found to be roughly 80-85 miles North East of Bangalore. An offer of a teacher's post would mean my having to move out of Bangalore, away from the family. I was prepared for this.

I returned from Coimbatore by 12th May. A letter was received on 14th May acknowledging the receipt of my application. The signatory's name was F.G.Pearce. He had stated that he was away in North India on a holiday and that my application was received after all the advertised posts had already been filled. It is obvious that I was thoroughly disappointed.

However, in the letter there was something which was consoling. It mentioned that my qualifications, both academic and extra-curricular were good and fitted the requirements of the school almost exactly and the school management wished to make further acquaintance with a view to consider the possibility of offering a post if a vacancy happened to occur. Mr. Pearce had mentioned that he would be returning to Rishi Valley on 6th June and the school would be reopening on 16th June. He suggested that if I wished to visit the school, I could do so at my own expense after the reopening of the school.

Two points mentioned in the letter drew my attention. One was the name' F.G. Pearce'. It struck me that this person must be the same as the author of two text-books in History that we had for the High school classes in Bangalore,- ' Footprints on The Sands of Time' and 'The Struggle of Modern Man'. I had enjoyed studying these text-books as they were written extremely well and those prescribed by the Education Department were no comparison at all. I felt delighted and wished to meet him at the earliest. The other information in the letter was Mr. Pearce appreciated my experience in scouting and also being a 'Wood Badge' holder. He had mentioned that he himself was the Chief Scout Commissioner in Gwalior and Ceylon. I eagerly wanted to meet this person.

8. Called for interview:

I received yet another letter from the Rishi Valley School calling me to appear for an interview on 17th June and giving directions for reaching the school. I was asked to travel by the morning bus from Bangalore to Madanapalle to reach by noon and that I will be picked up and taken to Rishi Valley by the school transport. The letter had another happy news for me. The post of a teacher for General Science was still vacant, since the person from Delhi who had been offered the post earlier was unable to report for work due to health problems. This gave me some hope of being offered the post. While packing my bags, I remembered to take all my certificates and testimonials, both curricular as well as extra-curricular and waited for the morning of 17th June, with fingers crossed.

At the Kalasipalyam moffusil bus station in Bangalore I spotted the bus to Madanapalle. To my utter disappointment, the conductor refused to let me in, since the bus was already overcrowded. Begging him to let me in did not have any effect on him. However he was kind enough to inform me that another bus, leaving 30 minutes later, would take me to Kolar by noon and from there another connecting bus would take me to Madanapalle to reach by the evening. I had no other option but to heed his advice.

I managed to reach MPL by the evening. On making enquiries with the bystanders I found a dark green Austin van parked by the roadside.

A person wearing a white shirt and khaki shorts was getting bags of vegetables and provisions loaded into the van.The gentleman, who introduced himself as Mr. Krishna Naik from Rishi Valley, asked me if I were Venkatachalam. On giving my identity, he asked me to hop into the van. On the way he complained that he was waiting for me for a long time in the afternoon till 1 p.m. As I did not turn up, he went back to the school. The principal presumed that I might have had problem in getting the correct bus and asked Mr. Naik to go to MPL again in the evening. I explained to him the problem I had.

I was taken by the connecting road to RVS, a distance of about 10 miles. By the time we reached the mouth of the valley, it was dusk time and darkness was slowly enveloping the hills all around. Driving along the rugged road I was taken to the main school building where some documentary films were being screened for the students, through the muffled light I could see a person walking briskly along the corridor. He approached me very cordially and asked me if I were Venkatachalam. I was simply bowled over by his friendliness and approachability. He was none other than the 'CHIEF SCOUT COMMISSIONER' - Mr. F.G.PEARCE'

9. The interview and my first job:

After being greeted by the Principal, I was asked to rest in one of the hostel rooms after dinner. Actually, Mr. Pearce had scheduled the interview for the afternoon of 17th June. Since I was unable to reach the school in time, it was postponed to the morning of 18th.

Next morning, I was asked to meet the Head Master, Sri. B.Rajagopalan. He was one of the senior members of staff in the erstwhile Tamil - Telugu medium school in Rishi Valley known as 'The School Rishi Valley' (1930's to 40's), stewarded by Sri. G.V. Subba Rao, who took the school founded by the 'RISHI VALLEY TRUST' to glorious heights. Sri BR was highly experienced in teaching Mathematics and had stayed over when 'The School Rishi Valley' was replaced by RVS in 1950. That was when Mr. Pearce was invited to take charge of the new English medium school. Sri. BR wanted to know my academic background and wanted to have a look at my certificates. Though he appeared to be tough, he was really a kind person. Through his questioning, he was soon able to conclude that I had a passion to be a teacher and wished me well.

Later, I was asked to meet Mr. Pearce in his office (a room next to the Principal's quarters). was asked to tell him all about my experience at the Teachers' Training College and the training I had in the Scout Movement. He appreciated my securing the 'Wood Badge' and the "Medal of Merit" that I had received for my services to the cause of Scouting in Bangalore. Later in the morning I was asked to meet Mrs. Anasuya Pearce and Smt. Malathi Naoroji who were discussing a plan to have an open air class behind the main school building, and across the road under the tree. Along with them were present both sons of the Pearces, Vijay and Jai. They asked me for ideas and to my surprise what I said met their approval. They wanted to know all about my achievements apart from academics. I told them that I was good in swimming and diving, life- saving exercises and was also a goal keeper in water polo. Besides, I appraised them about my experience in the National Cadet Corps and Scouting. They were all highly pleased and offered their best wishes for a successful career in teaching.

Later in the day Mr. Pearce asked me to meet him. He offered me the post of a teacher in the school and asked me to get back to Bangalore, discuss the proposal with my parents and write to the school accepting the offer. He would then write to me about the date of joining. Mr. Pearce was keen on my helping him to start a scout unit in Rishi Valley. I assured him that I will be delighted to do so. I returned to Bangalore and on 22nd June I received the letter of appointment as an assistant master in RVS on probation for the academic year June 1954 to March 1955 for an inclusive salary of Rs. 115/- per month!

I arrived in Rishi Valley on Saturday, 27th June, ready for work from the next day. I felt extremely grateful to my friend Srikantthaiah for suggesting that I send an application to RVS. Had it not been for him, perhaps I would have been looking for a job in Bangalore! It was providential that I happened to meet him.

10. Far from the madding crowds:

I joined the teaching staff of the Rishi Valley School at the age of 23 and I was perhaps the youngest member. On the morning of Sunday 28, I started my career. I had kept myself free in the morning to get a look at the school campus. Seeing me take a stroll in the garden, Mr. Pearce, who was on his usual rounds, walked towards me and offered to take me to the school and hostels. He asked me if I would mind his addressing me as VENKS instead of as Venkatachalam, since he found the latter, rather mouthful. I replied that it would be perfectly all right. To this day all my students refer to me as Venks.

I was shown round the main school building, the school office and then taken to the hostels which were called HOUSES, the RED & GREEN, the WHITE & BLUE, the GOLDEN & SILVER and senior boys' houses (later on named as Neem A and B). Each house had a House Mother or a House Master who lived in a double-room accommodation in the front portion of the house, opening into a corridor to help them give proper care and attention to the wards. He then introduced me to one Sri.V.R.Shasthry, the House Master of the Golden House to show me around the dining hall, the guesthouse, the school estate and dairy farm. He was one of the senior teachers of the 'earlier school', the 'School Rishi Valley' He had stayed on to help the school in looking after older boys. I was taken to estate where there were vast fields of paddy, wheat, sugar cane and jowar and also orchards of mango and coconut trees. In the dairy farm I saw about 30 healthy cows to provide good milk to the kitchen. I learnt that one of the cows, Saavithri by name, would yield milk two times a day, giving in all 24 litres. My attention was drawn to the mighty and ancient BANYAN TREE. It had several tall aerial roots supported by stone slab pockets to help the tree expand. It stood majestically, rising to a height of over 100 feet towards the sky.

The senior boys had organized a cricket match between the staff and students later in the morning. It was to be played in the open space in front of the Principal's quarters (there was no ground available for cricket). The boys wanted me to join the staff team. I told them that I was not all that good in batting but could bowl fairly well. (I was a fast bowler in my college team). The students won the toss and chose to bat first. During the course of their innings, I was asked to try and bowl. Normally it was my practice to take about 30 steps before releasing the ball. In the very first over, one of the deliveries shattered the stumps of the opening batsman. Those who came to bat later were rather jittery. When it was the turn of the staff to bat, I shot one of the deliveries straight into the quadrangle inside the Principal's quarters for a six. There was great jubilation in the spectators. I had become a hero instantly!

In the evening, I took a quiet walk all by myself down the approach road to the school, till the 'sign post', which is about half way to the mouth of the valley. I walked up the 'Sliding Rock' nearby to take a view of the entire valley. The sun had just then set and there was a red glow behind the three hills in the west. I looked all round and saw the landscape right upto the hills in the west. I had a grand view of the majestic 'Cave Rock' facing the school campus, which appeared to be located in an 'alcove-like' place in the valley and situated at a greater height than the rest of the valley. It was a magnificent sight and I fell in love with the place.

11. The Foundation For New Education

During an informal discussion with the Principal, I was given to understand that the Rishi Valley School was being run by **The Foundation For New Education** (FNE) and it is a full-fledged member of the Indian Public Schools' Conference (IPSC). The school prepared students for taking the Senior Cambridge examination for the '0' Level Indian School Certificate (ISC), which is approved by the Cambridge University, U.K. (recognized as equivalent to Higher Secondary or Pre- University). Students who found the ISC syllabus rather tough, were allowed to prepare for the Matriculation examination of the Andhra University (Andhra Matric), at Tirupati. English was the medium of instruction. Hindi, Telugu and Sanskrit were taught as second languages. The other subjects taught were Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Health Science, History and Geography.

Students were admitted between the ages of 6 and 9. Older students were also admitted to the higher classes depending on the number of vacancies. Students normally studied for 3 years in the children's classes (C1, C2, C3), and then for 3 years in the junior classes (H, J2, J3). Later for 4 years they went to the senior school (Sl, S2, S3, S4) before taking the Senior Cambridge/ Matriculation examination.

The school had two terms from the beginning of January to March and June to December. Admissions are made at the beginning of both the terms. When I joined the school there were only 84 students in the School (by the next June the strength was 150). There were about 22 well-qualified members of staff. The student-teacher ratio was kept small. Many students came from Bombay, Andhra and Madras, a smaller number from Bangalore and Calcutta and fewer from Delhi and Kerala

Some distinctive Features:

The relationship between the teacher and the students was informal and discipline was not enforced from outside. Order in the classrooms is maintained by helping The relationship between the teacher and the students was informal and discipline was not enforced from outside. Order in the classrooms is maintained by helping the students to think intelligently for themselves. Children were encouraged to do a thing for its own sake rather than in a spirit of competition. In the classrooms, knowledge was imparted by evoking a sense of learning in the student rather than by supplying information. Discussions of various kinds were frequently held and the child was helped to develop an enquiring mind rather than merely acquire knowledge.

Teaching work assigned to me:

I was assigned teaching of Physics, Chemistry and Arithmetic to the Senior Cambridge and Matriculation classes; General Science for the senior and junior sections and Arithmetic for the juniors. There were only 2 students in the Senior Cambridge class, 7 in the Matric and not more than 10/15 in the other classes. It was a convenient number to handle and it gave an opportunity to give individual attention. The students were inquisitive and would ask questions without hesitation and get their doubts cleared. There were evening study periods for the higher classes before dinner. With large windows without grills/ steel bars and kept wide open in the classrooms, there were no distractions from outside. It was like sitting in an open-air class.

12. Onerous responsibility:

I had never imagined that I would land up in a residential school, instead of being a teacher in a Bangalore City school, having to teach in classrooms bursting with students; without proper facilities or encouragement for arts and crafts and also games and sports. Working as a member of staff in Rishi Valley School was a great opportunity that came my way and to have a chance to be able to be involved in what I had always considered meaningful education.

The Senior Cambridge class I was asked to handle was the very first batch of students to take the final examination in December 1954 in Bangalore and the Matriculation class was the first batch to take the school final examination in March 1955 in Tirupati. I was just beginning my teaching career and was expected to prepare them for this major event with no experience of handling subjects like Physics and Chemistry at that level. For the other subjects there were teachers who had sufficient teaching experience. But for me it was a challenging assignment. I could not afford to do a shoddy job, I had to work hard and deliver.

The training I had at the Teachers' College in Mysore really helped me. I had been trained to prepare my 'notes of lessons' for the 'demonstration classes' observed by the professors. Mr. Pearce was very much aware of my anxiety. He was kind enough to call me to his office and asked me to observe him prepare notes of lessons for Geography, which he handled for the senior classes. He used to do this exercise in spite his sound knowledge of the subject and years of teaching experience. There was no need, but he insisted on being meticulous. What a thorough teacher! He asked me to sit in his Geography classes and observe the way he handled the class. What more could I ask for? I was fortunate to be groomed like this.

Welcome to the new teacher:

I had a shock in my very first teaching class. I was to teach General Science to the IX grade. When I was about to begin, one of the students got up and said, ' Sir, none of us likes science'. This was an unexpected welcome! Though I admit that I was surprised, I was not one to be brow-beaten. I picked up courage and said, ' For your information, I do not like science myself'. Don't you think that instead of a lesson in General Science, we should all go out to the school estate, pluck some sour limes, prepare lime juice and have a party?' They were jubilant at my response and happily followed me to the school estate. After collecting a good quantity of limes, we moved to the science laboratory. Before leaving for the estate I had spoken to my lab assistant and told him to keep enough bottles washed and ready. We got the limes squeezed and filled the bottles. The lab assistant dropped a pinch of Baking Soda (Sodium bicarbonate) into each bottle and closed them with corks. When the assistant shook the bottles, the students could see the fizz in them. All of them enjoyed drinking limejuice. We got back to the classroom. I told them that this would be what I consider a lesson in Science. They were surprised and asked,' How come?' I explained to them the chemical reaction involved in the preparation of fizzy drinks. The class chorused that if this is science, they would like to learn it this way. I passed my first test and had set a firm foot into my teaching career!

13. Learning through observation:

Instead of the teacher doing all the talking in the classroom, it is possible to let the students in the secondary classes observe and draw inferences on their own. Subjects, like Science, Physics, Chemistry and Biology provide enough opportunities for the teacher to conduct demonstrations, experiments and also show charts and specimens enabling students to observe them and draw their inferences. In my experience, it is better to show experiments and help them with observation and let the students learn the theory as part of a consequence. Most of the teachers start with the enunciation of the basic principle and stating the definitions and laws. Recalling the happenings in daily life and drawing analogy to a law in physics can be of immense help. Instances that I have used in classrooms to highlight examples of science are the rainbow, reflection in a mirror, blowing air into an empty bottle and many other such simple things that we see every day. Documentary films on scientific and geographical topics through television can also take away the boredom. Likewise, demonstrations in magnetism, sound and light are helpful. In Chemistry the teacher may conduct experiments for preparation and properties of gases. In Biology showing preserved specimens will be an advantage.

It should be possible to refrain from making any statements and get the students to watch the functioning of a simple pendulum. Set up a few pendulums, some having the same length but each set with different amplitudes and a few each having bobs of different sizes and metals and set them in oscillation. Allow the students to observe keenly. They will easily zero in on the inference that the time taken for one oscillation, viz., the period of a pendulum depends on the length and not on the other factors. I tried this with my class with great success.

The science laboratory for Physics, Chemistry and Biology was quite big (about 30 x 25 sq.ft.) located in the main school building in the south western corner, next to the assembly hall. This lab with all the facilities for practical science work had been 'bequeathed' to RVS by the erstwhile school that existed in the 1930-40s- 'The School Rishi Valley'. This lab was something which many of the colleges would have loved to possess during those days. There was arrangement for performing practicals in the science subjects, facilities like large work tables fitted with gas taps, sink with water supply, a gas chamber and shelves with solution bottles for chemical analysis. For teaching Biology there were specimens stored in sealed jars containing formalin. Also left behind was a Fortin's Barometer. It was a great boon for the science teachers of RVS.

Two unforgettable incidents:

Many of the chemicals in the bottles were very old and had to be discarded. New equipment for teaching Physics to the Senior Cambridge classes had to be procured. While trying to get the lab ready for teaching, I took the assistance of 'Bell Venkatesh'. In one of the bottles, there were lumps of sodium kept

immersed in kerosene. Without checking with me, he took the bottle to the washing place in the quadrangle nearby and poured the contents into the water below in the cement receptacle. There were loud explosions and sparks flying all around. Luckily no one got hurt. Sodium became explosive when it was exposed to water!

Ramakrishna from the nearby village used to help me as a lab assistant and was doing an excellent job. At a moment's notice he could set up materials for practical work in physics and chemistry for a given topic. Once it so happened that he wanted to prepare a cracker for Deepaavali. I had instructed him to grind potassium chlorate and Sulphur powder separately before mixing. Somehow after doing so he felt like making a gentle grind after mixing them. And lo!! What was the result? There was aloud blast and the pestle flew up making a hole through the tile, the mortar got shattered. At that time I was walking near the sign post. The sound of the blast was so loud that I heard it there. I ran at top speed to the lab. He was not badly hurt but the flame got him in his face. I got him rushed to the Madanapalle hospital for treatment. Luckily for him, there was no serious damage. He was all right after a while!

14. School, nay "Home"

After I started living in Rishi Valley, my views of a school started changing. What impressed me was that this residential school was first and foremost a 'HOME' for the children who lived with their respective 'house mothers' and' house masters' as their - in loco parentis - in the 'houses'. They went out during the day to the classrooms for studies and to the playgrounds in the evenings for games. From these activities they returned to their 'homes'. The emphasis was on the 'home life' in the houses with about 25 children guided by the housemothers and housemasters living with them as their foster parents who were responsible for the overall care of the wards including health, medical care, safety of their belongings and talking to them about ethics. Housemothers and Housemasters were also teachers of subjects in the classrooms. At meal times they were the ' family head of the table' observing the children's food habits

'AKKA's & SIRs

Very young boys and girls lived in the RED HOUSE with Sathi Akka, older girls in the GREEN HOUSE with Sudha Akka, boys and girls of 9 to 10 years of age in the WHITE HOUSE, with Apte Sir,10 to 11 year old boys in the BLUE HOUSE with Srinivasan Sir, 12 to 13 year old boys in the GOLDEN HOUSE with Shastri Sir,13 to 14 year old boys in the SILVER HOUSE with Kapuria Sir and the older boys in the NEEM HOUSE with Narayan Sir. (The other bigger houses were built only after 1960). The Akkas and Sirs lived in rooms attached to their respective houses.

The Daily Routine

The students had a busy day of activities. At 5-30 a.m. there would be the wake up call from the big school bell hung from the branch of the tamarind tree near the Arts and Crafts section. The children would go for physical exercise after wash. Returning from there they would have a drink of 'raagi kanji', bath and change of dress. The younger children would have breakfast which would be sent to their houses. The juniors would have breakfast at the dining hall. The seniors would go to the school for supervised study and would have breakfast at at 8 a.m.

School would start at 9 a.m. with the morning assembly. Students did not have to wear any specified school uniform. Classes commenced at 9-15 a.m. The younger children and juniors had lunch interval at 11-45 a.m. and went for early lunch. The seniors went for lunch at 12-30 p.m. 'Rest Hour' was observed from 1 to 2 p.m. All students remained in the houses and would do light reading lying on their beds or sleep. They were expected to maintain silence. Classes resumed at 2 p.m. and end at 4 p.m.

Milk with snacks would be brought to the houses by volunteers from the houses for distribution at tea-time. Games were played from 4-30 to 5-30 p.m. Students went back to their houses for a cold shower bath and changed into white kurthas and pyjamas. Everyone would proceed to the open ground behind the Red & Green houses, squat on carpets spread on the sandy ground, house-wise with Akkas and Sirs for observing' ASTHAACHAL'. There would be silence and it was a time for watching the sunset and the colourful display of clouds in the west behind the hills.

The seniors went to the school after this for supervised self-study and the others had early dinner at 7 p.m.and the seniors had dinner at 7-30 p.m. There were house activities in the common rooms attached to each house. The house bell announcing' lights off' would go at 9 p.m. and the children went to bed. Akkas and Sirs would make sure that their wards were comfortable in their beds with the mosquito nets tucked in properly.

Lights went out at 9 p.m.

The 'School Rishi Valley' had installed a D.C generator for supply of electric power to enable pumping water to the house bathrooms and the kitchen and also for lighting all the buildings between 6 and 9 p.m. and again between 5 and 6 a.m. with seasonal adjustments. After the 'lights out' we had to manage with 'hurricane kerosene lanterns' for light in all the houses and also for the teachers to go out and meet anyone. An A.C generator was installed for power supply in 1953. Later on, power lines were drawn from Madanapalle to the Horsley Hills and lines passed through Rishi Valley. That is how RVS got electric power from 1956 onwards.

15. The old Dining Hall:

The Dining Hall that existed till the end of 1950's, needs special mention. The present large dining hall was built in the early 1960's when the student strength had increased beyond 300. The old dining hall was an extension of the kitchen and stores building which was a pucca construction with an R.CC roof. The dining hall had tiled roof with the openings on the sides covered by bamboo trellis. The area had four square-shaped blocks, two on either side of a passage in the middle for the movement of the servers.

Food was served on stainless steel plates and in katoris along with water in steel tumblers, all laid on low and long benches while the children sat behind the benches on wooden planks. In the middle of each block was a square platform on which food to be served was kept in vessels with handles so that student volunteers could go round serving .Servers were selected by rotation and they had food after serving was completed. The house mothers and house masters had food with the wards and ensured that the children ate properly and did not waste food. After eating, the children carried the empty plates and cups to be deposited in large, shallow drums from where the house maids would keep clearing the plates as they got filled. The entire system created a 'homely' atmosphere and provided an opportunity for personal rapport between the children and the staff members.

The gap between the kitchen and the dining hall was a make-shift area for non-house parents and guests to have food. Cooking was done using charcoal and firewood and it was ably supervised by Mrs. Paranjpe who was affectionately addressed as VYNI AKKA. She was the sister-in-law of Mrs. Pearce whose brother was Mr. Paranjpe, fondly addressed as THAATHA. He used to be in charge of the school library. Vyni did a mighty good job of supervising the issue of provisions and vegetables to the cooking staff, cleanliness, cooking and distribution. The 'SUPER CHEF' was Sri Keshavan who was loved by everybody.

Food and Nutrition

The menu was purely South Indian vegetarian, for better health, for better digestion and better nutrition. In the evenings, wheat in the form of chapathis with a suitable vegetable and cooked dal with spice and salt was given.

The morning drink served in the houses for the children after exercise was 'RAAGI GANJI' (*) - a ragi malt drink (ragi happens to be the staple food of the local people in the villages). For breakfast we normally had idlis with chutney and saambaar two times a week, bread with jam and wheat porridge on two days, uppuma with chutney on one day, 'ATUKKULU' (#) with mango pickle (AAVAKKAI) on one day. Along with breaskfast, milk was served for all children.

Boiled egg was available for children who asked for it. Coffee or tea was available only for members of staff. At lunch time rice with sambar/ rasam, a vegetable and curds were served. During weekends there would be mixed rice like lemon/tamarind rice with paapad and a sweet item. At tea time biscuits/ sandwiches/ cake/ vada/ mixture were sent to the houses At dinner time, there used to be chapathis with a vegetable and dal served along with buttermilk. Once a week there would be 'APPALAMS' and on some festival occasions 'KHEER'.

Sunday breakfast was 'special'. 'DOSAs" were served by turns for the houses starting with the youngest. It was a good chance for the older students to get up late and go for 'hot hot' dosas.

(*) RAGI MALT - Ragi was cleaned, soaked and allowed to sprout overnight and later dried and roasted. Finally it was ground to powder. Ragi powder was boiled in water, milk and sugar were added. While most of the children relished the plain, light nourishing drink, some of the boys used to clamour for the thick 'bottom ganji' left after the plain drink finished.

(#) ATUKULU - Beaten rice was soaked in water till it became fluffy. It was then tossed in a spicy gravy made of chopped Onions and tomatoes and was topped with some fried bread crumbs.

P.S.:- I used to notice that some of the senior girls had the habit of carrying with them the mango pickle piece in the AAVAKKAI after licking up the spicy part, washing it and keeping it in their 'geometry' boxes in order to enjoy eating them during the intervals at school!!

16. House Activities:

Apart from the time children spent in the 'houses' - having a good sleep at night, having a wash and getting ready for the morning exercises, having bath and getting dressed for breakfast and school, rest time in the afternoons, bath and ASTHAACHAL in the evenings, there used to be free time for after dinner activities in the common rooms. There was free time on Saturday afternoons and most of the time on Sundays. House parents, especially those of junior houses had to find ways of using the time available for cleanliness of the bedrooms and box rooms, safety of the wards' belongings and also their health and fitness. They used to involve the children as far as possible. The older girls and boys would themselves take up the work.

Saturday afternoons:-

The house mothers and house masters of White, Blue, Golden and Silver houses had to get their wards to write letters to their parents (on postal Inland letters) about their welfare and activities during the week. For the very young ones, the house mothers would write a few lines themselves The other house masters would write a few lines informing the parents about any news to be conveyed. The senior students wrote their letters themselves. All letters would be sealed after the addresses were checked by the house parents and would be handed over to the school office on Mondays for being taken by the postman 'NARAYANAPPA' who would cycle all the way to the Kurabalakota post office for dispatch. He would collect mail for the school and the staff and students and get back by the afternoon. At the sight of him we would ask whether there was any mail for us. He would shake his head with a broad smile and would say in Telugu, 'MEEKU EMI LEDU' (meaning 'nothing for you').

At least once in a fortnight there would be a film show on Saturdays in the assembly hall after dinner at 8 p.m. The school office would write to the embassies of U.K., Canada, the U.S.A. and Australia in Madras requesting them to send documentary films on science, geography, places of tourist interest and also agencies lending feature films in English.The screening of the films was done using a Bell & Howell projector operated by Sri. T.K. Raju (the teacher of Arts & Crafts who received training at Shanthinikethan and worked in 'The School Rishi Valley and stayed over to serve RVS). He was loved by all children and affectionately called RAJU MAAMA. A special collapsible hardwood chamber had been constructed ingeniously for this purpose by the carpentry teacher Mr. David Horsburgh. The shows would commence after dinner at 8 p, m. and end at 9-30 p.m. Whenever feature films in English were screened Raju Maama would carefully block any kissing scenes with his hand, the viewers had only to imagine what they were missing. When Maama was not available for screening, I used to take charge and always remembered to follow Maama's tradition!

Sunday Routine for the students:

- Cleaning:- P.T. shoes and polishing them
- Clothes for wash: Soiled clothes to be given for special weekly wash and entries made in a pad with details.-(limited no. taken for daily wash also)
- Hair cut:-Students who needed a hair cut were given the treatment by the 'Royal barber' from Madanapalle carrying his equipment in a rusty old box
- Oil bath: The kitchen store would send 'TIL Oil' and 'SHEEKAKAI' powder to the houses and hot water was supplied in the bath rooms. House maids helped with young children.
- Tuck shop purchases:-Those who needed items of toiletry and stationery could tell the house leader who made entries in a pad with details and obtained the items from the shop.
- Cricket matches:- Once or two times a month between students and staff and occasionally a team from the Madanapalle college
- When there were no organized matches, the seniors played table tennis or shuttle or football. The younger ones played indoor games in their common rooms. Some of the students preferred to go for a quiet walk.

17. Rishi Valley Scout Troop:

Having functioned as a Chief Scout Commissioner in Gwalior and Ceylon (now Sri lanka), Mr. Pearce was keen on having some staff member help him organize a Scout unit in Rishi Valley. When he came to know about my involvement in the Bangalore Scout Group for 15 years and my achievements there, he was happy and encouraged me to start a unit in the school. This welcome assignment set me working on plans to procure the equipment and make a beginning.

During the school vacation in December 1954, I went to the State Scout Headquarters in Bangalore and purchased essential items needed, like 5 ft. long hard bamboo staves 1.5 inches thick for drill and trekking, cotton ropes for teaching Scout knots, semaphore signalling flags and 2 copper bugles and returned. There were about 16 boys who were selected by me to have 2 patrols of 8 each. The two patrols were led by Vikram Pearce and Natarajan Sundaram (Nattu).

I taught them the following requirements for beginners:-

(+) learning to say the Scout promise and the 10 laws,

(+) tying Scout knots like reef knot, sheet bend, bowline and clove hitch,

(+) Semaphore signaling between 2 patrols with 2 flags held in hands and and sending action messages to each other over great distances during trekking,

(+) learning to march to the tune from the bugle (I had learnt to blow tunes using the bugle),

(+) learning to hoist a flag using staves and ropes.

The boys took a great deal of interest in building a platform between two huge tamarind trees in the nearby grove to the north of the main school building. The plan was to construct a tree-top house. A platform was prepared using cut stone blocks to serve as a retaining wall and the inside filled with broken bricks, sand and earth. A rope ladder was also got ready and a small platform 8ft by 6ft was constructed using bamboo sticks. This was completed by the boys during the weekly meetings on Saturday afternoons. Unfortunately the proposed rope bridge never got done. There was a change in the administrative set up in 1958 and we were given to understand that the management felt that it was not necessary to have a Scout unit in Rishi Valley.

One contribution from me for the boys were the songs I got them to sing and they became hits during bus travels while returning from excursions to the school:

(i) We are all jolly good fellows, we are all jolly good fellows,
We are all jolly good fellows so say all of us.
With a hip hip hip hurray, with a hip hip hip hurray.
That's the way in Cubbing and that's the way in Scouting,
That's the way in Rovering, so are all of us.

(ii) Back to Rishi Valley happy land and I'm going to work my ticker if I can
I want to be a Cubber a jolly Cubber too and now I finish Cubbing I don't know what to do Back to ---------)
In the same way, I want to be a Scouter a jolly Scouter too I want to be a Rover a jolly Rover too –

(This was a song we used to sing in the Bangalore Scout Group. 'Back to Bangalore happy land ---'
I just modified it to make it suitable for Rishi Valley Scouts.)

18. IPSC Adventure Course at Ajmer:

The Rishi Valley School is a full member of the Indian Public Schools Conference (IPSC). A school in India that is considered a Public School is mainly residential and is organized as an educational settlement for adolescents for the full maturing of a personality and provides opportunities for maturing, particularly for academic work and varied physical activity in team games and whole pattern based on Indian life and culture.

In England, there are OUTWARD BOUND Schools that are residential. Their training helps students develop their capacity to face hazards giving the participant a chance to discover himself/ herself. The training is severe but does not demand more than what one thinks as possible, living with nature and appreciating its beauty. There have been attempts to bring this movement to India through several adventure courses by the IPSC. One such course was conducted at The Mayo College in Ajmer in December 1954 and another at The National Defence Academy, Khadakvasla near Pune in December 1955.

Mr. Pearce encouraged me to participate in both the courses and I grabbed these opportunities without any hesitation. Luckily these courses were conducted during the winter breaks of the public schools. Having had the experience of hill climbing and trekking in Scouting and also camping overnight in tents while undergoing training in the National Cadet Corps, I was wellprepared and took part actively in both the courses.

The Adventure Course at Mayo College, Ajmer:-

Admission to Mayo College was restricted to the sons of rulers of states and landlords for the first 60 years. It became a member of IPSC in 1946 and became a normal independent boarding school. Most of the houses were beautiful buildings and were donated by the rulers of different states and hence named after them. The place is surrounded by hills and adjacent to it is a lake. The college is located in an area of 250 acres. There are swimming pools, squash courts, 11 hard tennis courts, an open air gym, courts for volley ball, basket ball and many cricket fields.

The course was conducted by Mr. Arnold Brown, Asst., Director of the Outward Bound Movement, U.K., Mr. Jack Gibson, the well-known Principal of the Doon School, Dehra Doon. We were trained in rock climbing using nylon ropes and abseiling. Mr. Gurdial Singh, teacher of Geography at the Doon School and the staff photographer for Himalayan expeditions was also an associate. Since I had sufficient experience in rock climbing, I did well in the course without much help from the trainers. They used to call me ' the monkey from Rishi Valley'. Many of the participants, (about 25 of them) had never heard about RVS and asked me whether it is a 'Sanyasi School' !! Mr. Singh and I became such good friends that at the end of the course he left with me a 60 ft. long nylon rope for my proposed 'Hiking Club' activities in Rishi Valley.

The training was tough and tiring. It would start at at 8 a.m. and end by the evening with breaks for lunch, rest and tea. We would wait for the night sleep to refresh ourselves for the next day's adventure. On the penultimate day, Mr. Brown walked into the dormitory to inform us that we could sleep till 8 a.m. But he came back again to tell us that he forgot to inform us that we were going together to PUSHKAR, a place Smiles away at 9 a.m. This meant that we had to get up and get ready to jog to Pushkar by 7-00 a.m!

Pushkar is the only place where there is a temple for Lord Brahma. A little further away is the Durgah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer. We visited these places.

19. Adventure Course at Khadakvasla.

The next IPSC adventure course was conducted at Khadakvasla in the campus of the National Defence Academy, (NDA), which is located in picturesque surroundings, 30 km South-West of Pune. It is spread over an area of about 7000 acres. The location was chosen as it was near a lake-shore with the surrounding hilly terrain and its proximity to a number of defence establishments in nearby Pune. It is a joint services academy of the Indian Armed Forces where cadets of the three services, Army, Navy and the Air Force are trained together before they go on pre-commissioning training to their respective service academies. It is the first tri-service academy of its kind in the entire world and is considered to be among the best. Cadets join the academy after completion of 10+ 2 studies and are trained for 3 years. Apart from a regular degree course, they are trained in outdoor and indoor activities that go into building their mental and physical being which will help them undergo metamorphosis into worthy officers of the Indian armed forces.

The highlight of the campus is the architectural beauty of the main administrative building, the Sudan Block, built with Jodhpur red stone, its impressive dome and marble-laden interiors with arches and pillars all of which are breath-taking. There are well-furnished individual cabins for trainees with assistance available from orderlies for each cabin. There is a huge dining block equipped with the latest type of electrical gadgets for preparing clean and nutritious food for the trainees throughout the day. The system is so efficient that the kitchen is able to provide food for 1000 people in clean utensils at a notice of just one hour.

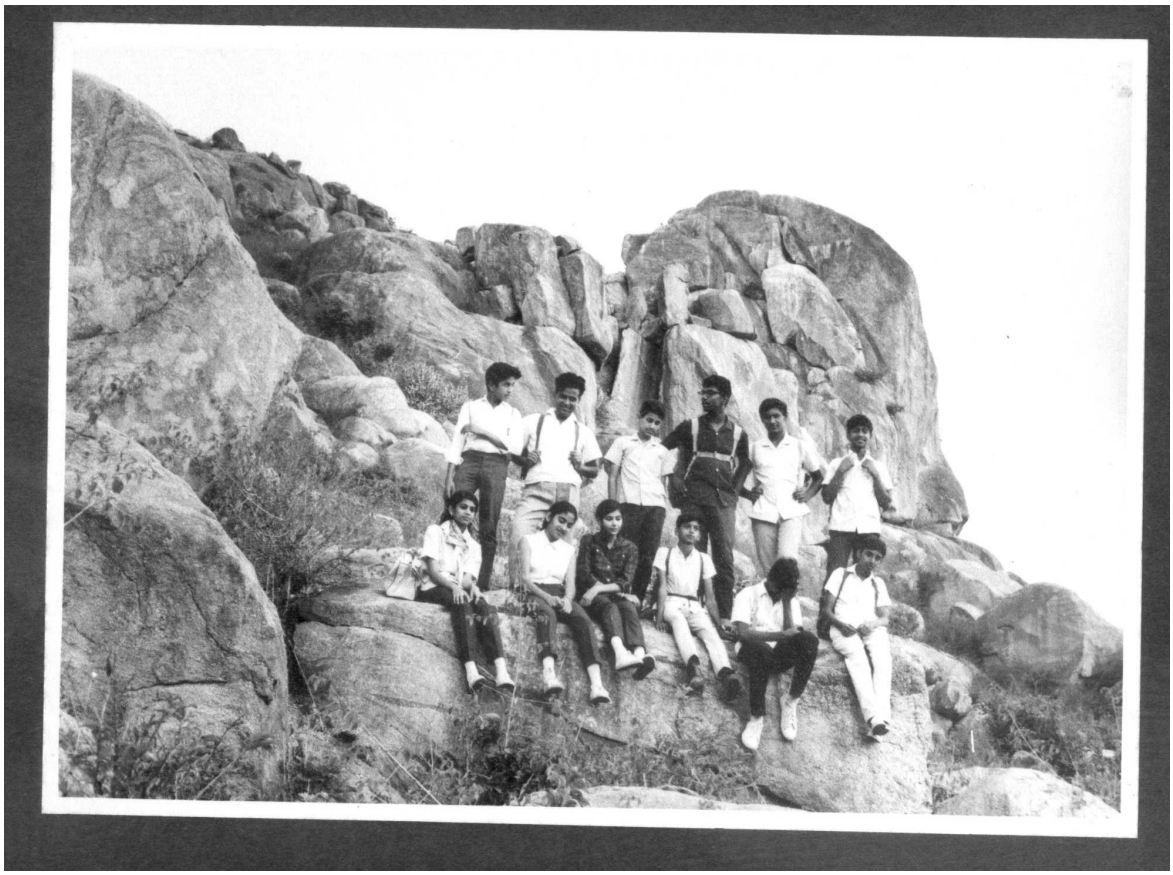
Our group of participants from public schools, 24 in number, stayed in the campus for 2 weeks. We were provided a place stay in the cabins of the trainees as they had gone out during vacation in December 1955. Training for us was given by the army staff and was supervised by one, Major Mac Keinn who took personal interest and care in the welfare and participation of the campers. The activities included tracking games, treasure hunts and rigorous physical exercises assigned to 4 groups of 6 participants each. The officer took such personal care of the campers that he would not take his food until the last camper returned from the outdoor activity absolutely safe.

Towards the end of the adventure course, we were asked to walk in groups to Sinhgad (Lion's Fort), located South-West of Pune, 10 km. away from NDA. The fort is located atop a hill in the Bhuleshwar range of the Sahyadri Hills, 1300 mts. above sea level. The fort has a long chequered history. It was captured by Mohammed Bin Tughlak in 1328 A.D. from a Koli tribe chieftain. After being held by the Mughals, it was subsequently captured by Shivaji Maharaj. But it fell again into the hands of the Mughals for several years before the battle in 1670, when Tanaji Manasare, Shivaji's general, scaled the steep cliff of the fort using a huge lizard (known as Ghorpad). A fierce battle ensued and the fort was regained, but Tanaji lost his life. The entire expedition and the climb was indeed tiring but the sights on the hill, the Kaundinyeshwar temple, the caves and the carvings existing for over 2000 years were sights really worth seeing.

We were happy that we could visit all these. History says that this fort was originally known as KONDANA after the sage KAUNDINYA.

20. Organizing a Hiking Club

I had thoroughly enjoyed participating in trekking and camping activities while I was a Scout and later as a Scout master organizing such activities. I was keen to form a group of students who would love to join me in outings to explore the hills around Rishi Valley. Ever since I arrived in the valley I had always felt that the hills were beckoning to me to scale them and enjoy taking a birds-eye-view of the surroundings. With the suspension of Scouting activities, I felt that it would be a great idea to get the students join me in trekking and hill-climbing.



I had observed that many boys and girls appeared to lack the enthusiasm for adventure. I had gained the impression that they preferred a life of comfort. Leisure can make or break adolescents. There is ample evidence that when the leisure of students is used constructively, delinquency and destructive activities and trends disappear and positive character is developed. They need to be stirred into activity with sports and outdoor activities which is the vital need of our country even today. When you have been a part of a group which has trekked to a distant hill, over rugged and wild paths, you begin to feel one of the greatest thrills of life in the open. The hazards and perils bring the group closer and develop various personality traits in children. The purpose of organizing such treks was not to train the participants to become mountaineers or enhance their skills. The process of dealing with unknown situations, thrill of adventure and the satisfaction of achievement does produce a profound effect

on the outlook and character of the members. This also gives a clue to one's personality in terms of initiative, responsibility, endurance, steadiness in difficulty and care for others.

Schools which are fortunate to have members of staff interested in adventure and exploration must provide the students opportunities to train themselves to explore outdoor life through trekking. The essential feature of such activities must be cohesiveness among the participants, which results in the enjoyment of the effort. Participation in the two IPSC adventure courses at Ajmer and Khadakvasla along with the masters from public schools heightened my desire to begin such activities, which I felt were not given sufficient importance in Rishi Valley at that point of time.

A close friend of mine in Bangalore who had completed M.A. in English literature was working as the Professor and the Head of the department of English in the Besant theosophical College, Madanapalle. Once when I happened to meet him, he enquired about my welfare and wanted to know how I spent my leisure time. When I told him about my hobby of trekking and hill climbing, he burst into loud laughter. He was rather surprised and said that it was a strange hobby and a waste of time. He scoffed at me saying that a better way to use time effectively was to read good books!

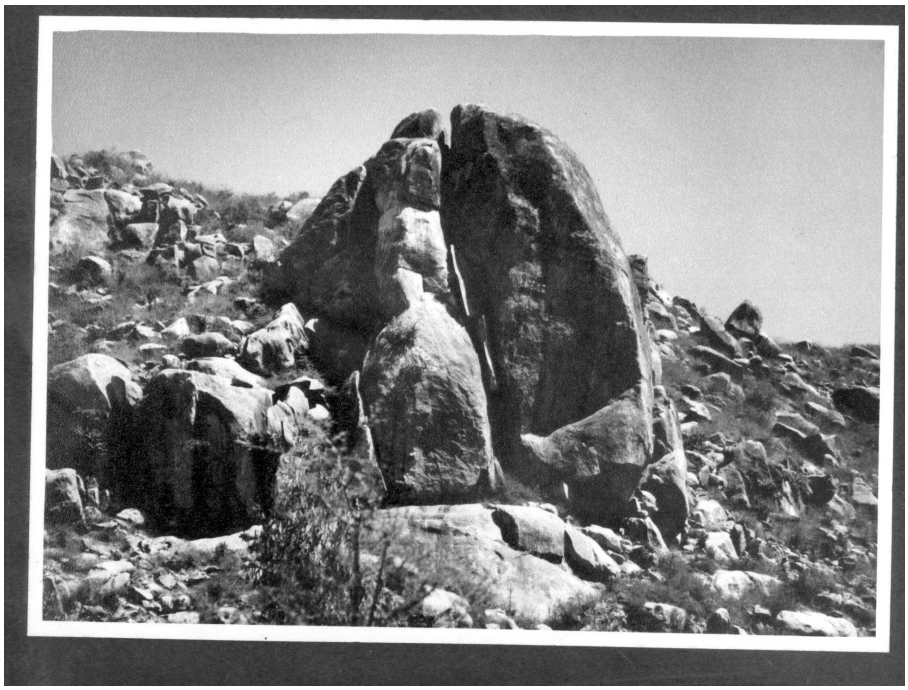
How could I convince this home-bird about the delights of outdoor adventure?

21. Abundance of Spots for Exploration:

Rishi Valley is located in a picturesque setting within a ring of hills surrounded by rugged rock formations. For those who love to go out to the hills to explore, there are plenty of spots offering a fairly tough climb. In the next few paragraphs, I wish to give details about some of the spots I chose to take the members of the 'Hiking Club' on treks. Some of them can be completed in a day's hike and the others need to be planned for an overnight hike.

*** The Cave Rock Hill**

This small hill is a landmark at the south-eastern corner of the school area, offering plenty of opportunities for beginners to practice hill climbing and easy rock climbing. It is called so because it is a hill with a huge rock on the slope



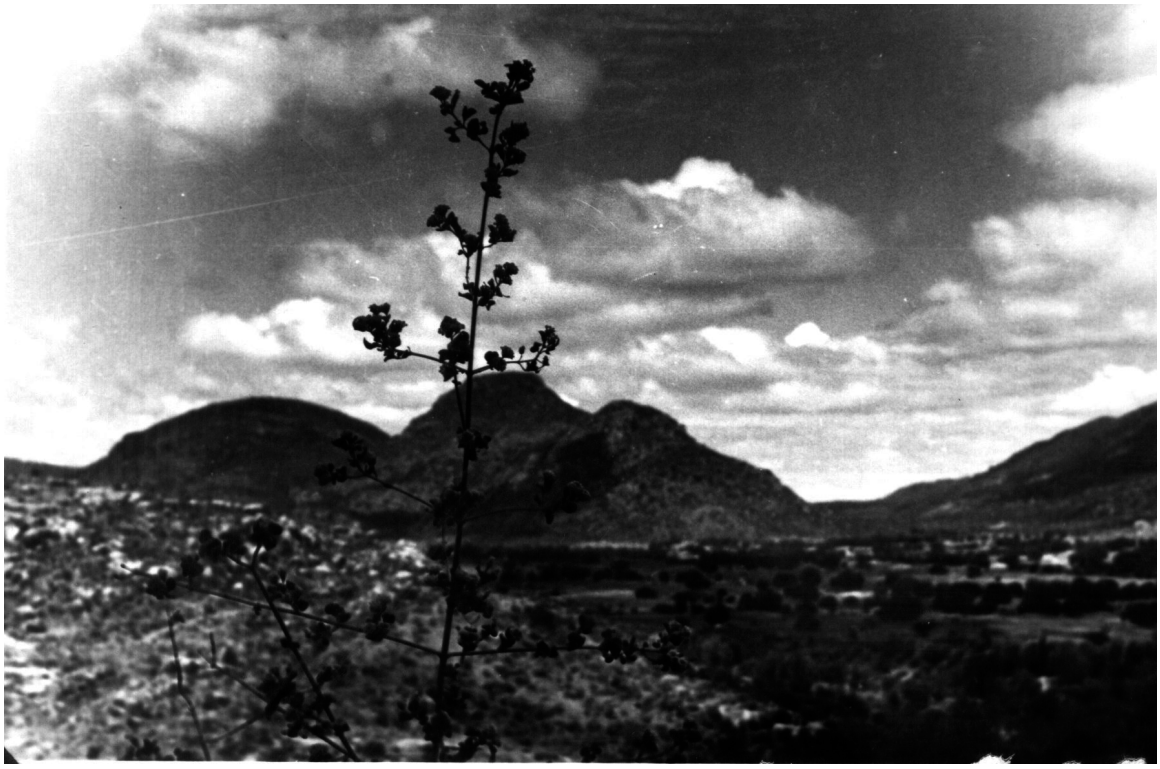
facing the valley, having a deep cave below it. The rock itself is conspicuous by its sheer size and shape. The rock reclines majestically on a rocky base half way up the hill facing west and appears as though it is surveying the beauty of the entire valley! It is roughly about 70 ft. tall with a vertical split in the middle, from the top to the bottom. There is a 30 to 35 ft. deep cave under the rock which is said to have provided a resting place for cheetahs that used to visit the outskirts of the adjacent village during the nights. The legend is that they were spotted there till the year 1954, looking for dogs and goats. On the top of the hill there is the "Boat Rock' which is peculiarly shaped like a boat. The shape of the rock is such that can be scaled only by climbing over another person who can act as a ladder for you!

*** The Lion Rock**

If you stand at the mouth of the valley facing west and look to your right, you will see at a distance a range of low hills. Sticking out from them, is a huge rock formation which has a striking resemblance to the shape of a lion's head. You will never miss noticing it as you enter the valley. There are a number of rocks lower down which provide opportunities to practice climbing.

*** The Three Hills in the West**

The three hills in the West of the Valley are very distinct. The nearer and the shortest of them is 'Rishi Konda' (Konda in Telugu' means a hill). This is the hill that has given the valley the name' Rishi Valley'. On the top of this hill there is a tiny 'temple' erected several years ago by the villagers of the valley. It has 2 feet-square stone slabs with a small stone deity inside. The hill in the center is the highest of the three and is called the 'Central Peak'. The farthest, which is concave-shaped, with a round, smooth appearance is known as the 'Bodi Konda'. Bodi in Telugu means bald! The hill does not having much vegetation leading to this name.



*

The Horsley Hills

The small hills at the north west of the valley sport the conspicuous' Three Sisters' Rocks'. These rocks offer a convenient short cut to the 'Horsley Hills' range, which is the highest in this region (altitude- 1265 mts. above sea level). The Three Sisters' Rocks are actually three tall pillar-like rock formations that offer a convenient resting place for hikers, before proceeding further. The location also provides a grand view of the entire valley. From this point, it takes about about 3 km of trekking over the hilly stretch to reach the picturesque surroundings of the Horsely Hills which is known to the local villagers as 'Yenugu Mallamma Konda'.(Yenugu in Telugu means an elephant). During the years 1840-43, a former Collector of the Cuddapah district, one Mr. w.O. Horsley used to visit the hill and is said to have been awe-struck by the beauty of these hills. He made this his summer resort. A forest bungalow was built by the Forest department and during the late 1950's the Government of Andhra Pradesh

developed this place as a major tourist spot. These hills can also be reached using a motor able road off the Madanapalle-Anantapur highway.

***Pedda Kanda**

In Telugu 'Pedda' means big. It is one of the tall hills in Chittoor Dt. and is 5 miles away from the south-western corner of Rishi Valley. On the rear side of the hill is the village Rayalpaadu located on the border of the states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, on the Madanapalle-Bangalore road. This hill offers tough spots for trekking.

***Mallayya Kanda**

Far away to the east of the mouth of the valley, about 6-7 miles away and sporting a 40ft. tall pillar-like rock formation is this hill which needs an overnight hike for exploration. There were some farms owned by former friends of 'The School Rishi Valley' available for an overnight halt.

22. Preparation and Precautions

Organizing outdoor activities especially over unfamiliar terrain needed on my part proper planning and gathering the necessary equipment to face hazards and attend to any emergency. I had to choose spots which could be fairly easily explored by the beginners ,in order to help them gain confidence in their ability to face challenges. Therefore I spent a few weeks initially surveying suitable spots for the first few outings. When I had gone to Bangalore during the school vacation, I went to the office of the Survey of India and purchased' 1 inch to a mile' Rishi valley area maps and also one copy each of the areas all around. These would enable me to study the terrain, the contours of the hilly areas in the spots I proposed to choose for the treks, in order to avoid difficult rocky faces.

I had in my custody a good collection of Scout staves (hard bamboo sticks purchased for Scouting activities). They would be very useful for every hiker to negotiate climbing slopes. I got ready a 'First Aid' kit. Luckily I had always kept with me a 'Mariners' Compass' for my Scouting activities and the 60 feet nylon rope gifted to me by Mr. Gurdial Singh in the' Ajmer Adventure Course'. All these were going to be extremely useful for conducting hikes. The two bugles I had purchased for Scouting activities were really handy to get the hikers locate my presence and get them to keep together.

Enrolling members

I discussed my plans with Mr. Pearce and as per his advice, i spoke to the senior house parents about the proposed outdoor activity. They were helpful in forming a small group of members. About 15-16 students indicated their readiness to join the club. At a meeting with these children, I explained to them the need to confine strictly to the discipline in order to ensure safety and therefore the achievement of the objective. Over a period of time boys and girls from different houses took part in the hikes The one student who was of great assistance to me in conducting the outdoor activities was T.R.Nandabalan, son of our art teacher, Raju Maama and so a day scholar. Born and brought up in Rishi Valley, he was very good in climbing up steep rocky slopes with bare feet easily. He proved to be a very helpful assistant to me. The following participants in the hikes on different occasions, were Ashok Malhothra, Ravi Anand, Suresh Philar, Ravi Philar, Jaiwant Ullal, Thyagarajan (Kannakutty), Vinayak Namjoshi, Aditi Pant, Maya Natu, Shyama Varde and B. Ramesh Reddy (Breaddy). There were quite a few others but I am not able to recall their names. Sri. R. Chandrasekharan, who was the Estate Manager then, also joined us in many hikes.

The first few sessions were devoted to climbing some of the slopes around the Lion Rock. The hikes worth mentioning were organized to the Horsely Hills and Pedda Konda and the Tirumala Hills. I must mention that in all these programs there were no instances of accidents, injuries or any such mishaps, by God's Grace.

The RV Storybook celebrating Rishi Valley

From RV Storybook

Memoirs of Rishi Valley is a series of posts written by Sri S. V. Venkatachalam, known fondly to his students as Venks Sir. In his 20 years as a teacher at RV, he left an indelible mark on the valley, and he has a fond place in the collective memory of many students. As he turns 82 this year, it is his desire and our privilege to share with students old and new an RV that is long gone and yet lives on.

We're indebted to both Vaani Akka (Venks Sir's daughter) and T. K. Ramkumar sir for all their support in putting this post together. Thank you so much Akka and Sir!

The RV Hiking Club, with Venks Sir in the centre.

23. PART 1: Signals From The Signal Rock to Rishi Valley at Night

The Horsley Hills are full of dense jungles. At the highest point, 4020 ft (1265 mt) above sea level, lie the 'Signal Rocks', which can be spotted during the day time from the play grounds of the school. According to local folk-lore, there used to be a little girl, Mallamma by name, who had lived there and was taken care of by a few elephants. It is said that she had miraculous powers of curing the health problems of

the local tribals who used to visit these jungles. She disappeared one day and the local people built a little temple in memory of Mallamma's divine powers. The hill came to be remembered as *Yenugu Mallamma Konda*. *Yenugu* in Telugu means an elephant.

I heard from the hikers of the erstwhile school, 'The School Rishi Valley', that they used to have an interesting activity when they trekked. The trekkers used to send light signals to the valley at night in response to switching on and off the street lights by the switch operators of Rishi Valley. We wanted to try out this exciting 'operation' ourselves. In this outing, several students, boys and girls, took part. In December 1956, on a weekend, the party set out after breakfast. One batch of the members of the hiking club, led by me, took the short cut trek to the hilltop via the Three Sisters' Rocks. The other group led by Sri G. Narayan went by bus to the foot of the hills on the Anantapur Road and walked up the ghat road. Arrangements were made to have two cooks and two helpers to accompany us and carry packed lunch and tea and also prepare dinner and breakfast for the morning. After the parties reached the Forest Bungalow, the students went to look around the place. After lunch and rest children were busy running around and playing.

Late in the evening all the younger ones were given early dinner and asked to sleep. The hikers, after making sure that they were comfortable, secured the main door of the forest bungalow set out for the signal rock adventure. We had with us a 'petromax' lamp operated using kerosene for this purpose. Two boys carried a huge blanket to serve as a switch for covering and uncovering the light. At about 8:30 p.m. ten of us made a bee line to the Signal Rock while taking care to spot bears! We chose a flat surface and settled down quietly. Sharp at 9 p.m. we started the signaling operation in the direction of the school campus. Lo! There we could see the switching on and off of the street lights of the school campus by Mr. John who used be in charge of the power house. I am sure they could see our signals. We learnt later that there was a great jubilation among the people in the valley who had gathered there. We were also equally jubilant at the success of the operation. The next morning we got back to Rishi Valley after breakfast. The students were happy at the success of the trek.

24. PART 2: How We Got Lost in a Jungle at Night

Having been impressed with the success of the trek to the Horsley Hills, many others wanted to trek with us. After much planning, we got one group, led by Gundu Rao Sir, to go by bus to the foot of the hills on the Madanapalle-Kadiri Road and walk up the ghat road. The other group led by me and Sri. Bharathan (who used to take good care of the school dairy farm) decided to give the group a tougher climb. We were to climb the Rishi Konda first, climb down the northern slope, then climb down the southern slopes of the Horsley Hills from the base and then cut across to the Forest Bungalow. We had taken care to study the Survey of India map (1 inch to a mile), particularly the hill paths.

The new comers in our batch were so awfully slow in the first part of the climb that by the time we got down to the base, it was very late in the afternoon. We hurried the group and by the time we had climbed the connecting hilltop, it was already getting dark. We could spot the Horsley hilltop, which was about a kilometer away. While the survey map showed a clear area, in reality it was now covered with thick lantana bushes (the map was cartographed in the year 1925). Though we tried our best to cut across the bushes using our staves, we found there was no chance of such a possibility. It became quite dark. We gave up hope of further efforts and decided to settle down on a clear area and waited for the dawn.

Most of the people in the group started feeling jittery. We had finished eating the food we carried. There was no water left. Oranges had been eaten and only the orange peels were left with us for 'dinner'. We were compelled to eat them. All around it was a thick jungle. It was said to be infested with bears. Remaining there throughout the night was the 'Hobson's choice' we had! Bharathan and I had to discover ways of keeping the group in a good mood. We were able to light a bush fire and got a few boys to keep feeding the fire. We assured the children that there was no need to panic. The other party had reached the hill top by midday as planned and had been waiting for us with lunch and tea.

Luckily for us, it was a full moon night so we could at least enjoy seeing the jungle at night. We had to be content with lying down and keep watching the bright full moon sail across the sky. One by one, everyone went to sleep while Bharathan and I kept a close watch on the group. The next morning, just after dawn, we tried our best to cut through the bushes but in vain. We decided to retreat and walked down the slope we had climbed and then walked along the path towards Rishi Valley via the Thettu village. By the time we got near the outskirts of the village, we noticed a batch of search party students led by Gundu Rao Sir advancing towards us, with worry writ on their faces. They had made a frantic phone call to Mr. Pearce from Horsley Hills and they had been instructed to go early in the morning to look for the 'LOST TREKKERS'. Their joy knew no bounds on seeing us. Our group was thirsty to the bones. We drank the water from the stream to our heart's content and reached the school safely. All those who were waiting anxiously, were now relieved and listened to our story in amazement!

25. Memorable Events

Event One - Visit of the Shakespeareana Troupe from U.K.

This well-known troupe from the United Kingdom staged Shakespearean plays in the major cities of India in the year 1957. They arrived in Bangalore and later visited Madras in the last week of September. The Director of the troupe Mr. Geoffrey Kendall staged plays in Madras under the auspices of The British Council, Madras Division. Both Mr. Pearce and Mr. David Horsburgh got in touch with the British Council and requested Mr. Kendall to stage plays in the Besant Theosophical College, Madanapalle and also in Rishi Valley. The troupe showed keen interest in staging a play in the open air stage under a huge banyan tree. The troupe arrived in Madanapalle and was provided accommodation for stay in the old guest house in Rishi Valley. Two plays, 'The Merchant of Venice' and 'Macbeth' were staged at the Besant Theosophical College in Madanapalle.

Mr. Kendall and the troupe were very much impressed by the open air stage and staged two plays, 'Othello' and 'As You Like It' . The stage was got ready by the actors in a jiffy. No curtains were used nor did they make use of any loud speaker system. The change in scenes was effected by swltchlnq the flood lights off and on. The banyan tree with its clumps of hanging roots acted as wings for the stage. Originally, the plan was to stage only one play but they were so happy with the success of the first play that they were wanted to stage the other one too. They felt the stage under the tree was ideal for staging such plays. The players were all well trained and got the stage ready for the changes in scenes taking very little time for each change. We had a great time watching the plays both in Rishi Valley and Madanapalle.

Mr. Pearce ensured that the the stay for the troupe in Rishi Valley was comfortable. I act as the liaison person under his advise to look after their requirements and their comfortable stay .This gave me the opportunity to get to know the actors well. Among them was Shashi Kapoor who was then in his late 20's. I got to meet him often and he would let me know if they needed any help. I observed that he was interested in Mr. Kendall's daughter Jeniffer whom he happened to marry later.

***Event Two - A 'Refresher Course' for Teachers of English Language**

A refresher course for the teachers of English language in South India was planned by the Madras Division of the British Council. Having come to know that facilities were available for the stay of the teacher trainees in the boys' hostels in Rishi Valley, they requested Mr. Pearce to permit the use of the place from 26th December, 1955 to 6th January, 1956. The school offered accommodation for the participating teachers trainees in the boys' hostels and for the professors in the Old Guest House.

Prof. F. Billows from the British Council, London and Professors of English from the Osmania University, Hyderabad, the Andhra University, Vizag, and the Madras University were in the faculty. The Council requested Mr. David Horsburgh to be one of the team of professors. There were in all about 50 participants from schools in South India and Mr. Pearce asked me to join the participants and also to function as a liaison, quldlnq the teacher trainees in the use of facilities in the hostels and the dining hall. I was happy to get a certificate for participation. I enjoyed the experience thoroughly.

***Event Three - School Inspection by the Education Ministry, Govt. of India**

During the academic year of 1956, a team of inspectors from the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India, conducted an inspection in the school in order to assess the standard of teaching and the facilities provided in the boarding school. The team consisted of 5 persons. They observed the teaching done by the teachers in all the classes. We were told by the Principal later that the team was full of praise for the ideal environment for residential school education and the facilities provided. The school received a detailed confidential report on the inspection with their remarks on the teachers' work in the classes by the end of the academic year.

The inspectors observed my teaching General Science to the S 2 class. Mr Pearce gave me a copy of an extract from their confidential report about my teaching work:

"The class was very enthusiastic but well in hand, actively participating and answering questions_ No individual was ignored_ A good teacher with command over the subject matter_ Able to convey the subject matter in an interesting way and yet allowing the pupils to think for themselves_used their mistakes as stepping stones_able to rouse and sustain enthusiasm in the pupils."

Attention Ramkumar and Venky: There have been 25 earlier posts of my memoirs of RV. I am asking Vaani to send them to you and also post all of them on the Rishi Valley Group on facebook as suggested by Ramkumar. Here is the one numbered #26.

Venks

26. M.S. Visits RV

Millions of lovers of classical and devotional music the world over, have enjoyed listening to the singing of Smt. M.S.Subbulakshmi in her mellifluous voice. She was "The Queen of Music", "The Nightingale of India", "The Songbird of Springtime", a "Divine Being" and a highly regarded artiste of our country. There have been great musicians of Indian classical and devotional singing but MS was special. I always wondered what the magic of MS was that mesmerized millions across the globe. It was her humility, sincerity and serenity, which endeared her to one and all. She seemed to pour her heart and soul into her singing. Her musical genius encompassed a range of qualities that define greatness in classical music. Her celebrity status although universally acknowledged, had not touched her at all. Born into a traditional family, MS was a lifelong student, learning from musical giants of different generations. Married to the freedom fighter and journalist Thiagarajan Sadasivam in 1940, her humane qualities and musical genius took her beyond stage performances, into becoming a legend.

As a young boy I was initiated into South Indian classical music and was very fond of listening to it. My two elder sisters had been provided tuition in singing classical music. We had a grand 'Columbia' gramophone at home on which our father played music while me and my four brothers would sit around and enjoy listening to old disc records. Whenever there was a music concert at the 'SABHA' nearby in Bangalore, we would diligently sit through the entire duration and listen to the singing by well-known musicians. I remember listening to MS in this SABHA during the early 1940's. My eldest sister Kanaka and her husband who lived in Coimbatore were dear friends of MS. and Sri Sadasivam. Dr.Narayana Menon, who was then the Director General of All India Radio, Madras was a great friend of Mr.Pearce (the principal of Rishi Valley) and the Sadasivams. In 1956, The Menons came to Rishi Valley to admit their little daughter, Malavika into the school. The Sadasivams had adopted the son of Sri. Sadasivam's brother as they had no children of their own. They decided to admit the boy Thiagarajan, (fondly called Kannakutty) also into RVS. So when they all visited Rishi Valley together, the Pearces were happy with the decision of the Sadasivams and brought them to the Blue House of which I was the house master. I felt delighted to receive them I introduced myself to them as the younger brother of Kanaka of Coimbatore and Padma Akka as the house mother. Kannakutty was happy to be with us and the boys of his own age. He quickly started taking keen interest in all the activities of the of the house and the school.

The Sadasivams used to visit the school ateast once a year to see how Kannakutty was getting along and were happy to learn that he was doing very well. During the academic year 1956-57, when the Sadasivams visited the school, the Pearces requested M.S to have a teaching session with a group of teachers. Some of us who used to teach songs at the School assembly gathered in the room adjoining the Principal's office, eagerly looking forward to the exclusive privilege of being taught a Bhajan by "THE QUEEN OF MUSIC"! She decided to teach us the Hindi Bhajan she had sung for the film 'MEERA' :- *Brndaavan ki mangala leela yaad aavey*. Among us were Meenakshi Akka, Apte Sir, Narayan Sir and Jithendra Prathap Sir and a few others. M.S. would give us the words of the song, wait for us to write it down and sing each line slowly for us to repeat a few times. It was exhilarating to listen to her singing in her melodious voice, even as we repeated the lines after her. MS Amma happened to notice me quite a few times, listening to the lines she sang with great attention and repeating them. She would smile gently and shake her head in appreciation as if approving my ability to repeat correctly. That was an unforgettable day for me and I feel elated thinking about it even today!

Dear All,

I am resuming writing my memoirs after a long time. You may know that I have been hospitalized twice since January 2013. I am still very weak. By the grace of God and the care of my children Shankar, Veena and Vaani, I am alright now and trying to resume writing the memoirs. I must thank Kishore for constantly egging me on pen my thoughts and all the other old students who called upon me and also made inquiries over the phone and through email. This time, I am writing about Ahsan Hydari, my old student who impacted our lives in many ways. May his soul rest in peace.

Venks

(Continued)

27. AHSAN

When our family heard that Ahsan was battling cancer, we prayed for his complete recovery. We knew he was a brave fighter. Once when he visited me, he told me that he had given up smoking but I think it may have been a bit too late as the cancer had already advanced. When the news of his demise reached us, it shook us to the core. He loved me and used to address me as his "Guru". He was extremely close to all my family members and used to visit us often after we moved to Chennai many years later. He loved the "Attukulu" and Coffee prepared by Padma Akka whenever he visited us.

When I joined RVS as a teacher in 1954, he and his twin brother Irfan were already studying there. The new English medium school was started by Mr.F G Pearce in 1950. Mr. Pearce began contacting his friends and acquaintances in Bombay to make admissions for the school. Through his contacts, he met parents at the Indian Railways. One Mr.Gore helped him with the contact of Mr.I Hydari who was the Chief Mechanical Engineer of the Central Railway. Mr.I. Hydari was the son of Sir Akbar Hydari, the former Deewan of the Nizam of Hyderabad during the British period. Mr.I Hydari admitted both the boys Ahsan and Irfan into RVS and they stayed at the White House. When I took charge of Golden House, both the boys were transferred to my care. They were very good-natured and actively took part in all activities. Ahsan was good in Cricket and Irfan was a cheerful lad.

Once it so happened that an attack of measles affected the entire Golden House. Mr.Pearce suggested the all the children be isolated at the old Guest House under the care of a nurse to prevent it from spreading. During the weekend the boys were asked to write to their parents how they were doing and I used to pen a few lines at the end of the letters to let the parents know about the care being given to their children. The parents appreciated this. Especially Mr.Hydari, wrote to me requesting me to stay with them for a few days since I would be escorting the boys back to Bombay for the Summer vacation. I accepted his invitation and went to their house. He was kind

enough to provide me with first class train fare. Their house was large and spacious. He took trouble to have vegetarian food prepared for me when the boys told him that I was a vegetarian. I was fed a nice meal of rice, rasam and vegetables!

Many years later, Padma Akka and I were to perform the marriage of our one of our twin daughters Vaani With Anand in Chennai in 1989. We had just moved out of Chennai to Delhi about eight months back and it was a big responsibility to conduct the wedding at a place where we did not have a home. We came down to Chennai two weeks in advance. We had no place to stay but Ahsan was so kind to allow us all (an entire wedding entourage) to stay at his home. We literally occupied his whole house and he made us feel extremely comfortable. My daughter Vaani often remembers with great joy how her wedding journey as a bride began from Ahsan's house. For this, she and all of us remain ever-grateful to him.

Later in 1997, I was having a crisis of sorts when my career with an employer was cut-short because of a project that never took off. I was living in Abiramapuram, Chennai when I met Ahsan suddenly. He made enquiries about what I was doing. I told him my predicament and inability to get an employment at my age of 66yrs then. He was quick to respond and said "Sir, why didn't you tell me earlier? A person of your experience and standing could assist the AMM Foundation which is running schools and is part of the Murugappa Group where I work". He spoke to Mr.M.M. Murugappan and took my CV to the Chairman Mr.A.M.M. Arunachalam. After discussions, I was appointed as an Academic Adviser, guiding the teachers of their schools, improving their teaching skills and conducting demonstration lessons. I still remain extremely grateful to Ahsan for the concern he showed towards me and my family. When I was still at the AMM Foundation, Ahsan resigned his job at the Murugappa Group. He came to the Corporate Headquarters at TIAM House and personally took leave of each and every person including the workers and the watchman! That should tell you what an humble and affectionate soul he was. I was personally very touched when I learnt later that he had made a contribution of Rupees Fifty lakh towards the RVS Rural Hospital. What a thoughtful gift for the villagers around Rishi Valley!

Our prayers for Ahsan to rest in Peace. You continue to live in our hearts.

VENKS

(Please see the attached pictures of Ahsan when he visited me in September 2007 and an old one of him with his mother far left and sister in the middle. I hope to continue my memoirs at regular intervals from now on)

28. Ashok on Lion Rock

Ashok and his brother Ravi joined Rishi Valley in the year 1952. Their father Sri Jamna Das Malhotra worked with the Railways. He was one of the best behaved students. He was very fond of trekking and was an active member of our Hiking Club which I had founded. One Saturday evening, he came to me and requested me to give him a 60 feet long nylon rope that I used for rock climbing. He assured me that he would be very careful. He along with Chittibabu went to the Mouth of The Valley and somehow managed to climb 'Lion Rock'. For those who have observed carefully, the rock resembled the head of a Lion. Having accomplished his feat, he wanted to get down but became very jittery. He shouted to Chittibabu who was sitting near the Mouth of The Valley and begged him run and inform "Venks Sir". I was at that time in Blue House. I informed Mr.F.G.Pearce the Principal who immediately took out his car and drove me to the Mouth of the Valley. Having taken an assurance me that things would be ok, he left.

I climbed to the base of Lion Rock and told Ashok that there should be no reason to be tense and that he could jump the ten feet onto the flat rock below and that it posed no real danger. Inspite of my repeated assurances, he did not pick up the courage. By this time it was getting dark and the height looked deceptively bigger to him in the moonlight. After nearly 20 minutes of persuasion, he finally made up his mind and jumped the final ten feet and landed safely. There is no need for me to tell you that I was looking like a Hero in the eyes of the students that evening.

Ashok later joined the army and came to visit me when I was the Principal of the Bhavans School in Delhi. He was not just Ashok but Brigadier Ashok Malhotra. Ashok attributes a lot of his success to the school, teachers and specially the 'Lion Rock' incident which he felt gave him the courage to face any situation and terms it a turning point in his life.

Venks Sir

29. BLACKIE – A Real Darling!

She was a black terrier, the family dog of Mr.Pearce, the Principal of RVS. She was a favorite among the children and loved by all. She spent most of the time in Mr.Pearce's courtyard. At meal-time, she would visit the dining hall entrance and collect her share of chappatis from the popular chef Mr.Keshavan!! The helpers in Rishi Valley used to help keep her clean and she was a harmless dog. She loved receiving attention from the younger children and used to visit the various houses.

When the Pearces made the decision to leave Rishi Valley in 1958, his family left for Ooty, but Mr. Pearce stayed on for three months to teach Geography and English. When he left, Blackie had to shift her place of stay. She received good care from my wife Padma Akka, me and the children of Golden House. She stayed most of the time in our house and slept in the courtyard. During the day time, she stayed in our living room and took good care of my little son Shankar who was just two years old then. We used to leave him with Blackie and go for short distances/ visits and Blackie would safe-guard him!

Blackie got very attached to me. Whenever I used to climb the Cave-rock hill (which I did frequently), she would faithfully follow me. Once I climbed the hill on a Saturday in the late afternoon. After reaching the top, I pulled out my bugle and played a tune. The sound of the bugle reverberated in the valley. The young boys got so excited when they realized where it was coming from and spotted me. Some of them rushed off, wore their canvas shoes and started running towards the hill trying to reach the place where I was standing. Blackie instantly ran down the hill and escorted the children on a safe path that she had trekked with me and brought them with great care to the point where I was. I was moved to tears and appreciated her sensitivity by patting her affectionately.

After a few years, Blackie was older and would take things easy and sleep most of the time in the Courtyard. Some months later, we found her dead in the house garden early in the morning. The children were very upset the whole day and some did not eat properly that afternoon. The gardeners helped us dig a huge pit in the open space beyond the courtyard and we buried dear Blackie there. We planted a Gulmohar tree at the spot in her memory. Subsequently, I wrote a short poem about Blackie which was published in the RV newsletter along with her picture!

A note on Cook Keshavan:

He was from Kerala and lived a simple unassuming life. He was well known for his culinary skills and loved by all. I would often find him sitting all by himself on the rocks of the southern hill slopes, perhaps lost in meditation.

I have attached pictures of both Blackie and Cook Keshavan. They are not very clear but I felt I must send them out.

Venks Sir.

30. A strange welcome for the Princi:

It was the winter break for the school during November-December 1955. Mr. Pearce and family had gone to the United Kingdom with family to spend time with their friends. Before they left, he allotted the responsibility of administration and the lines of authority and carefully delegated responsibilities so that things went like clockwork in their absence. It was a significant feature for good administration. Mr. Pearce had conveyed the dates of his return to Rishi Valley and the office was informed to have his car sent to the Cuddapah (Kadapa) railway station to pick up the family. Accordingly the driver Mr. Roe was instructed to be at the railway station with the black car. The students had returned after vacation and the school was in full session.

One of the prominent members of staff Mr. David Horsburgh, an Englishman, was an all rounder. His lifestyle was rather unusual, and he walked about in the campus with bare feet. He could speak the local language Telugu as well as the villagers and taught carpentry and aero-modeling in the school workshop. He had a penchant for jokes and poking fun at colleagues and kept the staff and students in good humour. He had adjusted himself very well to the social life of the villagers.

David thought of a naughty plan for Mr. Pearce's return. He called me over and we hatched a plan. The idea was to see that no one was around at the campus when they arrived, so that it would give the impression that the campus had been deserted by the inmates. The children would all remain in their house common rooms; the Principal's quarter doors would be kept wide open; a table would be kept in the center of the sitting room with a long sheet of paper dangling from the typewriter indicating all the jobs yet to be done. I suggested that I would track the movement of the Principal's car in the valley, taking help from some of the scouts who had been trained by me in slashing messages using semaphore flags. They could be assisted by some of the naughty urchins like Ravi Natu (Brother of Maya Natu) who could be of help in spotting all movements.

The next job was to get the residents of the campus aware of our plans. The school functioned normally and we gave the briefing during the assembly time. The last teaching period would be cancelled to enable the children to go to their houses and have early tea. They would dress up for games and remain in the common rooms until they were asked to come out. They could actually see movement of people outside but others could not see them. The signalers were to be at the Lion Rock to spot the cars entering the mouth of the valley, one batch at the Sliding Rock to notice the car entering the campus at the sign post and one group on the hill slopes behind the dining hall to send the message to me, waiting at the foot of

the Cave Rock Hill. The plan was that after the car arrived in front of the Principal's quarters no one would appear till the family got down from the car and expressed their surprise. At the right moment, I would give the call so that the children would come out of the Houses to welcome the family.

Everything went off without a hitch. The Principal and Mrs. Pearce were very perplexed. Mrs. Pearce said "I am sure we wired the school about our arrival, had we not"? "Yes of course, I had even put a call through" said Mr. Pearce. "Then where on earth is everybody?" said the bewildered Principal more to himself than anybody in particular. Exactly at that moment I blew the retreat call from the foot of the hills and all children and residents came out of the buildings and rushed to receive the family. Mr. Pearce had a hearty laugh. He didn't take too long to figure that David was behind the mischievous plan! Everyone including the students has a great time being part of a practical joke! Those days were real fun when everyone took things in the right spirit!

Venks Sir

Mrs & Mr. F.G.Pearce

31. Recovery of the lost Bugle:

I had mentioned Pedda Konda in one of my earlier notes. In Telugu, Pedda means "big". Pedda Konda is the tallest hill in Chittoor District. It is close to Madanapalle and about five miles from Rishi Valley to the base of the hill. We began planning a hike to this hill and one the most valuable tools we had was a map made by the 'Survey of India'.

The plan for the trek was mooted when Mr.Pearce's son Vijay visited Rishi Valley. Some of the senior students knew him well and wanted to join us along with other regular hikers. I was pretty sure that it could not be an over-night trek since we had no idea of the facilities available there. We knew however, that the village of Rayalpadu was on the other side of the hill and that there were buses from Kolar, Bangalore, Chintamani and Srinivasapur that pass through the village. We planned to take a bus to and from Madanapalle. We took a packed lunch with us and some sandwiches for tea. It was a Saturday and we left after an early breakfast.

The first part of the trek was easy as it was just a walk along a busy approach track. The new hikers were very enthusiastic and wanted to stay ahead in order to get to the top first. They had all been warned to stay with the group. In between, I would assemble everyone with a Bugle call and take a count. It was a tough ascent to the top and by about noon we reached the top. We ate our lunch and took rest under a tree.

At about 2 pm, we all climbed down the other side and reached the village of Rayalpadu. Thrilled that we had kept to the plan, we took a bus back to the school. I had asked all the hikers to take care of their belongings. I had entrusted the care of the Bugle with Kannakutti as I had found him very reliable. Unfortunately, in his enthusiasm to get ahead with the group, he left the Bugle behind on the hill. We realized this only after we returned to Rishi Valley!!

Kanna and I planned to go again the next day and recover the Bugle. I had to take him along because he remembered where he had left it. The next day, we made the trip again and reached the spot where he claimed to have left the Bugle but it was not to be found! We were at a loss and decided to go the Rayalpadu village and ask people if they had seen it. It was around 3 pm already. We found the village Headman discussing some issues with his assistants. When he saw us, he asked us what happened. One of the villagers on hearing our story retorted that he had seen a fellow walking around with something that looked exactly like the second Bugle that I had carried with me to show them what I was looking for. To our amusement, he narrated how the fellow told everyone that Lord Shiva had appeared in front of him and given him the Bugle! When I demonstrated that I could actually blow tunes on the Bugle, the villagers were convinced that it belonged to me. They promised that they would find the man and arrange to have him sent to the school to return the Bugle.

The next day, the villager in question, came to the school and returned the Bugle. We gave him a sumptuous lunch, a dhoti and Rs.20/-. He was mighty pleased and so were we!!

32. Escorting Students During Vacations

During the summer and winter holidays, students at Rishi Valley would go home and return. Most were from Madras, Bangalore and Hyderabad. A large Party went to Bombay and a fairly big Party went to Delhi and Calcutta. Many groups had young children travelling and so the teachers were their escorts_to and from home_to ensure they reached their destination safely with their baggage. Those of us teachers who agreed to escort students had to be aware of certain points:

- When we had children travelling on long distance trains, we had to make sure that they did not get off at stations where the halt was long. We used to insist that the children remain in the compartments. Whenever we had a large Party travelling, we used to try and reserve an entire compartment so that it was safer for the children. The children from Bombay used to travel by Ist Class since most of them were children of Railway officers.
- The bags had to be loaded and looked after carefully till the destination. The House Masters and Mothers would ask the parents to make a list of items sent with the children and would check the items. The parents would also advise us about any medication that the children were taking. We would request parents to not send too much cash with the children.
- When we took the children home, we used to ensure that the children had changed their clothes, freshened up and looked fresh when they were picked up by the parents. We would have a roll call for effective checking. The senior students travelling with us would help us with the younger ones.

Invariably, I used to be the escort for the party travelling to Bombay. It was a tough job. The Party would leave the school in the morning and arrive at the Cuddapah Railway Station on the Madras-Bombay VT Line. At Cuddapah, Mr.P.G.S.Mani (father of P.S.Ramdas) made excellent arrange ments for lunch for the Party and the helpers from the office of student Anjaneyulu's family would help in loading the huge trunks into the reserved compartments. That made the job of the escorts easy!

Parties returning to school after vacation would get off at Cuddapah. After identifying their baggage and loading them into the bus, we would leave for Rishi Valley. It was an exercise in care, watchfulness and responsibility for the escorts.

On one of the trips in the beginning of the year 1957-58, I had gone to bring a Party of students from Bombay. I was wearing a newly stitched Ash-grey Safari suit. Asha Bhosle and her sister Lata Mangeshkar came to the station to drop off Ashaji's son Hemant at the reserved Ist Class compartment. She got a bit confused looking at me and said "Namaste Mukherjee Saab". Later she clarified that she had mistaken me for Mr.Joy Mukherjee (a well-known movie star) and wondered what he was doing with the Rishi Valley Party! When she realized that I was Hemant's House Master, she pleaded excuse and made enquiries about how Hemant was getting along! I am smiling at the memory and wish I had an instant camera like today's generation to click a picture!

33. Hiking Club – Walking Expedition To Tirumala

While at Rishi Valley, we organized various trips but the expedition of walking the distance to Tirumala from Rishi Valley was by far the toughest. We reckoned from the Survey of India maps that we had that the distance was roughly about 100 miles (150 -160 Km approx). We decided to cover the distance in about 5 1⁄2 days at the rate of about 18 – 20 miles a day. We planned the route in such a way that we reached the house an RV parent at the end of each day, allowing us to spend the night there. The plan was to have dinner and collect our packed lunch the next day after breakfast and walk to the next destination. We had planned a route touching Cinna Tippa Samudram (CTM), Pileru, Pulicherala, Baakarapet Forest Bungalow, Chandragiri Travel Bungalow and Tirumala. After spending half a day on the Tirumala Hill and having Darshan of the Lord, we were to trek down to the Tirupati Railway Station and take the train to Kurubalakota near Rishi Valley. This was circa 1961.

We decided that the group must be small so that the parents who were hosting us did not have a challenge and we could manage a smaller team more effectively. We

decided on not more than ten people including a few girls who were keen to join the trek. Finally based on various factors like safety, we decided to have only boys on the team. The group consisted of Kanna Kutty, Suresh Philar, Vinayak Namjoshi, Jaiwant Ullal and Nandabalan besides Mr. Chandrasekhar, the Estate Manager and myself. So we were only seven of us. The route used regular roads, railway tracks and cross country. We left on Saturday afternoon after tea carrying packed dinner to Vayalpad, a distance of about 10 miles. Next morning we crossed CTM accepting the kind offer of Sri. Pattabhi and reached Pileru for the night's rest at a parent's residence. The next day we trekked to Pulicherala to the residence of Sri B V Reddy, grand parent of Vikram Reddy. There we had a comfortable stay and they packed for us sufficient food for the next day. It was the toughest part of the trek as it involved a cross-country walk via Baakarapet and Chandragiri Traveller's Bungalow. At the end of the third day's walk, we rested in Chandragiri and prepared for a tough climb up the Tirumala Hill from the Chandragiri side. It was a tough climb. After reaching Tirumala, we took

the Darshan of the Lord of the Seven Hills and reached the Tirupati town by the walking route. Finally we took the train to Kurubalakota and reached RVS safely. We were given a rousing reception!

The treks were quite strenuous since the walk of about 18 miles everyday was quite a task. We would encounter villagers and locals who would spot us and ask us why we were walking and would direct us to the nearest bus stop or suggest various ways to reach Tirupati. Many of them were shocked when they heard that we wanted to walk and were doing so for our own pleasure! Many of them even laughed at us. Sometimes we had to cheer up the group. Mr.Chandrasekhar was very good at sharing jokes. When one of the boys requested him to help with carrying his bag as it was heavy, Chandra retorted "Ofcourse, I have no problem in carrying your bag as long as you carry me!"

Though it was a tough expedition, we thoroughly enjoyed the trek. It was an unforgettable experience and I cherish these memories even today. See attached a picture of the trekking group and that of us outside Mr.B V Reddy's place.

Venks Sir

34. Ballabh gets into trouble during an excursion

I once escorted a batch of students on an excursion to Gwalior, Agra and Delhi in 1956. We finished our visit to Gwalior and enjoyed visiting the Scindia School located in Gwalior on a hill. Mr.Pearce had earlier been the Principal there. Later we went to Agra and had a grand tour of the Taj Mahal and other historical sites. We then got back to Delhi.

At Agra the children bought various mementos and one of the students Ballabh Kothari from Calcutta bought a small dagger. We got to the Delhi railway station waiting to board a train to Madras. Ms. Hilda Yarrow was my co-escort. She would keep an eye on the students and make sure that they stayed together. I was busy getting the luggage weighed and taken to the bogie.

One of the boys came running to me to say that the Police had taken away Ballabh to the Police Station since he was carrying a dagger. We did not realize that there was a prohibitory order, Section 144 due to some communal trouble. I did not panic. Ms.Yarrow was bewildered at the turn of events and was in tears. It was difficult to comfort her but I assured her that I would be able to sort out the matter. I told the senior students to help her and asked them to proceed on the journey. The plan was for me to join them half-way by taking the next train which was actually a faster one.

Fortunately for me, help was at hand. Parents of two students had come to the Delhi railway station to see their wards off to Madras. One of them was Mrs.Ullal, mother of Kishore Ullal who lived in Delhi and the other was Dilip's father (uncle of Ballabh). Mrs. Ullal and I went to the office of the Railway Police to inquire what happened. We were told by the inspector that Ballabh was found openly carrying the dagger on his belt when there were prohibitory orders and he had been taken to the Magistrate's court!

We rushed to the Court to find that Ballabh's finger prints had been taken, he had been fined Rs.25/- and let off. We were stumped and didn't know where to go looking for him. There were no cell phones in those days! It struck us that Ballabh's uncle must have accompanied him. Luckily I had Ballabh's uncle's address and we rushed to Asaf Ali road where he had his office. When we reached there, we saw Ballabh sitting there! We were happy to find him and thanked his uncle for the help. Ballabh and I went back to the Delhi Railway Station with Mrs. Ullal. The Grand Trunk Express was available for us and was to leave in an hour. We thanked Mrs. Ullal for her help and the train left at 5.30pm. We reached Wardha the next day. Ballabh and I got down there and waited for the train in which the other students and Ms.Yarrow were arriving. It arrived in half an hour. The children were all craning their necks out the windows and when they aw us, they started waving madly. It was a happy reunion. Ms.Yarrow was in tears. It was drama in real life! All's well that ends well.

35. Kishore Namjoshi

Kishore was one of the students I remember well who got very attached to me. In the beginning we had problems with handling him in school. Mr.Pearce helped me handle his difficult behaviour. Later, he was to be one of the finest boys of the school. I developed a liking for Kishore's frankness and sense of humour. He did quite well in studies and passed the ISC examination in 1962.

Kishore's father, Captain Namjoshi, was one of the ace pilots of the Indian Air Force. He played a major role in the war with Pakistan in the late 50s and unfortunately got killed in an air crash. His two sons, Kishore and Vinayak, were brought to RVS by Mrs.Namjoshi for admission. Right from day one, the brothers started creating problems. They were admitted to the Blue House where I was the House Master. The brothers told everyone that they did not like to join the school. The next day they were missing from school! We searched for them in the school estate and fields but there was no trace of them. Mr.Pearce sent me in the school van to the Kurabalakota Railway Station where we found the boys waiting for the train to Bombay. I asked them how they would travel without a ticket. Kishore retorted that he would sell their camera and buy a ticket. I was firm with them, and forcefully brought them back to the school.

The next day we found the boys missing again! The older boys from the senior houses went all over the estate and searched the jowar fields. They found the boys hiding behind the crops. They were caught and brought to me. I sought advice from Mr.Pearce on the course of action. He told me to give a whack on Kishore's backside and tell him that he would get more if he didn't listen to us. I was in a dilemma. I had never physically hit anyone and was nervous about the suggested course of action. Nevertheless, I said I would give it a thought. When I summoned Kishore and spoke to me, he was still defiant. Despite my sense of restraint, I followed Mr.Pearce's instruction. That did the trick. Kishore fell at my feet and pleaded that he will do anything for me and promised not to try to escape. Mr.Pearce's trick worked dramatically. There was total change in the behaviour of the two boys from then on.

Later Kishore became the best wicket-keeper of the school cricket team. His stubborn behaviour still continued, however with me, he was totally different. On one Saturday afternoon when he was called by his team-mates to join them for a cricket match, he refused because he wanted to sleep. The students came to me to help them get his participation. I asked them to tell him that Venks Sir was planning to come and talk to him. Before I could reach the front door of the House, I saw him coming out with his cricket gear and having a broad smile on his face!!! "Sir, I am ready!" he smiled.

It was during the year 2011 in February, I had been hospitalized for treatment of a serious health problem. I used to be in pain. What gave me more pain was the shocking news from old students of RVS from Pune, that Kishore had passed away. He must have been in his late 60s. He was far too young to die so early. That was a rude shock and very painful for me. The loss of a dear student is an inexplicable pain.

The memories of RVS are so overpowering that I often smile to myself thinking about those beautiful days.

36. Singing with Krishnaji

Krishnaji used to visit India every year for two or three months and invariably Rishi Valley used to be one of the places of his stay for a month or more. There was the old Guest House where he stayed in a small room, simply furnished and tastefully decorated. On one side of the room, the door opened into a large hall held by pillars. Large bamboo mat rolls were fixed in the openings to cut out too much glare. All discussions of the teachers at the Rishi Valley School (I was one of them for almost twenty years) used to take place there. Standing in this hall with the bamboo mats rolled up, Krishnaji would look at the rock - smudged hills around, the beautiful clusters of trees and people passing by. Close by was the Spathodia tree, with its lovely flowers. During the rainy season, a little stream would flow in front of the Guest House and one could hear the water flowing down the hillside.

Adjacent to Krishnaji's living room was yet another fairly large hall where he met people seeking interviews. No furniture was kept there and people sat on carpets. Since the guest house was far away from the school and the hostel area, there would be hardly any noise except for the chirping of the birds which had made Rishi Valley their home.

It was in this hall that Krishnaji, G.Narayan (another teacher of the school who was a good friend of mine) and I used to meet in the evenings for about an hour of chanting and singing. Krishnaji wanted us to teach him some *Bhajans*, devotional songs and *Sthothras*. In return he taught us some *Bhajans* and *Sthothras* that he had learnt at the Rajghat Besant School, Benares and some portions of the Vedas that he had learnt when he was young. One could see the expression of joy on his face when he chanted and sang. He enjoyed listening to the beautiful notes and words of Sanskrit chants and also *Bhajans* in Telugu and Hindi.

Narayan and I had the unique opportunity of singing with him and teaching him songs every evening. After the singing session, he would set out for his evening walk. Generally only the three of us would be there while we sang and quite often it would be just Krishnaji and me. On some days we used to have some friends from the KFI who would come and listen to us chanting.

I found Krishnaji to be an unusually keen learner. He would watch the teacher intently, watch his lip movements and would want the lines to be repeated several times before he joined in. He was very particular that we sing the lines simultaneously. Whenever he came across some beautiful portions of the song, his face would glow and his eyes would be half-closed and he would have a gentle smile on his face. He made the person teaching him enjoy the exercise. Krishnaji was a good singer with a base voice. He preferred to sit down with his legs crossed while singing and would keep his back straight. He would always ask someone to sing and prefer to join in with them. He rarely sang alone. During Vedic chanting, he expected us to start at a sufficiently high pitch as he was comfortable with higher pitches. If he found the pitch too low, he would wait for a suitable pause in the

song and and suddenly lead the group, singing in a higher and more comfortable pitch.

Krishnaji was choosy about the songs that wanted to learn. He liked simple tunes that were not sung very fast. He loved some portions of compositions of Adi Shankara like "Nirvaana Shatkam", "Nirvaana Dashakam" and "Dakshina-murthy Ashtakam". He also liked my selections from the first part of the "Sri Venkateshwara Suprabhatham". Narayan taught us to sing some of the compositions of the Telugu poet Pothana and Thyagaraja. Among these, one in Raga Aarabhi "Jootha mu Raare' was a particular favourite of Krishnaji.

Whenever we sat down to sing, Krishnaji would ask me to sing the Marathi devotional song "Ghana Shyama Sundara" and a Punjabi folk song "Khatnenu Kaliya" which had a lovely rhythm. I had learnt to chant a small portion of the Holy Quran from a muslim friend of mine. Krishnaji was quite surprised when he first heard me chanting this. Krishnaji also learnt some Tukaram bhajans from Sri Achyut Patwardhan. In Benares, Sri Samanthji, the teacher of Sanskrit and music had taught Krishnaji many songs and had also made a beautiful booklet specially for his reference. This book contained words of Sanskrit chants and songs written in beautiful hand in Indian ink. He took meticulous care to cover the book with red silk. Krishnaji used to carry the book with him in his travel kit.

Krishnaji loved listening to good Carnatic classical music. Often, stalwart musicians and instrumentalists would perform for him at Vasanta Vihar in Chennai. He also appreciated Bharatanatyam by the children under the Banyan Tree in Rishi Valley. He would sit among the children to watch the dance shows. At the end of the show, he would make it a point to meet the children who performed and encourage them with words of appreciation.

I have had the privilege of being with Krishnaji during our singing sessions and recollect with happiness those great moments that Narayan and I spent with Krishnaji singing, learning, teaching and enjoying

good music. I was happy to teach a student who was eager to learn, paid complete attention and enjoyed learning! It was a rare opportunity that I treasure as special among my 42 years of teaching experience! Krishnaji is no more but the sound of our singing and particularly Krishnaji's voice and his face lit with joy will remain in my mind's eye for a long time to come.

37. Padma Akka

Having decided to pursue teaching, a job about which I was so passionate, it was absolutely clear in my mind that my life partner should be supportive of my decision and that alone would spur me to channelize all my interests into my love for teaching. God is great and his ways are inexplicable. As I had mentioned in my earlier memoirs, I had gone to Mysore to join the Teacher's Training College there and took keen interest in attending 'Bhajan' sessions being organized there. During these sessions of community singing, I was introduced to a family who incidentally hailed from similar background as mine from Palakkad in Kerala. Alamelu, that was the name her family gave her, was an active participant there. It so happened that she took the initiative to suggest that we become life partners and I agreed without any hesitation! After marriage, my parents preferred to call her Padma, which is incidentally another name for Alamelu (the consort of Lord Venkateswara) and so she came to be - the beautiful "lotus" in my life! She came to Rishi Valley to a different world altogether. For someone who had completed only school education, the atmosphere was challenging. But she took to Rishi Valley as a fish would take to water.

During the years 1955 to 1962, I was the House Master of the Blue and Golden Houses. They consisted of boys in the age group 10-12 years. A very impressionable age indeed. They needed a 'motherly' touch to learn to keep themselves, their clothes and belongings neat and clean. She fitted into the role like a glove and Padma Akka's personal touch ensured that the beds were dusted clean, the bed sheets neatly folded, the lockers of the students had their clothes neatly folded and kept and shoes and chappals in order. She ensured that the maid "Yangamma" came early to start the boiler so that the guys could have a steaming hot bath after coming from PT. She ensured the toilets were cleaned every single day and even helped to sew missing buttons on the shorts and shirts of the boys. I still remember she would make a special round after 'lights out' to see if the mosquito nets were tucked in properly. Whenever she did Pooja on special days, "Prasadam' was distributed to the boys.

What effectively this did was to leave me free to do the other activities for the boys. Gardening in the quadrangle in front and beside the Common Room extending

right down to the road to Asthachal. I used to organize after-dinner activities such as stories of Mahabharata, Ramayana, Black Tulip, Scarlet Pimpernel and so on. We used to arrange for indoor games like Carrom, Chess and of course singing. Boys from other hostels were frequent visitors and would join in. Padma Akka was an ace Table Tennis player herself! She would always be a winner in a game of Chinese Checkers as well.

The Rishi Valley School atmosphere helped helped Padma Akka to blossom into a full-fledged teacher. She completed her graduation and also a special Montessori Training Course that enabled her to take care of the small children of the teachers. In those days, due to the shortage of classrooms, a special section was opened in the verandah of our new quarters and she conducted classes there with the help of Sathi Bai Akka. This prepared the children for the nest step - J1 class.

Vishalakshi Akka helped her to get a Veena and taught her how to play it for five years. Padma Akka's interest in music also saw her playing the 'Tambura' during the numerous dance ballets staged at the Rishi valley under the Banyan Tree. She also actively helped with the make-up and hair for the dancers.

Interactions with many teachers who came from various KFI schools across the globe helped broaden her horizons and inculcate new ideas in her teaching methods. She was extremely soft-spoken and the boys really loved her. However, she made sure of two things they didn't like but had to do. One was to get a hair cut from the barber from Thettu village who used to come on a Sunday and give a crew cut. The other was the dreaded 'purgative' to wash the stomach clean.

We spent glorious years in Rishi Valley. Our twin daughters arrived nine years after Shankar and they all grew up in the lovely Valley. Padma Akka's role in bringing up the children and keeping a happy home made our stay there an indelible memory of our lives.

Her gentle, ever-smiling and unassuming disposition made her popular among the staff, children and other people in the Valley. It is apt that I am choosing to write about Padma Akka in this memoir. This month, it will be twelve years since she passed away and so our thoughts have been going back to the wonderful times we spent together.

38. Sathi Bai Akka

There are some people of Rishi Valley, who's image the mind conjures up with immense delight. These wonderful people blended beautifully into the fabric of the surroundings as though made for it. Yes, Sathi Bai akka was one such wonderful person. Who can forget the colourful cotton sarees, all perfectly starched and ironed and her hair let loose in typical Kerala style and the cheerful smile and disposition of the lady? The tiny children loved her, so did the older ones. She was very popular amongst the teachers too. I have to mention here, that, she was very close to Padma akka with whom she shared a special and strong bond of friendship and the two were inseparable.

Sathi Bai Akka was born and brought up in Telicherry in Kerala and came to Rishi Valley in the early 50's. Infact, when I joined in 1954 she was already there. She handled the junior classes and was an outstanding teacher. Several generations of students have been nurtured and fostered through her love and care. For them, her memories remain delightful and unforgettable.

She was a perfect fit to be a house mother, a duty she carried out with aplomb. Her natural instinct and trained eye ensured that all the children were extremely well-cared for and took personal interest in ensuring the cleanliness of her "Red House". She was always taking rounds and was behind "Papamma's" back to keep the place spick and span. She had many activities for the children in the common room to keep them engaged as well. She participated in all school activities including the Sports Day with enthusiasm and gusto.

Sathi Bai Akka's shriek whenever she spied a lizard, cockroach or scorpion is legendary in Rishi Valley folklore! Once she screamed for "Papamma" who was then dispatched with alacrity to fetch Venks the savior. I came running there to find her perched atop a wooden stool looking ashen. "What's the matter Sathi Bai?" I asked. "See Venks, there is a scorpion in my bedroom. Please take it away". She dared to come down from her perch only after she was convinced that I had caught the offending intruder and deposited him at the foot of the Cave Rock hill! We all had a hearty laugh.

On some days after the film show at the auditorium, Mr.Naidu and myself would ensure all children had returned to their respective hostels. On our way back, we would pick up some small pebbles and lob them onto the tiled roof of Red House. Sure enough, immediately a scared face would peer over the curtain and we could hear her shout "Oh! My God you naughty Venks and Naidu? You really scared me", followed by the unforgettable "I'LL GIVE YOU PROPERLY"! We would go into peals of laughter.

She used to visit Pune during the last years of her life during vacation and made it a point to visit the home of my son Shankar, who was very attached to her. Padma Akka's death in 2001 shook her. I remember I was also present in Pune on one of her visits. We met and spoke about all the wonderful days we had spent together at Rishi Valley. One incident related by Shankar just before her death left him rattled. He had gone to meet Sathi Bai Akka at her nephew's place at Airforce station, Lohegan quarters a couple of days before she was due to travel to Mumbai. She spent time with him and his family. A few days later, the evening before she left Pune, Shankar got a call from her and she asked him to come and see her again. She held his hand for a long time and when he touched her feet she blessed him saying that he would get a promotion at his work place. She left the next morning. Shankar got a call from her nephew in two days that she was no more.

We were all heart-broken.

Sathi Bai Akka and Padma Akka

39. Cricket Coaching, International Folk Dancing and Assemblies at RVS

Many of my students appreciated my total involvement with them. Apart from teaching Maths and Science, I used to be a friend to most of them, spend time with them as their "House Master", played games, sang and danced with them. I used to have elongated discussions with many students. These activities, gave me an opportunity to observe the behavior of the students at close quarters and watch their attitude to various experiences. I value my interactions to each of my students to the fullest. These experiences have helped me grow and become who I am today.

Among the various extra-curricular activities that we organized in the school, Hiking was perhaps very popular and I have already written many posts on that. The other popular ones were Cricket Coaching, International Folk Dancing and assembly songs.

Cricket Coaching:

Like in all schools, the students at Rishi Valley wanted to play cricket but there were no coaching facilities available. I took upon myself the task of first getting all the materials required for cricket coaching from Madras and got the pitch well-laid with the help of Dr. Balasundaram who was an excellent bowler himself. Later on,Naidu Sir took good care to maintain it and the outfield with yeomen contribution from Nagappa and his assistant. We practiced on half matting and used full matting for

the matches. I gave the boys tips of batting, bowling and fielding. I was myself a good spin bowler. We taught ourselves and practiced for many months on end. In due course of time, a strong team emerged. So strong was the RVS team that College teams from Madanapalle, Chittoor and Anantpur coming to RVS for matches were easily defeated! Our fast bowlers were really feared; like Hanumesh, T. Vasu, Venkateshwar Reddy (Laddi), Vinay Panchmiya(left arm fast), K.Ra, Jayant Dhote, V.Prabhakar Reddy, Bankim Sutaria and Vinod Rajagopal. We had excellent spinners like K.Rajendran,"Kutchi" Shashikumar,V.KSriram and S.V.Shankar. Our captains were also outstanding like V.Ka, K.Rajendran,Prabhakar Reddy and Sunil Shanbag. If I have left out some names, kindly bear with me as my memory is not as sharp as it used to be. Once we had a team from Bangalore, called "Jawahar Sports Club" comprising of the legendary Gundappa Viswanath and Syed Kirmani who came for a weekend match. They were surprised by the tough fight given by Team RVS! My son Shankar was part of the school eleven and was well known for his all round abilities. He caught Viswanath at the slips and ran a good 20 yards and took the catch of Kirmani at the boundary, both wickets of some exemplary fast bowling by Bankim Sutaria. They however proved too strong for us. Later on, we employed the services of an NIS cricket coach Sri Vazim-Ul-Haq from Hyderabad. He really shaped the team into a winning combination. He was also very popular with the boys. Sri. Jai Prakash who joined later was also a part of the team and was a good fast bowler with a bowling run up where his arms flapped like the wings of a bird! He was a popular team person. Some still remember his laughing rebuke " Arre! What fellow" when a catch was missed.

International Folk Dancing:

Mr.David Young was a teacher of Mathematics and International Folk Dancing at The Happy Valley School' at Ojai, California. The school was then run by some people who were interested in JK but later broke off from the KFA fold. David Young came to Rishi Valley to spend 2~3 months once in 1964 and again in 1967. He taught the students the dances and the music was played from LP records that he had brought from the US. We also got a few from within India. I was very interested in folk dancing and so picked up the dances and would also help in playing the music using the LP record player. Seeing my interest in the dance form, David suggested that I take on the responsibility of teaching and rehearsing the dances even after he left for the US. He continued to be in touch with me for many years after that. I scheduled Sunday evenings for the dance practice and the boys and girls loved it! Initially, before the new auditorium was constructed, we used to have folk dancing under the Banyan tree. Later on it used to be at the auditorium which had an awesome ambience for it. The boys and girls loved the "All American Promenade", "Hineh-ma- Tov", "Red Wing", "Korabushka", "Hava Nagilla", "Man in the Hay", "Mayim", "Troika", 'Shiboleth" to name a few. Once we even had a

special show put up for the school and was a great hit. I still remember, while doing "Red Wing" when the partners had to "duck n dive" the opposite pair would lower their hand which were held together so the oncoming couple had a tough time passing below. It was hilarious. I continued to be in charge of the folk dancing practice till I had to leave for the UK in 1972. Before leaving, I entrusted it to my colleague and dear friend Jaiprakash (JP Sir) who carried on the activity for many more years.

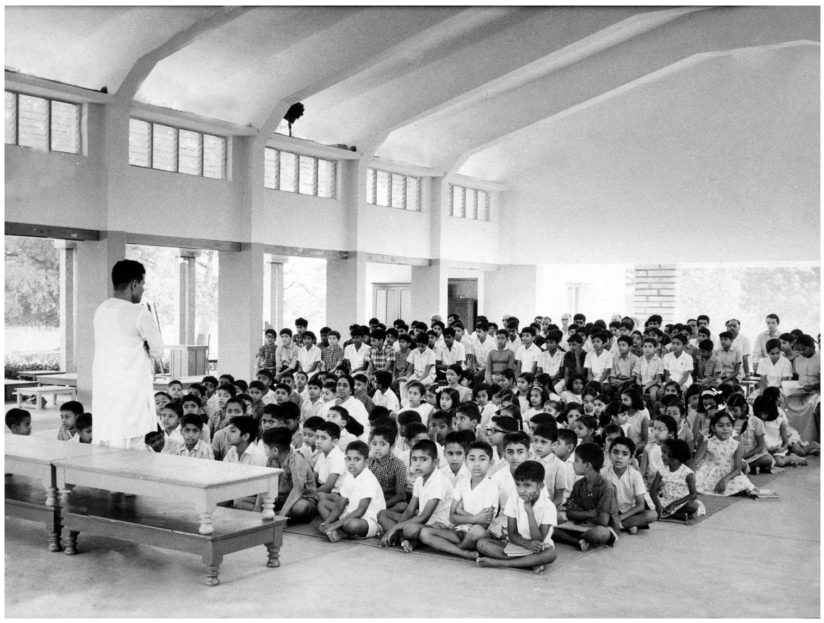
International Folk Dance

Once we had visitors from UK, US and Europe during December. I got groups of students to perform the dances of Russia, Spain, Turkey, USA, Israel, Mexico and India under low-hanging floodlights. The spectators were delighted to see the perfection with which the students danced and their joy while dancing. It was a proud moment for me. Later when I visited the Brockwood Park School in UK, I was asked to teach the some of the Folk dances there too.

Assembly Songs:

We used to have group singing during the morning Assemblies for 10 to 15 minutes. In the early days, Mr.Govind Apte, later Jitendra Pratap and Vasant Apte taught the Assembly Hindi devotional songs. Later, Vishalakshi Akka and Meenakshi Akka took over and taught many songs that are evergreen and remembered even today with great affection. They were accompanied by mridangist Sri.Sridhar rao for number of years and later by Sri.Krishna Iyer, husband of Shankari akka.The students participated in morning assemblies with gusto. " Gopavesha dhaari, gokula vihari" became " Gopavesha dhari,Gopi had a lorry!". Whenever a song had the name of a student like "Kamala" or "Vimala" or "Shankara" in it, all eyes would turn to that student and knowing smiles would be exchanged!

I used to love chanting, Sthoras and Bhajans and so I found myself in the group of teachers teaching Music! The songs/chants that I selected to be taught always had simple tunes and we all enjoyed singing them together. I had a way of writing out the words on a blackboard and breaking up the lines into smaller phrases. I used to also insist that the group repeats what I sing. This ensured that the students learnt the tunes/ Chants quickly. Many a time I would explain what our chants meant. I know of many parents who openly sent in their appreciation for the Sanskrit chanting being taught to students, Infact, we had a special group of interested students who would come on Saturday early mornings to the auditorium to learn advanced chants/Sooktams etc. I must really mention the effort of Sri.Hanumantha Rao who totally involved himself in these sessions and was a tremendous help in helping me prepare the "Stotra Ratnakara" part 1 & 2 which we got printed from Varanasi. I still have my copy of it and so does Shankar and many students with help from Sri. Viswanath Lalji of KFI Rajghat School who joined the RV staff for a short time.



Chanting Assembly