

ALMA MATER

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I looked up the dictionary for the meaning of the Latin word Alma. It said it meant "kind". Mater is the word I remember from my Latin classes at St. Michael's College as "mother". But when you look for the words Alma Mater, it meant the school generally from which one graduated. I like the meaning "kind mother". Yes! St. Michael's College was the kindest mother to us.

Ten years or so in her bosom made us what we are today. In a person's life time, it is a significant period. It is a period of transition. A period during which we develop ourselves. We, not only transform our physical appearances but also our mental and psychological makeup which serves as a basis for what we are today. How can we forget this period? How can we ignore the personalities that we came across during this time. How can we abstain from cherishing the memories and the relationships that was introduced to us and then which we fostered throughout that period. They are life long memories. It always gives us joy and pleasure when we regurgitate the pleasant past. A breath of fresh air of school days permeates in this hall.

I remember that period at St. Michael's College. We all remember very clearly that period in our own way. For most of us that is the best period in our life's. All play and fun and a little bit of studies unlike now.

St. Michael's was not only the best building built with mortar, bricks and basketball courts. At different season the premises is carpeted with purple flowers and domes of yellow flowers in the front. The tennis court with the jack fruit tree at its entrance. When it bears fruits, I remember Barathidasan's "வேரில் பழுத்த பலா".

My College was an envy of the competitors. Rev. Fr. Crowther S. J., a protestant who later in life became a Roman Catholic and the one of the exemplary Rector and Principal of the College notes in his article he penned for the Centenary Souvenir: "This college, Roman Catholics are building have collapsed" This was the remark that his father made in 1913 when fifty inches of incessant rain fell in Mattakkalappu.

My College is the soul and glory of Mattakkalappu. The old boys belong to other faiths build a school replicating our College and improving on it. Shivananda Vidyalayam built by an old boy of the College -Mylvaganam and later Swami Vipulananthar, in my humble opinion is a resemblance of St. Michael's College. The respect that Swamiji showed to Rev. Fr. Bonnel S.J. has to be mentioned in this occasion. This account is recorded. Once Swamiji, after he became a Swami, was speaking in the assembly hall of our College, suddenly stopped his speech. The audience wondered as to why he stopped and then they saw Rev. Fr. Bonnel walking into the Hall. Swamiji continued his speech after Fr. Bonnel took his seat.

My College was built on the sacrifice of the Jesuits. The Jesuits even sacrificed their meals to run the school when the Government was not liberally giving finances to run the school. The College gave us everything it had. She gave us education; she gave us knowledge; she taught us the true values of life and most of all she taught us that the services to our fellow brothers and sisters is the ultimate boon and satisfaction of life.

Enter Grade 4, this is how I faintly remember the first day at St. Michael's college. Rev. Fr. Reiman was the Prefect of Discipline. I still cannot figure out who the Principal was at that time. I think we assembled in the basketball court and class by class piled into our respective class rooms. Grade 4 was one last class room in the main building. A small hall at the end of the walk way is partitioned into two class rooms. Grade 4 was on the side of the basketball court. A statue of Sacred Heart of Jesus stand there inviting us. On each side of this walk way are classrooms. I think five on each side. The Principal or the prefect of discipline makes their rounds along this passage and when they do, there is pin drop silence in the class rooms.

Everything and everyone was a stranger to me. New environment building, new fellow students, new teacher. I see that feeling in my three year old grand-daughter when she meets new people. There is some kind of reservation and fright. Respond only when you want to and sometimes give out frowning smiles at others. But then there was next day and then next day. The reservation the fright and shyness and everything else evaporated into thin air. We then became friends with unbreakable bonds.

No one can express more beautiful than My Barathi. ஓடி விளையாடினோம், ஓயாமல் விளையாடினோம், கூடி விளையாடினோம், கூட்டி விளையாடினோம். சின்னஞ் சிறு குருவிகள் போல சுதந்திரமாக பறந்து திரிந்தோம்.

நிஜத்தில் மட்டுமல்ல கனவிலும் மகிழ்ச்சியான கவலையற்ற நாட்கள். அந்த நாட்கள் மீண்டும் வருமா?

Balachandran Iyakutty, Wesley Rosairo, Rushley Bartherlot, Gaston Sivapragasam, Nanthakumar Chelliah, Shanthikumar, Uthayanan Perinbarajah, , Desmond Nadarajah, Alfred, Shivaji, Yoganathan, Panchadcharam, Alexander, Preman Daniels and Lingaratnam were some of my Grade 4 class mates. Alexander retired as a Principal of Thannamaunai Maha Vidyalayam, Desmond is in New jersey still travels to Mattakkalappu and actively involves himself in the basketball affairs of the college. Rushley retired as an English teacher tried living in the USA for some time did not like it so he returned to Sri Lanka. Wesley, the last I heard moved to Australia, Nanthakumar Chelliah became an Engineer. Nanthakumar graduated from Amparai Hardy Technical Institute worked at the Eastern Paper Mills Corporation, Shanthikumar became a Chartered Accountant and is living in Mississauga, Gaston Sivapragasam went to Germany and he is an Engineer and doing very well there. Balachandran the best engineering mind, is in Canada. Preman Daniels settled with his family in the United Kingdom while Lingana after retiring from the Peoples Bank settled down in Australia. The others are lost from my radar. But I know they will be equally doing very well in their stations of life.

Uthayannan met with an untimely death when a bomb blasted in Mattakkallpu town during a vesak season. He came to maintain peace and order in his civilian clothes and the army shot him dead. How many innocent lives like that we lost during the armed struggle!.

I made other friends in other classes. Among them, Jayakumar from Singalavadi and I became very close and he is now moved to Alberta with his family. Bro. George, Bonnie Chelliah, Mudiappa Pillai (Deceased), Gnanam and Navaratnam, Kumar Emmanuel (Deceased) and Kirupa from Mannar were my fellow students. In the advanced level classes, the College tried admitting female students because of a then necessity. Nalayini Logitharajah, Kamalanayaki Packiarajah (deceased), Rahim the daughter of the Inspector of Police, , Vaz sisters from Vankalai, Hyacinth Sebamalai, Jayaseeli Fernando and three Carmelite nuns shared our class. One of them became the Principal of St. Cecilia's and later went to Trincomalee. The list is not inclusive but these are the names I remember.

Mrs. Vaz was our grade 4 class teacher. Rev. Fr. De Niese was our first English teacher but he died of heart attack. Then it was Rev. Fr. Somers who taught us English. We go to the library upstairs to watch sometimes a short film and to study English. There was a big train set in the library. It was very wonderful to watch running through the caves and bridge and unloading milk cans. He gave us sweet candy if we spell the words correctly. I got very few candy. It was very fun to learn English. Diamond teacher or Mrs. Tisseversinghe was our handicraft teacher. Later, in the lower grades Mr. Sivanathapillai, Mr. Saverirajah, Mr. F.R. Ragel, Mr. Retniah, Mr. T. Selvanayagam, Mrs. Rasanayagam Miss Rajes Kandiah, taught me. Mr. Gonzaga took algebra and geometry. Shapes and angles theorems and their proof were not my favorites. I cannot blame him for my disdain of the subject.

In the upper grades, It was Mr. S. E. Kamalanathan taught me Tamil. தமிழில் எனக்குள்ள உணர்வினைத் தூண்டி விட்டவர். Miss Kandiah taught me Ceylon and European History. The reformers like Peter the Great in Russia who taxed the Russian for growing beard and who worked in ship yards to learn the skill to modernize Russia came to life in her class. Mr. T. Selvanayagam taught me geography and I am still enthralled by the dedication he had in preparing for his lessons. Physical geography was his forte. His description of formation and shapes of desert are still fresh in my memory. Mr. L.M. Joseph took government. A perfect teacher to teach the subject of criticism and comments. The politics and the law- it is all about good criticism. The bar he sets up for leaders were very high. He later assumed duties as the Principal of Kaluthavalai Maha Vidyalam and put the school on the map by achieving great heights. Mrs. Vannithamby took English lessons for the boisterous advanced level class with lots of tolerance. I was very fortunate to have these great teachers. I do not remember Kamala Kamalanathan taking any classes for me.

Rev. Fr. Fingler, Rev. Fr. Nee, Rev. Fr. Basil, Rev. Fr. Leon, Rev. Fr. Paul Satkunayagam and Rev. Fr. Motha were the Prefects of Disciplines who maintained very strict discipline and order. The threat of punishment by cane was a deterrent to do mischief on the line and in the classrooms. Each had their own style. Fr. Motha even went to the movie theaters to get the students who cut classes and sneak to matinee shows.

The system of education divided the students into two streams-Science and Arts. I also remember the science teachers. Mr. Somanader, Mr. Pathmanathan, Mr. Markandayer, Mr. Sabaratnam, Miss. Raphael, Mrs. Hensman, Mr. and Mrs. Rasanayagam, Gunam Master, Mr. Packiaratnam, and Ms. Edwards, I am told that they did excellent service to the students. Mr. Andreas master has to be remembered for his coaching in cricket. The cricket matches with Central College were a feast to Mattakkalappu.

Mr. N. Pathmanathan, Mr. Mounaguru, Mr. Kuhamoorthy, and Mr. Mahalingam also taught at St. Michael's College after they graduated from the University and during their transition period before they found permanent employment.

When Rev. Fr. Gnanpragasam S. J., was the Principal, under his guidance the dream soccer team went to Ceylon School tournament finals and became the runners up. It is a treat for the eye to watch them play football. Jothy David, one of the team member lives in Mississauga.

And then came to the College, Rev. Fr. Peiris S.J. as Principal. A great and well renowned educationist came from St. Aloysius College Galle, a brother Jesuit School, to manage, operate and run the College. College was in a fight with the Government for finances to run the school. Rev. Fr. Miller S.J. describes the struggle in detail the College had with the Government, in an article that he wrote in the Souvenir. It was a tough and a rough time for the College. The Government was pressurizing the School to give up its fight to remain a private school. Fr. Peiris was

going door to door to collect funds. He introduced Sinhala to the Tamil students novel ways to attract parents. He attracted and wooed the Sinhala students and opened up a Sinhala section. St. Michael's put up carnivals to raise funds. In the end it was found to be too much for the Jesuits. In the best interest of the College and its students, the College was handed over to the government in 1970.

It is a coincident that I left college in 1968. I left College when it was in highest peak of its glory. The College was enjoying the best results Ordinary Level and Advanced Level Examinations.

Remember also the history of the College has come full circle. The circle starts with a point from the Missionaries from distant lands came to Mattakkalappu with the flame of education and lit it.

When I think of my College and the servitude I enjoyed as a right from the priest of the distant lands these apt verses from my great Poet comes to my mind

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நண்பனாய், மந்திரியாய், நல்லாசிரியனுமாய்,
பண்பிலே தெய்வமாய்ப் பார்வையிலே சேவகனாய்,
எங்கிருந்தோ வந்தான், இடைச்சாதி யென்று சொன்னான்.
இங்கிவனை யான்பெறவே என்னதவஞ் செய்து விட்டேன்!
கண்ணன் எனதகத்தே கால்வைத்த நாள்முதலாய்
எண்ணம் விசாரம் எதுவுமவன் பொறுப்பாய்ச்
செல்வம், இளமாண்பு, சீர், சிறப்பு, நற்கீர்த்தி,
கல்வி, அறிவு, கவிதை, சிவயோகம்,
தெளிவே வடிவாம் சிவஞானம், என்றும்
ஒளிசேர் நலமனைத்தும் ஓங்கிவருகின்றன காண்!
கண்ணனை நான் ஆட்கொண்டேன்!
கண்கொண்டேன் கண்கொண்டேன்!
கண்ணனை யாட்கொள்ளக் காரணமும் உள்ளனவே

Long live St. Michaels College in its service to Mattakkalappu!!!!

கல்வி மீது தணியாத தாகம்

தமிழ் மீது முழுமையான மோகம்

விளையாட்டின் மீது குறையாத வேகம்

இத்தனையும் தந்த புனித மைக்கலுக்கு

நீ என்ன தந்தாய்?

ரசாயனமும் பௌதிகமும் நிறைவாக கற்றாய்

வர்த்தகமும் பொருளாதாரமும் ஆழமாக கற்றாய்

கணிதமும் உயிரியலும் கணிசமாக கற்றாய்

உலக மொழி ஆங்கிலமும் கற்று தந்த

புனித மைக்கலுக்கு நீ என்ன தந்தாய்?

கூடைபந்து கால்பந்து என்று துடிப்பான விளையாட்டு

நாவன்மை மெய்வன்மையென மேன்மைதரும் பயிற்சிகள்

முதலுதவி சாரணியமென பலவகை ஊக்குவிப்பு

புத்தக பூச்சியாய் வளராதே என்று புகட்டிய

புனித மைக்கலுக்கு நீ என்ன தந்தாய்?

நில புலங்களை நீ எழுதித்தர வேண்டாம்

பொன்னையும் பொருளையும் வாரி வழங்க வேண்டாம்

பழைய மாணவர் சங்கம் வளர்க்க முன்வரவேண்டும்

கலங்கரை விளக்காக உன் கல்லூரி தொடர்ந்திட

உன் கடமையை செய்திடு