



# Let’s eat our greens

It’s such a wonderful feeling when you come back home and your mother tells you that she has prepared your favourite ‘*daal ka halwa*.’ Such feelings were substituted by a healthy diet prepared by our hostel chef. At times, I thought, more than a chef, he was a doctor. Every meal in a boarding school is a surprise, a very different surprise than that prepared by our mothers. Sometimes it was a vegetable I didn’t like and sometimes it was a preparation otherwise banned at home.

In a boarding school, we were made to eat anything and everything. But look at the brighter side. At the end of my stay in the hostel, I had tasted every vegetable available and edible. Perhaps, it’s the only place which teaches you to be a food critic. Today, I miss that food so much that even a chef of a five star restaurant can’t match those preparations. It touches the heart and not just taste buds.

My mother got the shock of her life when I came home during my holidays. No matter what she prepared, I gulped it down with ease without complaining or demanding anything special. I liked everything. Even today it gives me great joy if unexpectedly, a long missing vegetable is prepared at home. It’s a great lesson for every mother, considering what it takes to feed children that recommended diet called ‘greens.’ Children world over seem to have developed a hatred for green vegetables. They feel that it’s a conspiracy against them by their parents to make them green. Unfortunately, it’s sad that only few mothers are able to achieve what every mother desires - of making her children eat their green vegetables. As for the rest of the mothers, I would advise them not to give their children too many choices because soon they’ll start being fussy about everything. Thankfully, I was in a hostel and I developed the habit of adjusting with anything and everything. Today, I can go to any corner of the world and enjoy heartily any meal I get there.

The other good thing I learned at the hostel refractory was not to waste any food. Apart from all the good things existing in the world we live in, we were also introduced to ugly realities like millions of people who go hungry every night. So we landed up respecting every morsel which went into our mouths. That’s why, we always thank God before and after our meals. He is the one who gives us our daily bread that gives us the energy to do our work.

### The Mann School

Before The Meals  
O'god, We Are Thankful To You,  
For What We Are About To Receive.

After The Meals  
O'god, We Are Thankful To You,  
For What We Have Just Received.

### Lawrence School LoveDale, Ooty

Before The Meals  
For what we are about to receive,  
May the Lord make us truly thankful.

After The Meals  
For food and fellowship  
We thank you our Lord.

### Welham's Boys School, Dehradun

Before The Meals  
Bless O' Lord  
For These Your Gifts,  
Which Of Your Bounties,  
We Are About To Receive.

After The Meals  
We Thank You Lord,  
For All The Blessings,  
We Have Received.

### Lawrence School, Sanawar (Old Grace)

Before The Meals  
For The Food We Are About To Receive,  
May The Lord Make Us Truly Thankful.

Amen

### Birla Public School, Pilani

ॐ सह नावतु। सह नौ भुनक्तु।  
सह वीर्यं कर्वावहे।  
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहे॥  
ॐ शान्तिः! शान्तिः! शान्तिः!!

Om, may he protect us both (teacher and the taught). May he look after us both to enjoy (the fruits of scriptural study). May we both exert together (to find the true meaning of the sacred text). May our studies be fruitful so that we acquire lusture. May we never quarrel with each other.  
Om peace be! Peace be!! Peace be!!!

### Mayo College, Ajmer

ओम् तत्सत् ब्रह्मन् परमस्तु ।

हिन्दी अनुवाद—वह ओउम् ही सत्य, ओउम् ही ब्रह्म और ओउम् ही श्रेष्ठ है ।

### Lawrence School, Sanawar

ओम् एकदन्तं सोढम् प्रदक्षम् ब्रह्मधः स्वान्  
पादुः स्वज्ञाः आयो नः आरोग्यं भद्रं वेदतुः  
ओम् शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

हिन्दी अनुवाद – वराह रूप में समस्त पृथ्वी को धारण करने में समर्थ, वामन रूप में समस्त ब्रह्माण्ड को पैरों से नापने वाले, निद्रा को अपने वश में रखने वाले, कल्याणकारी ईश्वर अपनी आज्ञा से हमारी आयु, स्वास्थ्य और कल्याण में वृद्धि करें। सभी जगह शान्ति स्थापित हो।

So even before we put the first morsel of food in our mouth we should always thank God. This is also the reason why I chose to keep the title of the book, 'Let's pray before our meal.' For it is the energy from the bread which He has been bestowing on us that I got the energy to write this book.

If you ask any person who has been to a boarding school, you'll know what I am talking about. Apart from making the students eat all vegetables without cribbing, a boarding school teaches every student a lot many things other than vegetables.

The right time for every meal is something that everyone takes home from a boarding school. Every hostel ensures that students are served food at the right time and in plenty. Like, in a boarding school, meals are served about five times a day: breakfast, morning refreshment, lunch, evening refreshment and dinner. In spite of getting food five times a day, we somehow always remained hungry. Not that they did not give us in plenty but because our eyes and greed were bigger than our tummies. Somehow, we still managed to fit in a *laddoo* or two, right after a hearty meal. Our housemasters knew this, but they never bothered to stop us simply because they also got a share of the booty sent by our mothers.

Another thing I am proud of, cultured into me by my boarding school upbringing, is that today, I have taken my table manners to The Mann School too. We took the decision to introduce to our students chopsticks, apart from the usual forks and knives. I do remember the days when a pair of chopsticks left me utterly confused in a Chinese restaurant. I actually felt as if I was in China and ended up completely lost. Though at that time, like anyone from a small town, nothing could substitute a hand when it came to tearing pieces of hot rotis and dipping it into a bowl of *daal tadka*. In fact, initially I had a hard time using a knife and a fork. There were times, when I used to secretly eat with my hands when the mess staff and teachers' eyes were on other students.

Call it the curiosity of a man going beyond his way to introduce new things to students. It was not a bad idea, or so we thought. More than a compulsion, it became a fine source of amusement for all of us. Everyone loved playing with it while learning. Though it was meant for noodles, rice, and other food items the boys got busy trying to pick up anything and everything they could with two thin sticks. These chop sticks also temporarily turned many boys into wannabe rock band drummers. The chopsticks were the drum sticks and the crockery turned into imaginary drums. Thankfully, we had a carpentry unit at school that readily met up with their demands, since many chopsticks were taken away by the children as souvenirs and toys to play with.

Continuing with the topic on home delicacies and special treats, these were something absent from the hostel refractory. Unlike overt pampering by parents back home, where exploration of sweet taste buds was too frequent, at the hostel, our tongues were at the mercy of the small portion of sweet delights that accompanied our otherwise boring plates. That small portion of sweet dish was like the treasure chest of Long John Silver and we used to protect it with both our palms. That's because greedy eyes of every single member of the table were on it. Since it was a small portion and was given to us merely to leave a sweet taste in our mouth after meals, it was not enough for any one of us. And to the delight of a few greedy future diabetic patients, at times, the electricity would go off right in the middle of the meal. Call it a coincidence or a result of their prayers. On one of the many eventful days in the refractory, the electricity went off in between our meals and along with it our sweets disappeared too. In the veil of darkness everyone pounced on each other's sweets. That day was the launch of the great game called, 'Sweet stealing in the dark'. I should say that it surpassed every other game of the school and it was by far the most actively participated game of the school. The game rules were quite simple. Once the light goes off, one had to protect one's sweets by covering it with one's palms. If they were even microseconds late in doing that, their sweets will go down to the nearest stomach. It was fun in a way if you keep snatching sweets from others.

Date & Day	Breakfast 7:30 AM	Refreshment 11:45AM	Lunch 2:05PM	Refreshment 4:50PM	Dinner 8:00 PM
26.11.2018 Monday	Aloo Paratha with Plain Curd, Pickle, Aloo Chutney and Fruits	*****	Rajma Masala Gravy, Potato Methi Veg, Tawa Roti, Jeera Pulao, Boondi Raita, Pickle and Mix Salad	Tea with Biscuits	Egg Curry / Malai Kofta, Moong Dal, Tawa Roti, Jeera Rice, Pickle and Sevan
27.11.2018 Tuesday	Pav Bhaji with Coriander Sauce, Cornflakes, Milk and Fruits	Vegetable Macroni	Channa Dal, Sarson ka Saag Veg, Tawa Roti, Jeera Pulao, Bathua Raita, Pickle and Mix Salad	Coffee with Veg Hotdog	Masoor Dal, Brinjal Bharta Veg, Plain Paratha, Mutter Pulao, Pickle and Rice Kheer
28.11.2018 Wednesday	Mooli Paratha with Plain Curd, Pickle, Aloo Chutney and Fruits	Saboodana Aloo Tikki with Tamarind Sauce	Black Channa Gravy, Pumpkin Masala Veg, Tomato Pulao, Tawa Roti, Boondi Raita, Pickle and Mix Salad	Coffee with Namakpare	Hot N Sour Soup Veg, Veg Noodles, Ginger Chicken, Paneer Manchurian, Fried Rice, Schezwan Sauce and Fruit Custard
29.11.2018 Thursday	Masala Omellete / Bread Roll, Butter Bread, Porridge Milk and Fruits	Chocolate Pastry	Netaji ki Kardihi, Potato Cauliflower Veg, Tawa Roti, Plain Rice, Pickle, Papad and Mix Salad	Tea with Frenchfries	Ghiya Channa Dal, Spinach Corn Veg, Tawa Roti, Pulao, Pickle and Jaggery
30.11.2018 Friday	French Toast / Cheese Outlet, Butter Bread, Veg Poha, Milk and Fruits	Idli Sambhar with Coconut Sauce	Urad Channa Dal, Jaipuri Bhindi Veg, Pulao, Tawa Roti, Carrot Raita, Pickle and Mix Salad	Coffee with Biscuits	Masoor Dal, Soya Chaap Veg, Tawa Roti, Veg Biryani, Pickle and Shahi Toast
01.12.2018 Saturday	Puri with Aloo Gravy Veg, Pickle, Mint Chutney, Cornflakes and Milk	Read Sauce Pasta	Dal Makhani, Aloo Gobhi Fried, Jeera Rice, Tawa Roti, Cucumber Raita, Pickle and Mix Salad	Seasonal Fruits	Curry Chicken / Palak Paneer, Yellow Dal, Tawa Roti, Jeera Pulao, Pickle and Vinegar Onion
02.12.2018 Sunday	<b>Refreshment : 8:00AM</b> Fruits	*****	<b>Brunch : 10:00 AM</b> <b>Combined</b> Dal Kachodi with Amritsari Cholley, Hing Jeera Aloo, Coriander Sauce, Veg Biryani, Boondi Raita and Lemon Onion	Tea with Veg Pakore	Arhar Dal Fry Potato Peas Veg, Tawa Roti, Jeera Pulao, Pickle, Salad and Rice Kheer  <b>CONTINENTAL FOOD : B.house (7:00PM)</b> <b>Starter:</b> Cream Of Mushroom Soup <b>Main Course:</b> Roasted Chicken with Hot Garlic Sauce, Cottage Cheese with Cantonese Sauce, Tomato Spaghetti, French Fries and Garlic Bread <b>Desert:</b> Hot Chocolate Brownie
F&B MANAGER			PRINCIPAL		

**Menus :—**

## BREAKFAST

Hot or cold milk, according to season. In addition one of the following is served alternatively :—

Biscuit, Toast or Bread with butter and jam porridge and a vegetable dish.

## LUNCH

For lunch boys are served two dishes, one of a seasonal vegetable and the other of dhal. Out of salad—Chutteny, Murrabba, Pickles, Honey or PAPAR—one or two are served. Some curd preparation and sweet dish is given at least three times a week. During summer, rice and curd is served daily.

## AFTER-NOON TEA

Tea, Milk, Cold drinks or Lassi is served according to season with one of the following :—

Indian Sweets, Cakes, Pakoris, etc. etc.

## SUPPER

Supper includes two dishes either of two seasonal vegetables, or, one of a seasonal vegetable and the other of special curry or dhal. Sweet Pulao or some other sweet dish is served at least twice a week. During winter Salad, Chutney or PAPAR is served at supper, while during summer supper is supplemented with Ice Cream or Custard or Fruit Salad.

*Note:*—Pure Ghee is used in all the preparations.

In a boarding school children are made to eat a wide variety of food items. Starting right from Indian to Chinese to Continental; good boarding schools serve a wide variety of nutritional dishes from various part of the country and the world.

Above : A menu from the kitchen of The Mann School.

Above right: 1957 menu of another boarding school.



Most of the boarding schools run state-of-the-art kitchens under the supervision of hotel management professionals. The F&B manager of these kitchens and dining halls are responsible right from maintaining the hygiene factor to the nutritional value of the food that is being served. Seen in the picture is a particular section from the kitchen of MS.



Above: Students of MS enjoying a quiet and sumptuous meal in the dining hall. In a boarding school, the dining hall is the place which would make anyone feel at home. Here, all the students and the teachers sit and eat together. Simple fare, yet so hygienically prepared and served is savoured with such content that it would please even a mother's heart. 'Some more, please.' Left: Here the students of MS are enjoying their meal in the dining hall while attendants rush to and fro, filling their empty plates and their tummies.



Above: Students savouring Continental food in a formal dining session.

With time, good boarding schools, besides serving nutritious and hygienically prepared fare, also pamper their students' tongues by dishing out Continental cuisine, Chinese cuisine along with regional cuisines topping it with an array of sweets. Good food and hygiene has always been one of the most important aspects of any boarding school. Since 1865, in Lawrence School Sanawar, a strict control was kept on quantity as well as the quality of the rations. Firewood for cooking was given through a special permission granted by the Maharaja of Patiala to be collected from the forest that extended upto Pinjore. Children over 16 years received 12 Oz of meat daily with maximum of 10 percent of bone content. Animals were butchered in the butchery under strict supervision. Tea including milk was one pint per child. Band boys used to receive additional 20z of bread and 3 oz of milk. Monitors and Orderlies received 6 bottles of sauce and 6 bottles of vinegar. Special diets and ghee was reserved for small children.

Talking of sweets, how can I forget Mr. J.B. Singh, one of our house masters. He too played the game but a different version of it. He had sugar problem and the doctor had instructed him to avoid sweets. Being a teacher he was a man of experience and he found a way out to satisfy his desire for sweets. Whenever we used to get a *rasgulla*, which apparently was his favourite, he would squeeze the syrup out and eat the *gullas*. That went on for a few days. Just a few days, though, for soon greed overpowered his self-control. He started having the syrup too, after relishing the squeezed *gullas*. And every time he did that, you should have seen the expression on his face while gulping down those *gullas* and then the rass. It was like, he was in the seventh heaven. No wonder, gluttony is one of the seven cardinal sins. But with sins so sweet, who would want to remain a saint anyway? I won't blame him for not heeding his doctor's advice; the temptation was too strong back then. Moreover, our teachers used to stay with us and eat the same food. He too didn't have the privilege of taking a stroll to the nearest sweet shop every day. But thank God, there was Mr. Kalia, our Mess Manager. Because of him we never ran out of sweets. In fact the famous Kadhi was named after him. More popularly known as '*Kalia ji ki Kadhi*'. It was so popular among the students, that even today on every Old Students Day, *Kalia ji ki kadhi* never misses the menu.

Those were the little excitements and joys we had in the refectory. It was only after some time that I became comfortable with the crockery. But I am thankful to the table manners we had to follow then. In fact, those manners gave me the confidence to dine with anyone. Not to forget, a gentleman who can eat all the vegetables.

Call it fate or coincidence; with all the knowledge and appetite for the regular and exotic world of cuisines, I had to land up in the hospitality industry. I joined the Taj Group of Hotels. It was a beautiful experience where I was further polished to perfection. There was a time when I loved to grill. Whenever I went home during my vacations, it was something I cherished. Marinating meat and other vegetables and putting them over a low fire and watching the colour turn from red to dark red, almost black with strokes of red. But that was in the midst of green fields, chirping birds and a summer that most people would hate. At The Taj, it was in the midst of ten other chefs inside an air-conditioned room. I had my share of both the worlds. If you ask me, today I can formally dine with Mr. Barack Obama in the White House as well as eat under a neem tree on my farms in the peak of summer. That would be in somewhat forty five degrees during the acclaimed Indian summer.

Talking of food, back in the hostel, the only people who used to get a completely different meal were the boys who were sick. It always was a hard decision to pretend to be sick, just to escape the classes because in the 'Sick Room,' we were served only healthy food. That would be the infamous '*khichdi*' with capsules and tonics for dessert. Of course, how could we forget our very dear Mr. Juglan, the all-in-one doctor. He had a remedy for every ailment and it was called, 'APC tablet'. We called it "All Purpose Cure" (APC). The other famous remedy was, 'Tincture', a purple coloured liquid. Bruises, external injuries, knee pain, ankle pain and all other pains, anywhere in the body had one answer, Tincture and on top of this we had our so called 'healthy diet'. So, every time we used to pretend that we were sick, we made sure that it was nothing that would put us on a healthy diet.

Call it fate or the strange ways of the Almighty, after Mr. Juglan, the infirmary in-charge in the nineties was a noble man called Iodex. I am quite serious when I write this. His name was Iodex. Everyone knew him by that name. Just as Mr. Juglan was known for his multi-cure APC tablet and Tincture, the next in-charge was known for his fondness for Iodex. From pain in the knees to the forehead, he had just one solution, IODEX. Well, the legend continued and we still talk about him and many more like him who relieved our pain, no matter with what.

It was not just the infirmary that had its share of nicknames. 'Tootli' was the name given to Mahender Singh in 1960's because one ill-fated day he broke one of his arms. Though his bones were back to normal shape, his name couldn't. Call it coincidence or fate, some years after that, in the 1970's, another boy with a similar name, Mahender Gupta was named 'Tootli' and he too got the title because he broke one of his arms. He is still called by this name. Sushil Sharma, a beautiful name, which many of us did not know including his classmates. He was from the 1980 batch and he was only

known as '228.' It was his number in the hostel.

In the world of nicknames, Virender Singh of 1976 batch deserved the gold. He was known as 'Titar' (Partridge), a breed of bird found in the district of Dadri, Haryana. I guess, I do not have to tell you where he belonged or how he was christened with that name. Among the obvious ones, 'Chokhu' was a name given to the ones who wore specs, "Billi", because one had blue eyes, and he is also one of my closest friends, and is now a Brigadier. At this point, I would like to recall a very funny incident surrounding my dear friend Billi. Once it so happened, that Billi's father came to pay him a visit. As we were all playing nearby, his father walked up to us and asked us to fetch his son Nalin. For a moment, all of us looked at each other with surprise and stupefied expressions on our faces. Then his father, seeing us in dilemma started giving us a pictorial description of his son. Still unable to figure out the concerned boy we tried hard to recall who that boy could be, but then up to no avail. Then all of a sudden, one amongst us with a thousand watt bulb of discovery shining over his head and a flashing 'Close Up smile' from ear to ear, screamed out, "Oh! Uncle, you mean Billi?" Now it was Billi's father's turn to be surprised. In a flash he was left all alone as each one of us went screaming, "Billi, your father is here." Till date, I have not forgotten this incident and whenever I overhear my students at The Mann School christening their friends with such religiosity and solemnity, I cannot help but smile at them, while recalling Billi's incident.

'Naxalite' was another name given to Ashok Gupta of 1976 batch, as he was from West Bengal. In fact, till today, not many of his batch mates know his real name. In fact, as far as christening friends with nicknames is concerned, it is the same in all boarding schools across the world. 'Bad egg' for a layman may be a rotten egg, but this is not so in Eton School, Britain. For them, a bad egg is someone who is nasty and unpleasant. 'Going abroad' for any one of us would mean sailing or flying all across the world and landing in some exotic place. But at Eton, this would mean that you are all set to cool off in the infirmary. As the list goes, one can even write a book on nicknames and their meanings and reasons.

But this list, no matter how lengthy, would be totally incomplete without the mention of our teachers and of course with their nicknames. In schools across the world, be it boarding or day schools, students, apart from their peers, also christen their teachers with some amusing to out rightly hilarious names. The reason, of course, varies from school to school and from student to student. But had it not been for these nicknames, we would have forgotten them years back. Although it may seem impudence and brash temerity on the student's part to insult teachers in this manner but there were some who took to this christening with a pinch of salt.

A particular incident which has come to my mind is the one involving one of our teachers at BPS. We had named one of our teachers with a funny name and we thought he did not know it. Then one day, he overheard us laughing at his nickname. Walking up to us, he told us that he did not mind what names they have given him but he only has a small request. And the request being that, we should add 'Ji' to whatever the name we had given him. Certainly, that day instead of we having the last laugh he went off smiling and no wonder we were left speechless. Post that day, our respect for him only grew and today we remember him not with his nickname, but the method he applied to teach us one valuable lesson and that too without leaving any bruised ego or hard feelings on both the parties.

Now coming back to pain and pain killers, it's strange how we remember our infirmary staff so well, even after so many years have passed by. Probably, it's because whenever we met or interacted with them, we were in pain and always saw them as "angels with healing power." I would, however, like to change my words here, as this might not apply to Sister Mani, whom none of us ever considered to be any angel. For us she would always remain, if I am to borrow few words from today's youth, 'Iron Maiden', a woman, who does not know any pain but can only give a lot of pain. Read on and you will understand better, the reason behind her brief christening with this name.

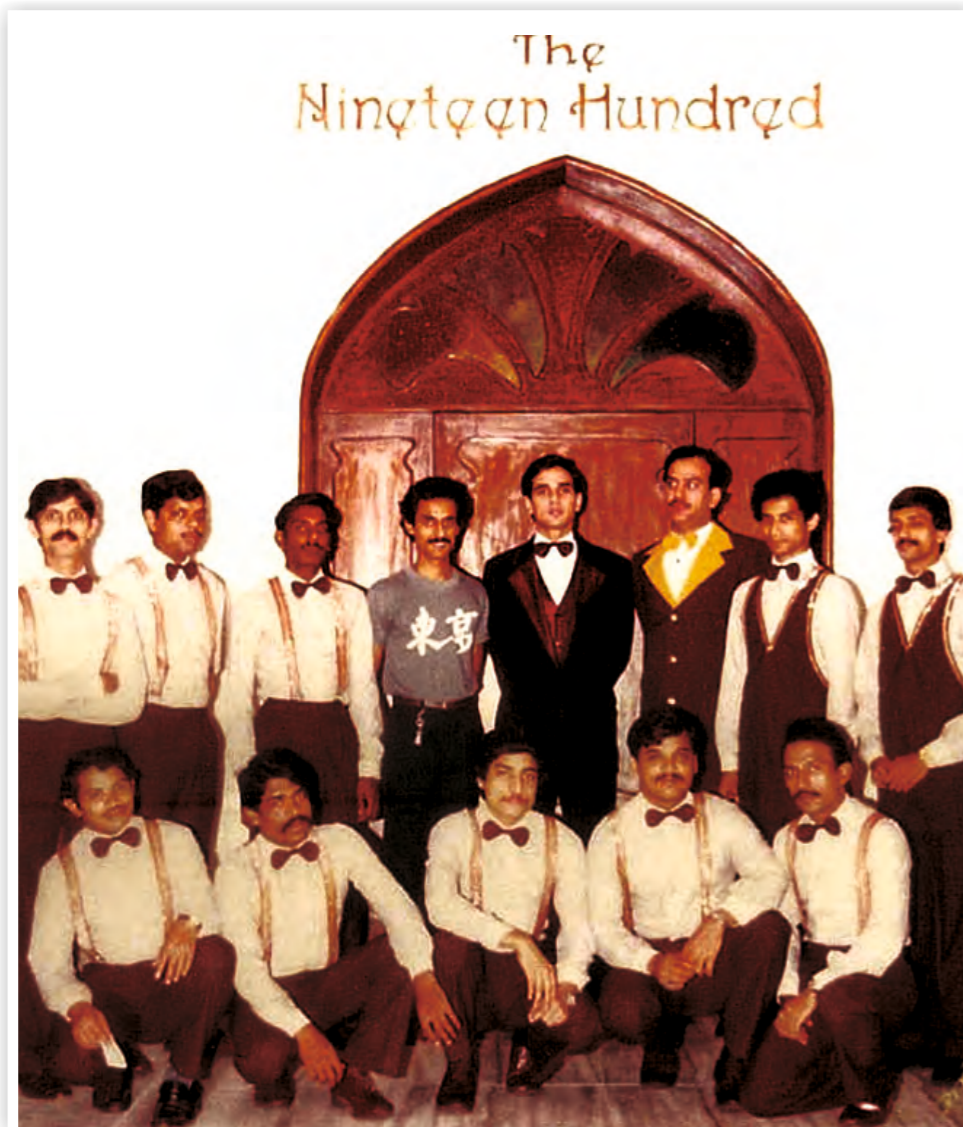
Every school practises what we call 'Routine Vaccination'. At my School, Sister Mani and Sister George were the designated nurses to give those hated injections. Whenever there used to be a day for that dreaded routine, two lines



**‘Smiling away sickness.’** Left: A student recovering at the MS infirmary. A good boarding school of today boasts of a well-equipped infirmary or hospital complete with specialized resident doctors and nurse along with adequate facilities.



Above: Snapshots of the infirmary of The Mann School.



#### '13=1900.'

Above: The 13 exclusive staff of 'The 1900', the exclusive club, at The Taj. Our crisp suits never crumpled under pressure and we ensured that a guest is treated as God. Standing on the back row I am fourth from the right.

Left: Lobbying with a smile. At my desk, as the Lobby Manager of nuances of our legendary hospitality while practically explaining to me the meaning of 'Work is worship'. Moreover, my stint with The Taj also helped me in understanding and providing the students with facilities comparable to their homes.



would form for injections. One dedicated to Sister Mani and one for Sister George. Unlike Sister George, who was kind and very gentle while injecting the vaccine, Sister Mani would qualify even to vaccinate an army platoon. She used to almost stab the injection and quickly take it out. So well known was this fact that the line to Sister George would always be longer than the line leading to Sister 'Iron Maiden' Mani. It was quite a funny sight. In fact, we had to be pulled out of Sister George's line to go to Sister Mani's which every one used to dread.

While still being on the topic of pain, I just can't escape writing about another incident that totally got me by my tooth. Once I was admitted to the Sick Room, due to a genuine injury in my mouth. One of my teeth broke while playing hockey under the watchful eyes of our legendary coach Balbir Singh, who was also the captain of the Indian Hockey team. My good friends and game mates came to meet me and see if I was alright and recovering. I thanked the Lord for such great friends, but only for a moment. I took the 'Thanks' back, even before it could reach the halfway milestone to heaven, when I saw them search and empty my cupboard, filled with juices, biscuits and fruits. It was raided until the last crumb disappeared. Unable to speak due to my injury, I could only give a harsh look. It didn't make much of a difference to them, though.

Just then Mrs. Banerjee, our English teacher walked in. She came for a visit and like an angel she brought a box of Pilani's famous pedas. This is the best part of being sick. You get lots of special sweets, fruits and juices as gifts from the teachers. She enquired how I was feeling and before leaving she advised me to eat the *pedas* slowly. But at the far corner of the room, a few focused eyes were already preying on the unsuspecting *peda* box. As soon as she left, like a flock of vultures they attacked the poor *peda* box and finished them off within seconds. All that was left for me was the cardboard carcass of the box. I was left there mumbling and helplessly looking at their jaws munching the delicious *pedas*.

Now, whenever I go to Pilani, I make sure I eat the famous *pedas*. It always reminds me of that incident. Since that day I have eaten thousands of *pedas*, I keep wondering how tasty it would have been, if I had got those *pedas* that day. The good part though is that, because of the Sick Room incident, I remember all those hungry rascals, in a good way and always have a wonderful story to tell. All thanks to Pilani's *pedas* and a broken tooth.

#### The wizard with his disciples.

In the picture, the legendary Major Dhyana chand (sitting third from the left) as coach of Birla Public School's hockey squad in the year 1958 posing with the school team.





‘Let’s pray before our meal.’ Students offering prayers before their meal.