

1957 - 1960 RkC Years

Square Peg in a Round Hole

No apologies here but this chapter is unashamedly all about me.

Rajkumar College, Rajkot, India was established in 1868 by the Princes and Chiefs of Kathiawar



[currently Saurashtra region of Gujarat]. It is the oldest of the colleges in India, founded for the education of the Princely order. The education was in English medium with complete emphasis on western culture.

In 1938, on the initiative of its founding members, the College became a Public School (private school in American terms). RKC has a 26 acre (105,000 m²) campus in the heart of Rajkot city.

Interview

One day, Bhai took me to the college. I did not know the reason for the visit. There, I was interviewed by the headmaster, Mr. Kulkarni. The interview was in English. Now the last time I had English as a subject was in 1952, in Aden. I had forgotten most of my English. My vocabulary was about 20 words. I was asked my name and I sort of answered in broken English. Bhai was disappointed that I could not answer these simple questions. It was decided that I would be put in a special class to learn English.

Fitting- In

I started school immediately. I was put in a special class A2, which was the lowest one could get. Most of the other boys in the class were 2 to 4 years junior to me.

The school had 3 houses for the boarders. Prep wing, Junior wing and senior wing. As I was 14, I was put in the senior wing. The house master, Mr. Rogerson was Scottish, an ex Indian army Captain and dedicated to the school.

I encountered my first problem when I tried to use the loo. I walked into one cubicle and found the seat to be 2 ft above ground. I tried to squat on this but failed. So sheepishly I came out.

I was used to squatting loos with hole in the ground and bucket underneath to collect the bits!!

Fortunately I had enough sense to try other cubicles and found there were 2 other cubicles with Indian type squatting loos. I also found that all I had to do was to pull a chain to get rid of the stuff!!

My second problem was at the meal time. Going into the mess room, I found that we had to sit at the table. there were knives and forks. At home we sat on the floor and ate using our hands. I looked at the others and tried to emulate the procedure of getting a potato in to my mouth using the fork. First attempt was a disaster as I ended up having gravy all over my uniform shirt. I was a definite subject of ridicule for the boys.

social status

Suddenly, I was in midst of boys speaking GujEnglish. Conversation was difficult, especially instructions from monitors and prefects.

I soon realized that my general knowledge was next to nothing.

I had no idea of current affairs.

I did not read English literature.

We did not have a car or telephone at home.

We did not get newspapers or magazines at home.

I read a few Gujarati magazines. In Gondal, at the end of our street, there was club for workers (Majur Kalyan Kendra.) there were magazines for children which I used to read, cover to cover.

Apart from a period of 4 weeks, about a year back. We had a tenant living downstairs who distributed newspapers and magazines. One month, when he could not pay the rent, Bapuji accepted payment in kind - Newspapers and magazines.

At home, occasionally , We were allowed to listen to music. Most of the time radio (or wireless as I was told at RkC) was turned on for the news - in English.

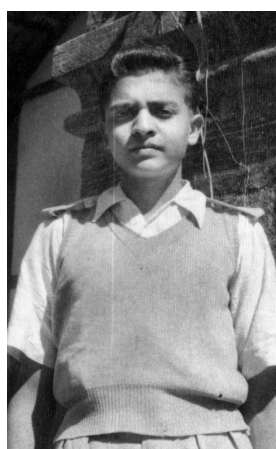
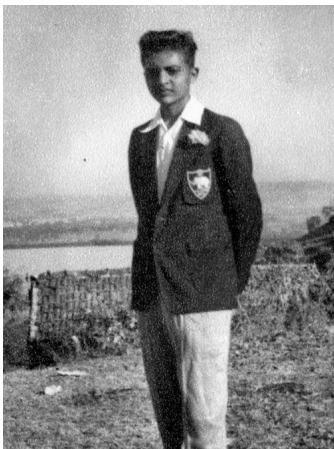
Occasionally we were allowed to go to the pictures. The process to get permission was complex. We had to convince Motaba and she would plead our case with Bapuji.

I was neither a sports person nor familiar with current sports scene.

One needed all or most of above attributes to fit in.

I did not, so I was teased, made fun of and bullied. Here, I must make it clear that it was boys who thought they were far superior to me because they had all the above advantages. The teachers, the house master, Mr Rogerson and Headmaster, Mr Kulkarni, were very pleasant and helpful at all times.

I hope this does not sound like a *whinge*. That is how it was at home, in middle of the twentieth century.

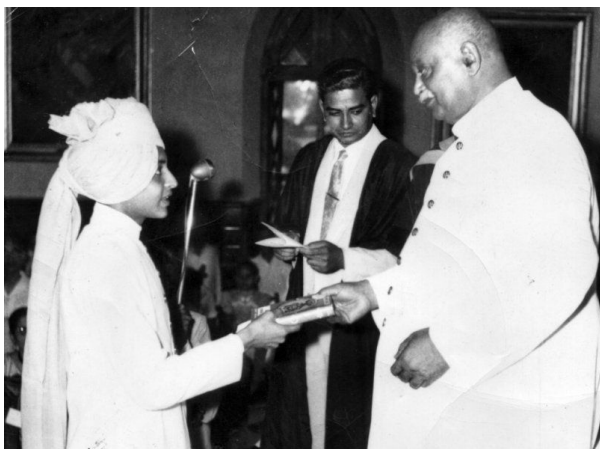


I found the headboy, of my wing, Zahid, to be a very kind person. I tried to talk to him about my concerns and it seemed that he was listening. Zahid was an all round sportsman and sang well. I looked up to him - he was 6' and I, 5' 2" at that time. I saw him as my role model - something I could or would ever achieve. That reverence was going to come and bite me in later years. Still, I had uniform for classes, PE kit, a blazer and trousers for evenings. The family at Gondal thought I was lucky to have all this luxury. It never occurred to me that this was costing my parents, a bomb.

First Year - Special Class (1957)

So I started in special-Need class. There were 2 groups - A1 and A2. A1 was for students who were conversant in some English. I was placed in A2 group which was for boys who had little or no English. At 14, I was, probably, one of the oldest boys in class. For the first time I had few textbooks given to me.

Here, I discovered maths, especially Algebra. I did not need English to understand maths.



Slowly, I got on with English grammar. Teachers were wonderful. My English teacher was Bapuji's ex colleague. He paid special attention to me.

In December 1957 I completed my year, coming first in the class!!

My real joy was scoring 98% in Algebra.

Bhai was really happy with result and made a point of attending the prize giving ceremony which took place in 1958. I had to dress in ceremonial dress long coat, tight chorni and safa (turban). The prizes

were given out by Jamsaheb, the Maharaja of Jamnagar.

When Bhai left, he gave me his old Rolleiflex, twin lens, camera. He also left his bicycle which he purchased during his visit.

I found that I was no good at sport. Although I enjoyed cricket, I was no good at fielding as I ran out of breath. Same problem with football. I ended up playing hockey but did not achieve much as I was not allowed to play with left handed stick. In athletics, I thought I was good at high jump as I represented my school in Gondal, in state olympics.

Here I found that my feet first jump was superseded by head-first-and-twist jump which I could not master. So I used to sneak off for swimming - only to get punished if I got caught.

Basically, the school was sport oriented. If one was not good any sport, only thing one could do was to concentrate on studies.

Just before my first summer vacation, Bapuji wrote to me. Could I go to Manishanker Kaka's house in Vijay Plot. They would have my bus fare to get to Gondal. (Manishanker Kaka was Bhai's first cousin, on maternal side).

So I went to Gondal, carrying bagful of dirty laundry. Jyotika reminds me that Motaba promptly handed her the laundry for washing. Sorry Jyotika.

My friend, sunder

At about this time, Sunder had completed his SSC (Secondary School Certificate), in Gondal and had moved to Rajkot, for further studies. He would come in the afternoons and sit on the boundary wall watching sport. Sometimes I would be able to walk over to him for a chat.

In 2014, I tracked him down and we met, after 57 years. He reminded me that all I wanted him to do was to fill my fountain pen with ink as I did not have an ink pot. My thanks to Jaiminibhai for arranging the meet.

2nd year 1958

I was promoted to form 2b (8th standard),surprisingly, even with lack of English. I had already completed 8th standard in Gondal so I had already lost 2 years of schooling.

By now, I had settled down to the boarding school routine. Classes were difficult as all subjects, except Hindi, Sanskrit and Gujarati, were in English. Slowly I found my feet, trying best not to get into trouble. Discipline was strict and every now and then I got in to trouble. Teachers were marvelous and were pleased to help me with my studies.

Mr. Rogerson taught us English. He was a great teacher but most of the time I had difficulty understanding the words he used. To avoid being made fun of, I rarely mentioned that I did not understand.

I started to read. I had great difficulty reading my English literature books. Then I came across a Perry Mason book by E.S. Gardner. That was an easy read. I read couple of books until one day, our house master, Mr. Rogerson, saw me reading. He was not at all happy with my choice of subject matter. "This book uses American English. You should read Agatha Christie", He said. I tried to read one but found it difficult. So that was the end of me reading mystery novels.

On the lighter note, we had entertainment laid out in the club tarrance. The show was choreographed, scripted and produced by Mr. Rogerson and that was my introduction to western culture.

We also had film shows, either in the gymnasium or in the tennis court. That was my introduction to western cinema.

Once a year, there was an entertainment night, presented by each dormitory.

My dormitory decided to do a parody on a face cream advertisement.

"You will be presenting the Ad" I was told.

"Of course, you will have to dress up as a girl. We have a new teacher, Miss Cooper. She has agreed to dress you". I had no choice but to agree.

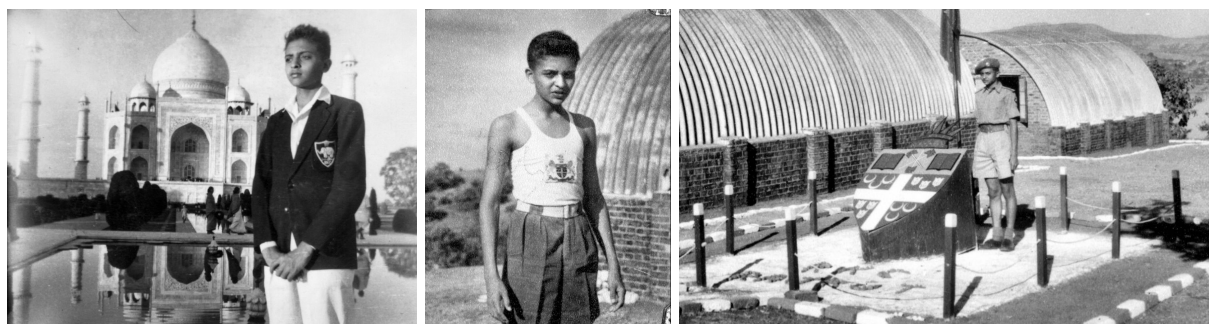
So I met Miss Cooper and I was smitten. She took great care in dressing me in her clothes. I was about her height and build, at the time.

The sketch went very well. Presumably, Miss Cooper had done an excellent job of making me look like a young girl who used *Himalaya face cream*. From then on, I was the recipient of lot of teasing and innuendos.

I started visiting Miss Cooper, before the evening meal. She was extremely good at dealing with young, smitten teenagers.

During the year, I joined NCC (National Cadet Corps).

National Cadet Corps which is a Tri-Services Organization, comprising the Army, Navy and Air Force, engaged in grooming the youth of the country into disciplined and patriotic citizens.



I attended 2 annual NCC camps. First one was in 1958, Khadakwasla, near Pune. The second one was in 1959, in Agra. Both the camps were near army barracks and I thoroughly enjoyed them. The picture in the middle shows me in vest with RKC badge. I did not know that I should have returned it after the camp so I put the badge in my dormitory cupboard. That was a BIG mistake.

The year finished in December and again, I came first in the class.



In early 1959, a **searchlight tattoo** took place in the playground. Most of the boys, especially from the senior wing, were included. The whole thing was choreographed by the housemaster. A use of black back drop was created behind which we all had to sit until our turn came to march.

The waiting was long but one day Praful and Ramesh, sons of Manishnker Trikamji Vyas, from Vijay Plot, noticed that I was sitting there. So they jumped over the wall and we had a great chat. After that, they turned up every evening during rehearsals. So waiting for our turn to march was not that bad after all.

I also sat for an external drawing examination, conducted by the government of Bombay, and attained an A grade.

3rd year 1959

This was an eventful year:

A year of progress, trauma, some highs and some sadness, both at home and at the school. I would cover the events at home, elsewhere but at school, Zahid, the headboy, completed his studies and left for a brief period. A new headboy and head prefect were appointed.

Highs

During the summer vacation, Veenaben and Madhuben got engaged.

In the last term, I had borrowed an old encyclopedia which explained how to make photographic developer. So when I visited Jasubhai, Veenaben's Fiance, in Rajkot, I asked whether I could get these chemicals. Jasubhai was working in a chemical industry at the time. He took to me a photographic wholesaler and I got tins of

Hydroquinone

Sodium carbonate

potassium bromide

bromide paper fixer, *hypo*, ([ammonium thiosulfate](#).)

I also got a box of photographic paper.

After the summer vacation, I was placed in the head prefect's dormitory.

In my last year's school report, the housemaster, Mr Rogerson had said

Mahesh is making a good general progress and is a keen and polite member of the team. I should like him to be smarter and to show more determination at games and P.T.

Excellent Progress in class.

So there was more than a hint of disappointment from the housemaster. I was not going to improve at sport. I was definitely not prefect material. Perhaps, I needed to be given more responsibilities in other areas.

Photography

I asked Mr Rogerson if it was ok for me to do some photo developing in the evenings. "You can not do that in the dormitory". Next day, he suggested I use the ante room which used to be Zahid's room, next to my dormitory for photography. He also suggested that I may consider starting a photography club with the help of one of the teachers, Mr Chhachhi. I was really happy.

Our science teacher was Mr. [Chhaya](#). He was a good teacher and an excellent communicator. I asked him whether he would help me mix these chemicals to form a photo paper developer. He looked at the recipe and thought there might be an error in quantities shown. He suggested I try out

different mixtures and see if they work. "Why don't you use the science lab on Sunday. Use the weighing scales. Do different mixes and see if you get the right tone. Come and collect keys from me, next Sunday". I was amazed. He was trusting me with access to the science lab where there were expensive equipment and some nasty chemicals.

So I setup the darkroom. I had to make sure that I kept paper and chemicals in my cupboard.

Servants' Welfare Association

With a large public school, there were a lot of people working in kitchens, grounds, cleaning etc. Lot of them lived on the premises. The next task given to me was to carry out a census and see if it was viable to run classes for their children. Unfortunately I did not find anyone to help me so I did the census and one Sunday, accompanied by an escort, went to town to buy books, slates, pencils and other material. I was given small room next to the boiler room and I started English classes, 2 evenings a week.

Radio Room

My 3rd character building task was to man Radio room, 2 evenings a week. (Mr. Rogerson insisted that it was called a wireless room). I was to play records and some radio programmes which were piped into the club.

This left me one evening spare. So I used to go see the young teacher, Miss Cooper. She knew how to handle young smitten teenagers and she was polite and I got tea and biscuits and we chatted. Life was good.

The Lows:



I mentioned earlier that I had failed to return a school badge, worn on the P.E. vest. One of the boys must have noticed this item in my cupboard and this was reported to the head prefect who informed, his friend, the headboy.

My cupboard was searched. They confiscated the badge and I was accused of theft, with appropriate punishment. My only worry was that they would open the box of photo paper and ruin the paper. So

it became a schoolboy fun. Search my cupboard, every now and then and watch me squirm as I try to stop them messing with photo paper or chemicals.

The tasks of running English class and radio room I was carrying out in the evenings, made it difficult for me to hear the dinner bell. Invariably, I was few minutes late. This attracted punishment and threats of withdrawal of privileges. It occurred to me that these 2 prefects resented the privileges I had, especially as I was not a prefect. They could not stop me doing these tasks as they were given to me by the housemaster. So they stopped me visiting the young teacher.

During the summer term, I had the external drawing exam. There were 4 or 5 other boys, including the head prefect, who were appearing in this intermediate Drawing exam. It was decided that we would return to school and go to the exam centre together from school. After the exam, we all went to cafe for an icecream. I think it was a dare. I fell for it. Even today, you can just buy one cigarette from virtually, any paanwala or cafe. I smoked a cigarette, probably first one in 5 years and we all had a giggle.

On the first day back at school, there was an assembly in the senior wing. The headboy stood in front of me and suddenly there was an almighty slap on my left ear. To this day, I am surprised that I did not suffer a permanent damage.

The head prefect had mentioned my smoke to the headboy. I thought I was safe as we were in school holidays. Unfortunately it did not occur to me that we were all in school uniforms.

The ex headboy, Zahid, had returned. I am not sure whether he returned as a student or a sports coach. As I did before, I would seek his advice, if I was unsure of anything. I regarded him as my mentor.

A group of 4 boys, including headboy and head prefect thought otherwise and decided on typical but nasty schoolboy prank.

I was woken up at midnight. They said Zahid wanted to see me.

Just outside in the lobby, 2 sofas had been dragged from the club room. Zahid was sitting on one. I was asked to sit next to him. I could see that Zahid was not very comfortable with this. Four of them just hid behind the sofa. I do not know what were they expecting to happen. This only lasted about 30 seconds before they emerged giggling from behind the other sofa.

For them it was typical public school prank.

For me it was the most traumatic experience of my life at RkC.

The Letter

Just before our Christmas break, I was quite intrigued, to get a letter from Bhai's friend, Shahkaka. He had never written to me. He explained that Bhai was finding it difficult to finance my board at RKC. He suggested that because of Bhai's *superiority complex*, he could not tell me himself. Now *superiority complex* was a new word for me. I had to go to one of our sympathetic teachers to ask what it meant.

I was not really happy at the school. So, once I understood what Shahkaka meant, I wrote to Bhai and asked if I could leave RKC without finishing my final year (Secondary School Certificate). I was pleasantly surprised that Bhai agreed.

I did not do very well in the class, coming 6th.

I think it was later half of 1959. It was winter vacation and I was spending my time, as usual, in Gondal. Motaba's brother, Jayantimama (my grand mother's brother) was in Gondal General Hospital. I was cycling back from the hospital after delivering a flask of tea. On the way, I noticed a car had broken down. I recognized the occupants. Our head boy and head prefect were standing by the car. I stopped and invited them to our humble place whilst the car was being attended to. One of the other passenger was Sister (or was it mother) Maria. I am not sure whether Miss Cooper was in the car as well. I was a bit embarrassed to take them to our humble house but not as much when Sister asked to use the toilet. Now that was embarrassing to imagining Sister negotiating our squatting loo with bucket at the bottom - in her crisp white uniform.

4th Year 1960

I was in the final year of Secondary School Certificate (form 10).

The year did not start off very well. The animosity with prefects continued.

One morning, I found that my textbooks had been defaced. I had no choice but to report this to the school prefect who was also my dormitory prefect. After few days I was summoned by the headboy and he informed me that I had done the defacing to get some attention. By now they had labeled me as thief because of the badge, trouble maker and attention seeker.

There was a final little episode which made me wish I was not there anymore.

A new boy, Bipin Shah, had started in the senior wing, early last year. He happened to be the son of Bhai's good friend, Chimanbhai Shah.

Bipin left his watch in the bathroom and it got lost. Someone told him that he had seen me go for my bath, soon after. Bipin did not have the decency to come and ask me. He reported this to the headboy. I might be wrong but the headboy took great pleasure in interrogating and punishing me severely. I do not know whether the watch was ever found.

Soon, there were terminal exams. After my terminal exams, I left RKC. Bhai was pleased that I came 1st in the class.

Just before the end of the term, I was invited, by my classmate, Kirtikumar, along with 2 other school friends, Ibram and Latif, to spend a weekend at a palace in a nearby village, Kotda Sanghani, 8 miles NE of Gondal.

I collected stamps and I was building on the Bhai's collection. Bhai had some rare stamps. I had also some good collection acquired from my penpals in Czechoslovakia, Germany and France.

As I was packing my stuff in a kit bag, I thought the album would get damaged. I asked Ibrahim if he could take it with him and bring it to Kotda Sanghani.

Bhai readily agreed for me to go and I was allowed to take his cine camera with me. As I cycled to Kotda, I was pleased, Bhai did not ask me who was going to be there: 4 classmates and 2 lady

teachers. As teenage boys do, we played around in the nearby river whilst ladies explored the palace, palace grounds and local market. One of the boys was Kirtikumar of Lathi (great grandson of famous poet, Kalapi). He is one of the 2 boys, I am still in contact.

Ibrahim forgot to bring my stamp album. I never saw Ibrahim or my album again.

Footnote

I have not thought about my difficult time at RkC. It has been hidden at the back of my memory until now. I only thought of RkC that helped me build my character. When I visited India in 1974, after 14 years, I wrote to Mr. Rogerson and he sent a car round so that I could go with my wife and son to see him. Of course, he did not remember me. I did not know that he was the principal now. Miss Cooper was the headmistress and she showed us around. They thought I was thinking of boarding my son there. The thought did cross my mind. Unfortunately, life was to change dramatically for me within next 2 months and boarding Vimal there would have been out of the question.

I had a chance meeting with an old RkCian, at a relative's house He mentioned that he had been approached to join a Yahoo group of RkC alumini but he was not interested. I was curious. Did a search and joined the group. I soon realized that my experience at the school was completely different.

Then in 2002, I visited the school with my nephew-in-law, Ankoor Sanghavi, and met Ayaaz Khan, the principal. I remembered him as a 11th form student.

Reading his book, peepoodi recently, seems to have brought all those memories flooding back.

I am sure RkC was responsible for my character building and has played an important part in steering my destiny in the right direction.