

Prof. Masaud Pervez Durrani Sahib

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This article is dedicated to Durrani sahib. The Last time when I visited Petaro, Durrani sahib was so nice to my father and 6 year old son that I was embarrassed.

There were many ways to learn in Petaro – classroom studies, peer assistance, and after-hours access to teachers.

Studies were tough, but our teachers were good. The dorms were not the nicest but the food was plenty and generally good, except for the time when sand got ground up in *Aata* and no one could eat that night. Or when the custard that went bad and all the bathrooms had “house full” scribbled on them.

As I look back I can honestly say that Durrani sahib was THE best teacher that I could have had. Durrani sahib took over as the housemaster towards the end of 1980 from Ghani sahib. His style was obvious to all of us from the night of Ghani sahib’s farewell dinner.

The food was sumptuous and served in Latif house’s ante room. After the speeches and thank you’s, all hell broke loose. And it was obvious from Durrani sahib’s expressions that there would be hell to pay for.

We were summoned for a night fall-in. He was present and I knew we would get a thrashing at the very least. Much to my surprise he just made one statement; *“there are times when we eat to fill our stomachs, and then there are times when it is a social occasion, as cadets you should know the difference”*. I am sure I would have forgotten any collective punishment, but those words still ring true.

Shortly before we joined Petaro, in 1980, part of the hedge in front of Latif house had burned down – a carelessly discarded cigarette, perhaps! One day Durrani sahib had a wrought iron gate installed there and had it painted gold/yellow to reflect Latif house’s color. He sent me out to “Check” it. I reported back that it looked good. He sent me again, and again, and I kept telling him that it was just fine. To which he proclaimed, if Ali thinks its “OK” then it must be great. This was his not so subtle way of telling me that I had a negative outlook on life. Ever since that event, my response to “how are you doing” is “Great!”, and I have been accused of “infectious enthusiasm”. All thanks are due to what Durrani sahib said to me on that day.

Once I got hold of a book on Einstein’s “Theory of Relativity”, an absolutely fascinating topic that made wonder about the vastness of space, continuity of time, possibilities of infinity and the probability of time travel.

I am sure I drove Durrani sahib nuts with my incessant questions and hypothetical arguments. He tried to answer all with the patience of saints. I think he had it enough when I waited up for him to get back at home around midnight and peppered him with my newfound ideas. Yet even at this odd hour, he was composed and tried to answer as many fanciful questions as he could. Next day I knew I better tone it down, because he gave me an English translation of a Russian scientist’s book titled “Cross roads of infinity”.

He never let a chance to “teach” go, even when one of our entry mates was caught with “*Jinsy kitabain*” (euphemistically called sexual education books). As he was being caned, Durrani sahib let it be known, “*English ki hoteen to main chor bhi daita, kay kuch to sikh rahay ho*” (If they were in English, I may have let you go, cause then you would have been at least learning something).

Durrani sahib had a great rapport with all of us, and a fantastic sense of humor. Aleem (80106) and I spent a whole night raiding his mango tree, and then had the audacity to ask him to borrow a battery, charger and a bulb from the physics lab to conduct an “experiment”. This home made incubator was put to great use to ripen the mangos.

Not to be greedy or anything, we dutifully took about a dozen of them to Durrani sahib, he took one and thanked us for it. When we insisted that he take all, since they were all for him, he quipped “if this is MY share, I wonder how many did you really take”.

I can tell you how he taught me to be a good leader, or what did he do when he found out that I had strung a *Har* (necklace) made out of “Break food”; we can also talk ad nauseam about the plan we hatched and how we got the first color TV for Latif house.

However, I am convinced that it was a Principal’s inspection that changed my destiny. Every one was busy cleaning up, and I did my part; but no one wanted to help clean the toilet. By this time I had become SUO and Durrani sahib had taught me enough that I took it upon myself to do it; and that was it, or so I thought.

A few years later, I found myself in Ohio at a crossroad in my life. I had two choices, I could give up, drop out of college and chalk it all up to circumstances OR I could work my tail off to pay for the rest of my studies and then graduate from college. One of the myriad of jobs that I had was to clean toilets in the same university that I went to. It was at that point I thought for a bit, should I or shouldn’t I take this job, but the answer was, if I can do it in Petaro, then why not here?

To this day, I have developed a “can do” attitude and in true Petarian spirit I am never shy to tell every one, “*Hey I cleaned toilets to get where I am today, I did it once and I can do it again, what will YOU do???*”

I would like to tell one last short story and end with a question.

I had to go to Hyderabad, during the weekday, for something, and did not want to get the principal’s permission. Durrani sahib told me to come and see him after the second period and he would allow me to go. I searched for him in the Physics lab, only to be told that Agha ji (his father who lived with him) had just passed away. We were all shocked, especially since we had seen him walking in the morning.

Later at night as we all sat around reading Quran, Durrani sahib looked up, saw me and said, “*baita didn’t you go to Hyderabad?*” How can you repay a debt like that?