

A Visit to Petaro After 18 Years

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It was a Sunday morning and my wife as usual insisted on taking the family on a picnic or a drive of some sort. I suggested we take a long drive to the beautiful and green Madinatul Hikmat campus outside Karachi. We all got into the car. It was past 11:30 AM. While on the way on Rashid Minhas Road close to Sohrab Goth and Super Highway intersection it came to my mind to drive instead to Petaro.

I said to my wife "Shall I not take you to Petaro? I have been telling you about the place ever since we got married 8 years ago". She agreed. I took the turn on the Super Highway. It took less than 2-1/2 hours to reach Petaro.

On the Petaro gate I told them I was an ex-cadet and wanted to visit the college and show it to my family. I had my three children with me.

It was more than 20 years ago when I first arrived in Petaro as a new cadet in class 8th. I was in the Iqbal House.

My wife was impressed on seeing the cadets. They looked so smart and disciplined. They looked very different from the city kids. They appeared better in every way from the city kids. It reinforced my belief that Petaro makes a difference.

It was Sunday. Many cadets were playing cricket in small lawns besides their houses. I remembered we used to do the same thing.

Petaro was a very exciting place. There were always events and activities going on. Your daily schedule was so well specified. From morning till night and from one season to another things never stopped at Petaro.

Some of the things that I remember as great aspects of Petaro life were:

1. The disciplined and regimented life
2. The affectionate teachers
3. The spirit of competition amongst cadets

The discipline of Petaro with its early morning PT and Parade and other rigors associated with it were always a burden on my somewhat feeble body. Being among the shorter kids always made me a target of ridicule by those who could not compete with me in studies, debates and other co-curricular activities. Many were also jealous of my being the favorite of most, if not all, of the teachers.

Being so emotional about making my decisions I decided in class 8 that I would leave the place after class 10. This was because we were told you could gracefully do that.

Later on, when I had left Petaro, I realized what a mistake I had made. I have been back in Pakistan for more than 8 years now and have never regretted my decision to return from the USA. But having left Petaro after 3 years rather than completing 5 years is something that I have always regretted.

I have never found such affectionate teachers before or after Petaro. I have never found such a wonderful place as Petaro. Having lived in UK for more than 2 years, in France for 1 year and in USA for 8 years and having studied in all these places, I could never find a place comparable to Petaro.

The competitive spirit that always existed in every thing in Petaro brought out the best in every cadet. The activities were so numerous and diverse that you could never get bored in

Petaro. The involvement of teachers in all activities and their encouragement and patronage is truly unique.

Even though I was not a good rider, I used to spend long hours in the stables talking to the caretakers of horses due to my fascination for horses.

The rainy season was an enjoyable time. Cadets would play football in the rain in the middle of the grassy field in our days.

I peeped into some of the dorms in Iqbal House that were unlocked. Every room was nice and tidy. I remembered the old days when we used to occupy those rooms. It was difficult to believe that 20 years had past since those were our dorms.

I found out that Mr. Ghouri was the Vice Principal. He used to be a kind teacher. I talked to him on the local telephone and requested to meet him. He and his family were very hospitable and entertained us well for more than 2 hours.

Among all the havaldars, we had a unique character in the form of Mirullah Jan, who was a wonderful man. He used to be in charge of the shooting club. He used to award the titles to each one of us like "*daal khor*", "*roti khor*", "*gosht khor*" and "*sabzi khor*" based on his evaluation of your ethnicity and behavior. You could always feel the sincerity in him and others in Petaro. They were simple people committed to their professions and to Petaro. His nephew was the house bearer for Iqbal House (our house) during my stay at Petaro. I met him during the last visit guarding the gate from behind the Mess to the Riding Club and Sports area. He told me about the sad demise of Mirullah Jan.

I always remembered we used to talk about great Petarians of old like Hasan Haider Rizvi. They were legends to us. S.P. Shahid was another famous name. His name was on every honour board in the auditorium which used to make me wonder whether he was a human being or a superman.

A military-style boarding school with a second world war airfield and the mighty Indus just a mile or two away, with horses and a riding club, with shooting club, with mandatory two hours of self studies every night always fascinated me and conclude that there could be no other place like Petaro.

I can never repay the debt of Pakistan for giving us Petaro. I know there are other military schools in other countries, even in USA. But somehow I think there is none other as good as Petaro. Petaro made me what I am. Petaro has trained me to compete with others, even those older and bigger than me. My patriotism, my feelings for the people of my country, my faith in the greatness of my country and its future are some things that Petaro has nurtured to last forever. The teachers of Petaro have shown me what sincerity to one's profession means. They have instilled in me the idea that teachers are builders of a nation.

We were back in Karachi by 9:00 PM. This was a real homecoming for me, going back to visit Petaro. Emotionally I have never been away from it.