

Fr Rufus Pereira

St Andrew — My School

I always loved cleanliness and beauty, and when I came to St Andrew's, I wanted to make the school building itself, which is for me the most beautiful school building in the city, (and is celebrating its 75th anniversary this December 2002), even more attractive, a landmark in the then beautiful suburban Bandra.

For a sum of **Rs. 10,000**, which was then considered extravagant by some parishioners, I had the whole building exterior and the compound walls and gates and gardens so well done up, that it attracted film producers to shoot their films with the school in the background.

When Dev Anand was shooting his film, he shot the first scene of the hero studying in England as a child, with the school in the background as a replica of a typical English school. The film begins with a one line credit, 'Our thanks are due to His Majesty the King of Nepal and to the Principal of St. Andrew's High School, Bandra.'

Even though I am not a sportsman, though I do love sports, I always encouraged every form of sports in my schools. As a student in St. Andrew's, I used to look at the huge sports field, the largest in the suburbs, a part of which had been my father's property, dreaming of turning it into a beautiful school stadium for the use of all the schools in the suburbs that did not have such beautiful facilities. Accordingly the Andrean Fair 70, in my first year as a Principal, was meant to raise money to build such a stadium. The money raised was more than expected, the plans drawn up for the stadium were very beautiful - but unfortunately Monsignor George who was fully behind this project died in that same year. **In the meantime I wrote to all the schools that our grounds were available for their annual Sports Day and for coaching their boys and girls especially in football and hockey. I also instituted an under 12 hockey trophy for the Bombay Sports Association.** No school has ever entered so many inter school sports competitions as St. Andrew's did in those years, and so no school ever won so many trophies in a single year as St. Andrew's. Sports for boys especially were very important for me then, and more so are they today, as a possible alternative to drugs, discos and internet pornography.

Again as a student of St. Andrew's, I would watch the cultivators ploughing the fields adjacent to the school and wonder why cultivation was going on in a residential area like Bandra, till my father told me that he used to help his father in cultivation in those very same grounds as a boy. **When I became Principal I was told that the land belonged to St. Andrew's but it was rented out and there was no hope of getting it back.** I felt that this was a pity because it could have been used to have a Catholic College to cater for Bandra and for the suburbs, instead of students going all the way to St. Xavier's and to Sophia's. I called for a preliminary meeting of all the Principals of Bandra suggesting that such a College should be a joint venture of

all our Bandra schools. They supported this wholeheartedly, as did the school staff. The Education Department officers who were my personal friends, and are still today, were most enthusiastic.

Then I approached **Monsignor George** who gave me a go ahead but told me that all efforts to get back the land had failed, because just one signature needed for the transaction was not forthcoming in spite of all his efforts. He challenged me to get that signature and gave me his blessing.

I began to visit that person regularly. He was very stubborn and knew he was holding the church as it were to ransom. **Fortunately I had just come into the charismatic renewal in 1972 and continued going to this man's house, but this time I used to pray for him, for he was not keeping well, and prayed also that the Lord would change his mind.**

Besides I would often go to that land with a Muslim staff member or with students and pray over that land. One fine day the man called me over to tell me that he was signing the necessary documents to enable the school to reacquire its land.

The rest is history, - for my dream had indeed come true. My heart is always filled with gratitude to God whenever I see the huge buildings of my dream College on the fields ploughed by my ancestors.

I would never have believed if someone had predicted on my last school day at St. Andrew's that I, still somewhat reserved with people, but now bold in preaching and confident when praying or healing, would be **elected in 1996 as a member of the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services Council, based in the Vatican, Rome, as representative for Asia** and to co-ordinate the ministry of healing and deliverance worldwide, or elected unanimously as **Vice-President of the International Association of Exorcists 1994 and President of the International Association for Deliverance in 1995**, organizing international and national training schools in the ministry of deliverance and giving retreats to priests in diocese after diocese and to Bishop's Conferences in several countries and even being called to pray over Presidents and world leaders.

The foundation of all this was laid by God in my family and in my two seminaries, but in a special way in St. Andrew's, where what I was taught by my strict but devoted masters and teachers was not just Latin (that was my favourite subject), but honesty and uprightness and respect for one another's cultural and religious background.

I am always proud to say that my best friend in school was Rauf, a Muslim boy from Perry Cross Road, among my best masters were a Hindu and a Parsee and my best Class IV staff was the Sikh watchman of St. Andrew's. God bless you all, fellow Andreans.

We can be justly proud of our renowned school and of our majestic school building!

