



The Dohnavur Post is a Newsletter of the alumni community of **Santhosha Vidhyalaya, Dohnavur.** For Private Circulation Only.

From the Scribbling desk!

The first issue of The Dohnavur Post came out in 2009. Although it came with a very modest marketing line – ‘Something for your Sunday afternoons!’ – it was anything but modest in its vision. To young writers, the Post offered a platform to share and reflect, and a standard to aspire to. To readers and writers alike, it set out to create “a literary culture”. But most importantly, the Post attempted to identify that invisible thread – our shared experiences from an almost distant past – that holds us all together. In the five years since 2009, over fifteen writers from across batches have written for the Post. Every issue sees writers push past ostensible boundaries, looking for unexplored perspectives and revisiting old experiences. In this issue we have a whole bunch of new writers making their debut with the post.

Immanuel D, the youngest writer for the Post as of yet, articulates about an unusual bus ride. He engages an almost poetic prose to describe his stance on probability, the monsoon and a fellow citizen of the road. ‘To me that is what monsoons are’, he writes ‘they convert simple things into the sublime.’

Ruth remembers, with subtle humour, the epidemics that visited school. Her article is an ironic take on childhood and how getting ill meant freedom from the mundane. She concludes with the observation that epidemics at boarding school resulted in a bonding effect that few other experiences offered.

Jason, in his original brash and jumpy style, talks about a breed of primitive beings, roaming the cities of our country and stunning new crowds. His inspiration for the article is a school alumnus – [David Livingston](#) – and his stunt with a live snake.

Eby’s article, ‘Mudslides’ discusses the little pleasures of childhood, and a recent epiphany that his memory has brought him. This profound article will make you want to shut down your computers, and go to a children’s park near your home.

Enjoy your reading. Have a nice day!

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“Probability Games”- That bus ride was different

Immanuel Devasir

A brush with probability theory left me wondering if ‘methods and arguments should be as much subjective as it is analytical’- An unconventional idea to be lost in while travelling on an MTC bus, but something about probability intrigues me. My failure to ace Probability Theory paper back in college I guess or my exposition on life that, ‘it is the probability of instances that make moments in life’ - I don’t know for sure, but physical indeterminism fascinates nevertheless.

This bus ride was no different, it was monsoon time in Chennai and the rain gods were incessant. I took a seat near the window at the back corner of the bus, from that view point I could see everyone. Through the window a barrage of droplets seemingly without interruption hit my face and it seemed to soothe my intellectual trance, the cool breeze quickly got me lost in a deluge of thoughts. Monsoon times are dreamy times right; they somehow empower trivial thoughts by engaging your mind as per your convenience and choice. To me that is what monsoons are – they convert simple things into the sublime.



Monsoon times are dreamy times .. they somehow empower trivial thoughts by engaging your mind as per your convenience and choice.

Probability games are not uncommon or unheard of; it’s just that we underestimate the probability games we indulge in on the go, like while travelling on a bus, that’s when probability games are very intense. For that’s where everybody is eager to size each other up and pronounce silent judgement on fellow travellers, armed with instances in brain’s realm that are matched or mapped to various probable’s or likely stories. Henceforth an intricate web is weaved involving the person concerned with the highest probable scenario. For instance a fellow traveller wearing dingy clothes, with a smudge under his eyes and a dialect resembling Hindi is judged a migrant worker by your brain, for analytically- the probability that he is a migrant is very likely, considering the above descriptions are all mapped to a migrant labourer.

This time I was so lost in thoughts that I only took time out to size up the person who sat next to me. He looked like a college student who listened to too much music (Only some very good words from the conductor got his attention). He didn’t seem interesting, so I got back to my thoughts. Suddenly from around the edge of the bus emerged a headlamp. It was a white bike (Yamaha FZ) and the rider was drenched from head to toe. He was driving too fast. Instinctively I figured that it could be my friend from college. As the attire resembled a dress he possessed, the frame matched him perfectly and the way he rode seemed inch perfect. My brain got into all kinds of probability games. I was about to yell out his name, for analytically all the arguments pointed to him but the indeterminism of the face behind the helmet held me back.

He did catch my fancy though, he made my imagination soar. But who was it who was driving from somewhere to somewhere when it was raining so heavily? And why? I would never do that. Why is he doing so? Could it be an emergency? Could it be a lovers retreat, as so many lovers do (Getting back home hastily after a face to face session in time for the phone session to begin)? Or could he be just another racing brat for whom roads held no fear.

I continued to track the vehicle for quite some time. I'd lose it occasionally around a bend in the road or ahead of some big vehicle only to recover it after a while. And then suddenly, it would disappear again. I knew the geography of the roads of that part well and understood that he was headed in the same direction as my bus.



He looked like a college student who listened to too much music.

I was close to my destination. By this time my brain was worn out and it was responding plainly to sight (a 'tree' got treated like 'just another tree' and not as an 'awesome, green, manicured tree'). The rain had stopped and all was bright and fine. The music had changed from heavy metal thundering to melodramatic Honking. As the bus approached a cross section in the road, I could see movements. Some cars were parked there and in the middle of the road a white bike lay in tatters. Twenty minutes prior to me reaching, there had been a collision involving a bike and a car. The bike guy didn't make it.

I didn't have the heart to check if it was someone rushing from somewhere to somewhere due to an emergency or if it was a lovers retreat or a brat for whom roads held no fear or if he was my friend in the first place.

Deep inside, I personally felt that the unfortunate person behind the helmet is never likely and could NEVER be my friend. Though analytically the probabilities pointed to him, it was still subjective probability then and the likelihood was influenced by my personal opinion and feelings.



And yes, that bus ride was different.

Immanuel Devasir passed out of school in 2009. He lives in New Delhi, where he is a student at Jindal School of International Affairs. Immanuel comments passionately on politics, and blogs on random topics from everyday life. He enjoys music, and plays the guitar. You can read some of his blogs [here](#)

By the alumni, for the alumni, to the alumni...

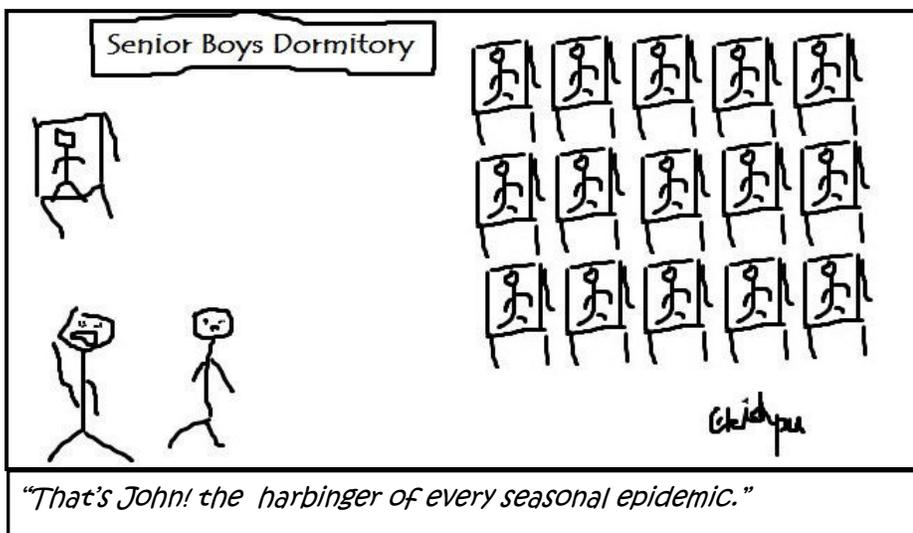
The Newsletter is run by a virtual team sitting in different places ranging from a plush office in Ohio, USA to a cramped one room apartment in suburban Bangalore. The writers range from a Missionary in Northern India to a Trade International Trade specialist. The newsletter is by the alumni, for the alumni and to the alumni of [Santhosha Vidhyalaya](#). The purpose of the newsletter is to create a literary culture around the school and its associations. Through the months many alumni have written from various batches and we have all enjoyed reading them. All alumni are welcome to write for the newsletter about their life, work and love. Write in to us on how you enjoyed reading the newsletter and tell us how we can improve on this. Email: thedohnavurpost@gmail.com

The Epidemic Memoirs

Ruth Thaveedhu

It would be surprising if someone made it through SV without being infected by any of the annual epidemics. With bunk beds stacked together like the Nazi camps, infections easily went viral. For at least a month, each year, half the names during the roll call were answered with chicken pox or mumps or eye infection or measles depending on what the year offered.

I wonder what we called the sick room at school. Was it the isolation room or sick room? Never a permanent place and never for petty illnesses like the flu or common cold it was probably one of the most longed for places in SV.

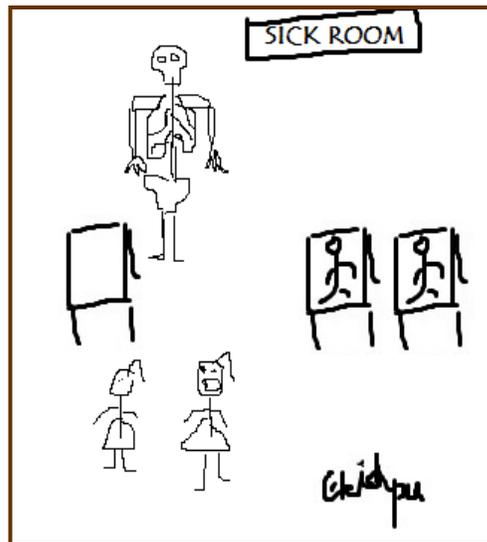


For at least a month, each year, half the names during the roll call were answered with chicken pox or mumps or eye infection or measles, depending on what the year offered.

For the Madras eye in '92 they used the guest room opposite to the chemistry lab as the sick room but thankfully I didn't catch it that year. J... caught it though. He had spent the previous evening peering through the gate and laughing at the infected ones. The rest of us spent the next morning philosophizing on reaping what you sow. When I caught it years later the sick room for girls was moved to an empty room in between the senior and junior girl's dormitories. We passed time by practicing dance moves and creating new recipes from buttermilk and pickles.

One year I had caught the chicken pox as it did its rounds. Now chicken pox is sometimes a lonely affair as the number of people infected is very small. That year I had to spend one scary night of chicken pox in the room near the kitchen (opposite to the chapel). There were two rooms in a row and one of them was used for the sewing class which was also the makeshift sick room that year. The other was a store room where, among others, the school's biology lab skeleton was stored. Not the best of neighbours to have when you have an active imagination and a high temperature. That was a long sleepless feverish night.

I think I liked the mumps year best. In '93 the year of mumps, we were housed in the guest room opposite to the chemistry lab. The peacock lived on one side of the building and PT sir's (Mr. N.B. Thomas) family lived on the other. Any visitors who came took the front portion of the guest house. Mumps had chosen its victims well that year as we had some really funny people in the list. Given the sick room's proximity to the higher secondary section, we were expected to keep quiet during the assembly prayers. But K.... always managed to interrupt the solemn prayers with his loud off-key singing. Collecting peacock feathers was a popular pastime. One theory was that if you put a peacock feather in the middle of a notebook and never looked at it for 6 months you would find a new one. I never got to test that one though. Six months was a long time to keep patience.



"Think of him as a guard to your bed! No one will steal from under your pillow"

We often dressed up in plaid bed sheets and acted out bible stories. Since we were not supposed to cross over to the visitor's guest room, P... had to keep the name lists of all those who crossed over. The house mother akka, who brought food featured in all the lists along with the things we intentionally threw over the line of control. It was then ceremoniously presented to PT sir's wife who didn't know what to do with it. When the rest of the school quietened down for the study time, we sat down to share jokes, riddles and ghost stories.

Mumps had chosen its victims well that year...we had some really funny people in the list



I thoroughly enjoyed these times. To live for a few days without being part of the bell or the whistle was heavenly. To simply "stand and stare" as the rest of the school worked up the routine was a wonderful experience. The Friendships forged over bloody red eyes or measles rashes and laughter shared with aching mumps jaws are some of my sweetest memories from school.

**Madras eye — common name for Conjunctivitis*

Ruth Thaveedhu belongs to the class of 2002. She works with Technip India limited, and is an avid reader in her spare time. Ruth's favorite writer is C. S. Lewis. She and her husband, Mathan, stay in Pozhichalur, Chennai.

A Civilized Primitivation

Jason Chris

To every frustrated and seemingly primitive SVian, and the one who sketched the picture



*Pencil sketch of a 'seemingly primitive SVian'
Notice he's had a pretty civilized haircut?!*

While the rest of the world was longing to take a bite into a McDonald's burger or a juicy pizza, a desperate few at SV were skinning an unfortunate pigeon, or a wayward squirrel, for a tight snack in the backyard. While the world was trying to catch up with Tim Berner-Lee's invention, *i.e.*, *the internet*, folks at school were compelled to browse in the wild for ugly creatures, during those Sunday evening walks. While the rest of the world was trying to improve its dexterity by handling abstract images using a long-tailed "mouse" connected to a computer screen, SVians were getting their experience juggling remodelled junk including bottle caps, marbles, crushed-up paper, or anything that could be tamed to the physics of a game. While the world was getting addicted to the idiot box unawares, we were rather frustrated by its rare weekly graceful cameo appearances. That's how primitive it could get; welcome to SVilisation!

When I said 'the rest of the world', I was referring to the people we get to interact with after we come out of SV. Usually after those interactions with the outsiders, I begin to feel, that I have been brought up in a "primitive way". However, for a bunch of kids who had to be content with a spider for a pet, we can get used to anything. Yeah! What else would you expect from a bunch of children who grew up playing with spiders or occasionally woke up in the morning to find stray dogs sharing the bed with them because it had rained the previous night. But reluctant interactions with the rest of the world present a weird feeling bordering on embarrassment. As if I've been brought up by some tribe roaming in Papa New Guinea – that *Brontosaurus shaped island above Australia*. (No...! We weren't so primitive as to have Dinosaurs around!)

I was watching a video, which actually led me to write the above paragraphs. An amateur video, in which the lead guitarist of the Chennai based band 'A2J', was holding a snake by its neck. He first took it off a tree by its tail and then, using a stick, he moved to get a hold of its neck. Yeah! We SVians know this drill and am sure we've witnessed it like a million times. (Fine..! Million is an exaggeration). The cameraman was shooting from a safe distance and I could hear a lot of excited exclamations in the background. And probably that video after it went on YouTube would have generated more female fans (Fans according to whom lizards are miniature Godzillas out to destroy mankind!) in addition to the ones who were already dazzled by his slick guitar play. I couldn't help but think that SV has trained his fingers to tame a slithery creature as well as that fretted stump overlaid with six metal strings. Am sure if any of us talked about our casual encounters with snakes to others, they would have stared with disbelief since most don't understand a snake beyond mysticism – like an interaction with some dark angel. Yeah we lived close to nature; side by side with snakes and scorpions, sometimes too 'side by side' (I am referring to those specimens in our biology lab, floating in a sea of formaldehyde and staring at you with fixed mystic eyes, separated from you by a cylindrical glass with a bottle cap! After those regular brushings with snakes, when we see a snake elsewhere, we don't raise alarm, except if we want to catch it while on the other hand, the rest of the world generally generates a stampede with a high pitched chorus: 'IT'S A SNAKE! RUN! A SNAKE'. Seen enough actually! This nonchalance to a long creepy creature or the knack for fingering taut metal strings can be deemed a life skill; learned from a primitive world while SVilising (Sv + Civilising).

SV, a village school with city standards! That's how I'd put it. After we came out of this 'oxymoronic' place, we felt like a young, shivering, vulnerable cub delivered into the real world with the umbilical cord of this strange primitivism uncut. It left us with certain advantages coupled with the flexibility that can balance the country life of the wild jungle and also show easy poise in the city circles. This benefit I believe not many from the rest of the world enjoy. However as I keep trespassing into this outside world like Mowgli moving through a concrete jungle. I do not feel embarrassed any longer, for our world which although seemed primitive, was special with all its pain, goodwill, beef, impoverished pets, sport, vocabulary and currency. Or perhaps I should start painting the walls around here Red – start SVilising my neighbour!

Jason Chris finished school in 2006. He creates music along with his band, and enjoys reading— nonfiction mostly— in his spare time. Jason lived the ideal SVian's dream when he served in school for a while after he finished his Masters.



RUSTLE IN THE BACKYARD

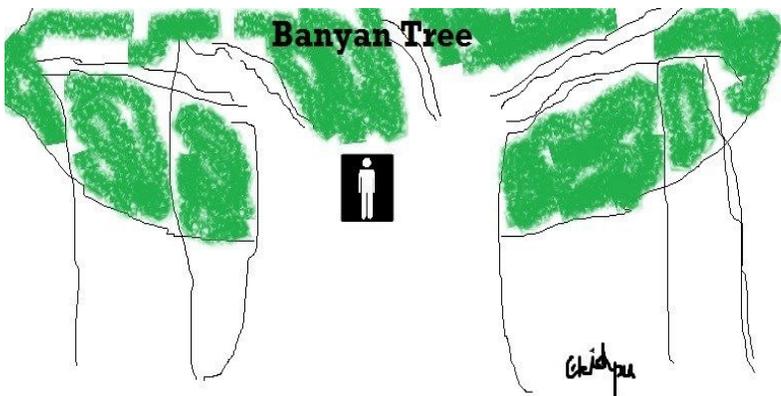
Those of us that have been following all the activity on Facebook, probably know this already! The alumni community may finally have what seems to be, its biggest ever gathering so far. These are "heady days", like one of us put it. An alumni meet will be held on the 29th and 30th of November, 2014, at Scripture Union's beachside camp in Mahabalipuram, Chennai. The planning is on, and some of us think there is a big surprise waiting for all of us. We are all super excited, and looking forward to it. For more information on the alumni meet, join the school group on Facebook using the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/127570207298597/>

Mudslides

Eby

Do you know what a hillock is?? I didn't when I first saw one over two decades back. This one was peculiar, yellow, almost limestone like, and lined with a certain shrub I haven't seen since; a shrub that, for me and other people I knew, was a distinct reminder of pain. You see this shrub had long, thin, straight, surprisingly supple, green stalks that when peeled of its bark became long, thin, straight, surprisingly supple, white stalks that an irate, long armed teacher in a foul mood could use to admonish his wards. But despite all the understandable hatred this shrub would bring to its rock ridden medium of choice, the hillock, my own mountain of the skull had one redeeming feature. Right in between all the greenery and the occasional yellow flower was a small bit of smooth, pressed earth. If you had the gumption and the necessary cunning to climb up the leeward or windward side (depending on which way the wind was blowing when you started) you would be rewarded with a short, almost euphoric ride to the bottom. All you had to do then was either attempt to repeat the experience or silently slink away to the nearest water source and attempt to clean all the dirty yellow evidence from your backside.

Now over two decades since I took my first mudslide on this peculiar hillock I realize I've been slow-walking myself to a personal epiphany ever since. An epiphany whose core message I think I've known all along. Life, at least mine, is (has been) about the small things. Any epiphany worth its salt should be earth shattering but this one seems strangely mellow. Little things stick in my head! Why??! I'd like to think that the larger meaning of life is simply futile to comprehend and we get by on the little things, those little experiences we gather along the way. I believe that's why I remember the urine soaked roots of a young tree and its valiant attempts to grow in an overwhelming abundance of urea.



SOME SIGNS ARE ONLY VISIBLE TO THE MALE EYE

We take a strange, almost voyeuristic, interest in someone else's stories and all these somehow change and become our own. A kiss in the rain is romantic for that reason. We are experience hunters gathering bit by simple bit, the people we meet, the conversations, images and so on are all, for lack of a better cliché, part of a collective tapestry of sorts. I am glad that the limestone yellow hillock with the pressed earth slide and the green shrub with the yellow flowers are a part of mine.

Eby belongs to the class of 2005— the infamous ‘Tunnel batch’. He works in Bangalore, and is the consumer evangelist for Minewhat. This is how a few of his friends described him: “ingeniously resourceful”, an “extremely lazy and sarcastic fellow”, “a part time hippie” (we have no idea what that means!), and a “downright crazy guy”. This is a picture someone took of him after waking him up on a random Sunday afternoon.

