

Story of Miss Taraporewalla

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A very good morning to all the beautiful people from all parts of the world. As a part of history of Montessori in India I bring you the stories of Miss Taraporewalla I am her proud daughter in law. The stories of Miss Taraporewalla are simple down to earth very special and close to my heart. Some of them are as told by her to me and some are as they happened during the 24 years of my life with her. They begin like this.

One hundred and three years ago, a little girl was born in this very city to her noble parents Eduljee and Alanmai. Her maiden name was Khursheed. Khursheed was beautiful, cute, had the potential to become someone great. But physically weak... so weak that she was unable to walk till the age of four years. But yes when she started to walk it seemed as though she never stopped walking till the age of ninety three.

Khursheeds ancestors were popular and even had coins minted with their family name. The coins were known as the Pestonshahi sikkas(currency coins). However khursheeds father Eduljee was orphaned at the age of eleven. But he grew out of all the troubles with the support of his maternal uncle. Eduljees uncle was generous enough to give his own innocent docile daughter Alanmai in marriage to him. He also got him a job at the Accountant Generals office.

Eduljee and Alanmai lead a humble life and were blessed with five talented daughters. They embarked values of life into their children along with good education. Khursheed was third in order from top. She was a tomboy and her sisters were none the less. Climbing trees was the simplest of their adventures. Khursheed fell several times from a Guava tree but father never stopped her from climbing again. These were the kind of lessons she learnt from her parents. Mother catered to all their needs including the making of homemade cloth toys. The girls enjoyed making their own coconut leaf toys too. Embroidery Crochet and household chores were part of the daily life. It was a simple life with productivity and creativity and yes a strong preparation for something big that would happen in Khursheeds life. Whenever Eduljee looked into khursheeds eyes he could see a spark in them. He would always tell his daughter, my child follow your dream and never fear to do what is right. Perhaps he knew that his little girl would one day become Miss Taraporewalla, one of the most profound educators the world would experience.

Financial constraints never stopped the parents from sending their daughters to the best school in town. Mahaboobia girl's school was a hub for the rich and famous. But Khursheed and her sisters remained grounded in any environment.

Soon Khursheed grew up to be a pretty young lady. Petite cute attractive and remained so even at a ripe age. Our young Khursheed wanted to be a medical nurse while father thought it was not pleasant to be one. After a constant debate for two years they heard about Dr. Maria Montessoris visit her being interned in India and the Course. Father more than willingly agreed to send Khursheed. Thus twenty six year old Khursheed enrolled to The First Indian Montessori Training Course at Olcott gardens, Adyar. The highly intense course felt eased out with the ambience of palm leaf cottages, Mamolinas lectures in Italian which were translated by Mario. So great was the impact of the lectures that it was here on the banks of Bay of Bengal that Khursheed vowed to follow the child.

Khursheed was ever so active during the course as well. It was not just a participation, it was total involvement. The theosophical Society had places of worship belonging to various religions. I recollect her telling me about her habituating more than one such places with daily prayers.

The Course had a large number of trainees...more than three hundred. It commenced in the month of November and had to be completed by February. They had long days of lectures.... sometimes lasting through the whole night.

She also told me about some funny instances where students boiled eggs secretly in water boilers as non vegetarian food was totally prohibited. But Khursheed never did anything of that kind. She was too bold for it and would never break rules what so ever.

Now I am going to talk about how Mamolina and Khursheed got close to each other. Two students had to share one palm leaf cottage . It so happened that things did not work well with Khursheed and her cottage mate and as a consequence Khursheed was thrown out by the lady.

One Dr. Pinchin followed the the instructions of Dr. Montessori and partitioned a part of her office to let Khursheed stay in one half. She beautified her part and named it as " Gorilla Cottage". This caught Mamolina's attention and she was keen to meet to find out why the name was given. When Khursheed was invited Mario was also present. Her answer was that a gorilla beats his own chest when in anger and does not harm anyone. So the name was a reminder to herself to be kind to the girl who refused to share a cottage .Mamolina was moved and treated Khursheed with some tasty cookies and tea. Mamolina was a brilliant cook who often baked good cakes and cookies. whenever somebody impressed her she would invite them over for a cup of tea and snacks. Khursheed was treated at many such occasions and these meetings brought them close to each other.

Another instance...picnics were a part of the little leisure they had. On one occasion there was rock climbing and some students started climbing in competition. Mamolina looked on. When one of the students panicked stopped midway and started to shout, Khursheed who almost reached the peak, left the fun, came back and helped the lady to climb down the rock. This gesture touched Mamolina and invited Khursheed for tea.

Olcott gardens, the intense course and Dr. Montessori's lectures transformed Khursheed forever. While Khursheed was leaving, Mamolina urged " come back my little soldier ".

These words kept ringing in her ears all the time.

Back at home.. desire to start a house of children was strong but resources were weak. Father started working overtime to collect funds. Khursheed worked in some traditional schools only to be ever so frustrated with the atrocities done to children. She dreamt day and night about the specially prepared environment and her vow at Olcott gardens. It had to happen soon and father was always there to help. Mother continued to pray. For some reasons Khursheed also decided not to marry . She worked in Switzerland at the embassy in order to collect funds for her Montessori. After her return father and she started putting things together. It was not easy. They used to hire a cycle rikshaw and go around searching for a suitable place. Sometimes they spent the whole day knocking at doors to ask if the place was vacant to be hired. With great effort they finally found a place suitable. Khursheed was talented enough to beautify any place. She was skilled to transform places according to the developmental needs of the child. Mother started stitching aprons and napkins. She also embroidered some pretty ones. Sisters contributed a lot too. Infact Nargis the one older than Khursheed joined the house of children later and helped in administration till the end of her life. Rupa the youngest was closest to her and remained as a great moral support. Father proved to be the hero in the whole thing. Equipment had to be brought from Bombay....

Father who was very fond of non vegetarian food ordered mother to stop cooking it in order to make ends meet and buy things that were needed. cardboard boxes tooth paste boxes and shoe boxes were perfectly trimmed and used for language material. Father and Khursheed would stay up whole night to complete the work. They painted the walls and furniture by themselves. Furniture was designed by them

as well . Every detail was taken care personally. Neighbours friends and well wishers knew something different was happening but had no clue.khursheed would invite them over and orient them about the method. She would continuously talk to people who visited. Finally the big day arrived on the 15th of July, 1953 when Taraporewallas Montessori House of Children was inaugurated. Khursheed became Miss Taraporewalla. Sometimes, big things start small. Five children enrolled but unfortunately three of them withdrew by the end of the year. Their parents had no patience in spite of Miss Taraporewalla trying to educate them. Two children remained and one of them was Sorab Bezendavar about whom she spoke to me till the end of her life. One can imagine how tough it must have been to educate the society about something of which they never learnt or heard or seen before.No internet to browse and learn from, no social network. She was her own propoganda, it was just a one woman show. Miss Taraporewalla Talked extensively, on All India Radio, conducted Exhibitions, above all it was those two first children who made heads turn towards this specially prepared environment through which the child during his formative age emerged as a different human being. Parents started recognizing the method as something that is beyond the conventional way of learning. Children started to write , read and do math effortlessly and willingly. To add to it Miss Taraporewallas strong willpower , dedication and ,patience brought her success and the house Of Children became popular. And it was the only Montessori house in the city for fifteen long years. In 1968 Mrs. Vanitha Bhushan opened her Lumbini Montessori House Of Children. Now of course we are blessed with more than twenty of them.

Miss Taraporewalla was highly talented in deriving work from her staff and was very particular about minute details. She was firm and at the same time believed in setting good examples herself. Parents too got inspired by her work and some of them started their own Houses of Children.

After the visit of Mario and Ada Montessori, AMI granted its precious affiliation to Taraporewallas which the school enjoyed for many years.

Hard work brought success and also popularity. However, she never got carried away by fame and always remained humble in service of the child. Honesty with parents , straightforward dealings fetched the goodwill which we are cherishing till date.

Miss Taraporewalla managed to purchase a mini palace in the year 1971. A person who was so very fond of non-vegetarian food , turned a pure vegetarian as she took a vow at Mahathma Gandhi Memorial , New Delhi to do so if she got a suitable building for her House of Children.

The Mini palace had huge halls, deep arcaded verandahs on three sides,semi circular arches, beautiful gardens and could house five primary environments with two hundred children. The building was named as a heritage property by the Government as it was more than a hundred years old. Hundreds of children graduated from it successfully. But unfortunately the building faced a tragic end when it collapsed with a big thud in 2001. There was a huge loss of material, antique furniture, books, documents and records. Thankfully no loss of life which we consider as a miracle.

Miss Taraporewalla was eighty seven years old at the time of this incidence. I have personally experienced the brave front she put up. The house of children started to function at anew premises within a month and she was back into action.

During those last years of her life I have learnt from her to never give up a mission due to reasons beyond ones control. Accept change if it has to happen and move on to build again. To move on to build something better and to actually treat this fall as an opportunity to improvise instead of complaining. And to have a vision for future no matter what age or physical disabilities. I have learnt that a strong mind can make things happen.

About Her Involvement in the Courses

Mr.A. M. Joosten the director of the Indian Montessori Training Courses and representative of Dr.Montessori in India was invited to conduct courses in Hyderabad. Miss Taraporewallas involvement was all-round. Managing the mobile courses which would stay in Hyderabad for three years at a time was a family affair for Taraporewallas. Miss Taraporewalla took care of the directors stay and other requirements. She often spoke to me very high about Mr. Joosten, his simple food habits, simple way of life, strong liking for India, its culture, languages etc. He was a very hard working man. Mr. Joosten also developed Language activities in Hindi for primary environments along with Mr. Swami. He was very fond of wearing Indian outfits and was addressed as Saab which means sir by Miss Taraporewalla. He would pull almost the whole of Taraporewallas family out for the Midnight masses and preferred walking to the church. He dared to hold a leper by his hand and help him cross the road. She also told me some funny things about him one was that he never hesitated slapping a person who made an error in helping the child. Of course the slaps were with affection only meant for correction. Another thing was that he would aim pieces of chalk at inattentive trainees. And he was perfect in aiming. One funny remark by a child when he entered the house of children was that " look doesn't he look like chalk? As white as chalk?" Another child said that he looked like face powder". Children simply enjoyed his visits. Teachers of Taraporewallas also loved him but were kind of very alert in his presence.

The mobile courses would wind up after three years and return only after six years. Perhaps Hyderabad was so dear to Mr. Joosten that he breathed his last here.

Mr.S.R. Swamy took over as the director and conducted the mobile courses. He was an amazing charmer who attracted many admirers, highly knowledgeable and yet very simple in his living style. Miss Taraporewalla addressed him as Bhayya which means brother. He was a religious man. Towards the end his diet was completely oil free as he suffered with asthma.

Boiled cauliflower or French beans with a dash of pepper and salt were frequently cooked for him.Mr. Swamy would commute to the training centre in a man peddled cycle rickshaw. He would sit in it like a king holding his pipe in one hand and with the other hand on his hip. He was a man of wit and my husband Vishwas recollects many of his jokes. once he seriously announced to a very young Vishwas " Vishwas before you start singing kindly let me know". Vishwas proudly asked "why?"the answer was.

"So that I can go to the other room."

Due to ill health he couldn't finish his last course in Hyderabad and Mrs. Meenakshi Shivramkrishnan was invited to complete the same.

When the Montessori Research and Training Trust was formed Miss Taraporewalla as one of the trustees worked hard for the permanent centre along with Kira Banasinska. Mr. Kothwal, Dr. Sudhir Naik and Dr. Usha Naik. Miss Jayalakshmi and Mrs. Shashi Agarwal have extended their continued and priceless help for decades. The permanent centre gave birth to many Houses of children children and the method spread rapidly in the last sixteen years. We have many dedicated Montessorians bringing in freshness and expertise.

Now last but not the least for me. My 24 years of life with Miss Taraporewalla. It was 24 years , 24 hrs of Montessori. She was 69 years old when I married her son Vishwas. The condition for my marriage was that I should get trained and learns to take care of the school. As I got married at a very tender age it took me a while to realize that I was a part of a big mission. In the beginning I thought it as very romantic to be following her. The more I followed her the more my husband would love me. I didn't think beyond that. As she followed the child every moment of her life I continued to follow her. She actually never took a day off. I think she knew how to relax in her work itself. That I think is an extraordinary character . She built a beautiful universe for herself in the field of Montessori and exercised unlimited creativity. If one looks

through my memory one would find millions of such images like to be particular about the colour of the rope for climbers in the garden, innumerable plants being potted, walls and furniture being painted with best sense of taste, potted plants being turned to face the spectators. For the first time I learnt that plants had faces. pictures chosen with great care and hung always at a suitable level for the children. The amount of writing she did in beautiful cursive even at the age of 93. I picked up the same writing just by standing behind her. She deeply loved all those beautiful souls who supported her mission., dearest friendship that she shared with Dr. Usha Naik is one of the most beautiful things happened for her. Her unconditional love for my two sons Karna and Rajiv made me stoop down to her every wish. Yes and when I grew up to be matured I understand that I was following a person who was purest in her conviction, chaste by character, a person who knew nothing beyond her own work, a person who had no clue about the complexity or the bad side of the world. She has over worked till the age of 93. She was that child of God whose stories would be told by generations to come. I stand before all of you as a child of a legend, I may not be one like her but I am the chosen one to carry her torch and hand over it to the next generation. I am thankful to Rajiv my younger son for enrolling in the primary course and continue his grandmothers noble work.

The life of Miss Taraporewalla should be motivational in todays context of ESF as we have gathered here to move beyond our classrooms and serve a much larger community. We should look back at the great lives of such souls who toiled day and night. We have great responsibility to sustain and develop they left behind. As we get ready to fly higher and higher in our service to mankind we need to know that these are our heroes and actually the wind beneath our wings.

I would like to end my presentation with a slide show.

Thank you.