

FLAMING MOUNTAIN



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DEDICATION

This collection of fleeting and sometimes repetitive thoughts is dedicated to

Chandan Basu & Rufus Paul

*In their own ways revolutionaries, teachers and friends who encouraged you to
think differently*

*And who left their mark on their pupils rather than on any monument and for
which they remain loved and remembered still*

&

*of course to that odd collection of boys that formed the class of '77 who in a
strange way because they were at the top of the school for two years running
as the education system changed and the school went through significant
change, took liberties they would ordinarily have probably never have been
able to get away with.*

0

1

JALAPAHAR

Flaming mountain
from days long gone
Trembling
with knowledge
given
to eternal youth
who only stare
at that other mountain peak
Rising across the valley
Glowing in the snow
As the sun dies
to another day.

2

A LEGACY OF NAMES

Jalapahar
Gibbs Goddard James Dang
Dawkins Bensons Pellys
Blackies
Carters Cotton Cross
Eden Falls Bryanstone
Eton Edinburgh Moore Swaika Dey
Tenzing Hillary Hunt Everest Tiger Hill
Kanchenjunga
Anderson Betten Cable Westcott
Ma Choudhary
Havelock Lawrence Hastings Clive
Munshi Prasad Ghosh
LeBlonde Howard Chatterjee Bannerjee
Bhatnagar Dhar Mandrelle
Paul Prince Mehmood
Basu, deFalbe, Morton Macdonald Galvin
Sikkim Bhutan
Khudside Woodlands
Diamond Nandu Naidu
Dhobi Pemba Spadgee Prep
Hardeep Singh Restriction list Chapel
Vyse Rao Deshpande Lee Holland Margaret Moktan
Nath Guha Ellis
Bharadwaj Kanti
Lobo Madan Mali
LC, Mounties
Lyon Millman Lefroy Centenary Anthony
Mountford Stolke
Club
Gymkhana Glenarys
Patchy (yes the goat)
Manjitar Rangoon Singla Bazar Ghoom
Siliguri Darjeeling
Tankariwala Roy
Dev Anand Panch number Ruby Pudding Master
Fives Kurseong

Kalimpong Tonglu Manibhanjan
Coutinho Lama Jaitly
Dorji Bee Jha
Keventers Planters Wisden
The hole in the wall
Cryptomaria japonica
Out of bounds
St Paul's
Exeat.

3

CARTER ENGLISH ESSAY PRIZE

An English essay is the prize
to celebrate a passing,
an old demise.
Carter urging
clever compromise
to articulate but not plagiarise
recorded in a chronicle for posterity
cringe causing expressions of naivety
celebrated forever
as a record of that moment
whilst experience has turned those views
upside down and on their head
changing the field of sight
All because those clouds of innocence veiled the light
Cricket?
Rain ... no game
Clichéd!
It's all the same

4

THE BAND ROOM

The clatter of rain on tin
As Denzil signals to the trumpets
above the din
the instruments for Prince
As he hides his wince
The top D is still flat
Hitting it no small matter
It still beats the math
waiting at Prep
Mind you,
the discussions on philosophy
do relate to the avoidable subject of quadratic equations
It is all considered wise,
And hidden in simple time
is a lesson.
Arithmetic taught in another guise.

5

SUNSHINE HOLIDAY

On a sea of cotton wool
in the valley below
the question remains - will it rise
and turn to rain
Who knows and can advise?
An air of expectation
as the houses congregate
down the slope to chapel
to prayers for a day off physics, double maths or HBF
the indications are good
It's possible it could
be hymn number 95
keeping every hope alive
For the long bell summons to hall
School captain and Rector have conferred
Pen exchanged for ball
The sun should shine all day
Games and walking leave to town
lazing in the khud
or simply playing the clown
It is declared
a sunshine holiday.



6

NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

They call it a vivarium
The khud side where they roam
Whilst the natural history society
ponders how to create a home
For rabbits, guinea pigs and deer
There are Hydrangeas and Canna lilies just above the lower field
Where boys play and try to learn by rote.
Cages grass and mud
not much to stir the blood
But there is another creature that views them through bleary eyes
It is that handsome hairy creature
they call Patchy
the mountain goat
A life nipped in the bud
At first a cute little kid peeking out of the shepherd's coat
Plucked away from the slopes
above Manjitar where he could rule mountain and the flock
But destiny is cruel
the future quite a shock
Solitude and the company of boys and the smell of the Westcott bogs
That turned out to be his lot
And in the end what became of him
As life grew dim?
Did he get a chance to roam another mountainside
Or become mutton
on a plate?
A wasted life perhaps
based on a boy's judgemental lapse.

7

OCTOBER QUAD BEFORE CHHOTA HAZRI

Crunched and frosted grass beneath a prefect's gaze
Green geometry
In the crisp cold air
against a deep blue sky
The cement grey of Pythagoras on a mountainside
Condensing breath and darker grey sweaters hidden beneath
the coloured wools of home
starting the day
as the lads snake by
to biscuits and tea
Foss Westcott looks the other way
Embarrassed by the frozen dew
on the tip of his nose



8

HAR BAKRA AEO

Do you remember running in the rain?
Something I loved about the rhythm and the pound
of those steps to meet the timings set and overcoming the pain,
from sentry box to rising road falling to Ghoom.
Then the climb
to join those who had chanced the short cut,
ascending the path to the flat run above, still below the school
The squelch and the sound
As the wet seeped through everything
The exhilaration
of running through the clouds and the mist and the driving floods
Above the monastery
The writing on the prayer flags fading into rivulets
tumbling to the rivers on the plains
Har bakra aeo
Up goes the battle cry
from above for those laggards
Not yet ready to fly
from the wrath
of Hardeep
who having given fifteen minutes of grace could outrun us all.
Twists and turns
Past the stables
And Tibetan jewels
And then the downward sprint along the Mall
to Keventers and the club
And the satisfying walk back up
to school

9

EARTHQUAKE

Three legged nanny goat
trying to learn geography
and take note
We lacked the experience
of other continents
explored by air, on foot and boat
Galvin with traces of chalk
on his coat
as he explained tectonic plates
and the effect of ice ages by dates
that had no meaning for us just yet
Goh Cheng Leong as we got to grips
with the new fold mountains that we were perched upon
And learnt the drill
for earthquakes
Watching Millman Hall shake in tremor
lying flat on the top field
in case of fissures,
remaining on the ball
Irishman sardonically gazing at his charges
Beat.
Practical lesson on geological mortality
Complete.



10

THE JUNIOR DEBATING SOCIETY IN THE LIBRARY

So what came of that debate
as they argued through the night
if it was moral judgement or just a bitter fate
and whether wrong was right?
Surrounded by books
looking to cast their light
daggers drawn in looks
words rehearsed
witnessed by
rearranged library tables
Gauntlets laid for battle
for or more against?
Sticking to the motion
The Chair and the house
playing cat and mouse.
By morning normal service as life again resumes
the newspapers print more stories
Of the anguish and the gloom
nothing much has changed he cries
In the world last put to rights
on those previous passing nights.
The quality of argument
it exposes all those lies
As Chandak Chatterji
once again
rolls his eyes and sighs

IDIOSYNCRACIES

Now look here this is physics
 with the major that is wise
 Mind you all the mathematics
 And everything we learn
 tangentially to philosophise
 Dealt with turn by turn
 to change the geography of each and every face
 towards Prodeeeeeep
 As we translate the ugly hobgoblins
 from the drama of the book
 to staged performances
 Where Puck again could look
 All the Mukherjees
 and even all the Bannerjees
 by now devoid
 of all their energies
 As another call goes out
 across the mountainside
 running through the driving rain
 Past the monastery perched below the lane
 Come on you donkeys
 So don't touch a Gagan
 a Mohan a rasiya
 In case it results
 in khub latiya
 the Gods make the earth quack
 Striking with bows of bumboo
 While we speed up
 to avoid the cane

MONSOON CAMP

As you trudge past the swollen stream
that will become the Rangeet
It gives reality to that dream
those blisters in each shoe
remind you what to do
As you set camp
near waters meet
In the seeping damp
Not yet sure
Of the rising tide
Flash flood
Two hours away
boulders starting to play
wind and water lifting canvas
Country road waiting for sunlit day
When memory
Ingrained
in all that torrent
Makes it all
rosy again

ALTITUDE

From the hot and dusty plains of bare survival
Into the refuge of the billiard green tables of tea
the jacaranda splashing patches of orange
as far as you can see
Rainforests breaking into plantations of Sal
Leading to the first loop
In a blaze of white and pink
As the magnolias make you think
of how the haze of altitude transforms those uncomfortable plains
to a spectacle
Of unlimited horizons
of green and pink
But there is more to come
Mad waterfalls to ford as the road winds higher still
And as the first mountain range is breached
The phalanx of the second appears in greeny blue
As the Cryptomarias and Pines give way to the axe
And the gashes of brown from previous rains change the view
the fog lights blaze a way through each mist
The road breaks above the clouds to sunshine
Deep valleys hidden away
As journeys toil repeats itself towards the Rhododendrons and then the alpine
meadows turning to snow.
We loop the loops
With every glimpse
Of that wall of white and grey
“Look t’wards the eternal snows”
Our souls not quite as pure as those
Height and light
Extending the limits of our sight.

14

PUNISHMENT DRILL

There is PD still in progress
Upon the chapel slope
No mercy
for chancing that dare
to have a short quick smoke
behind the gym
when the challenge was with beedis
No money there for dope
Retribution
for those written off
Lofty ideals adrift from anchor
and devoid of any hope.
Moniti Meliora Sequamur



15

WEATHER FORECAST

Quadrangle weather
Which way does the wind blow?
Towards the hills and winter chill.
Sunshine holiday or punishment drill to go
PT in the drizzle or football in the rain
Weather vane above the Rectory steps
predicting joy and pain
Teacher chasing,
boy running to avoid the stick
Gown billowing in the wind
Six of the best? Take your pick
But on going home day
at last
the wind dries up
the moisture and the rain.
The tables turn
Toy train engine festooned
With the traditional placard
As the boy gets the stick to chase the teacher out
Ghoom Sonada Tung
From Kurseong
a clearer view of the horizon in the haze
Low and steamy plains
Heat and dusty pains



16

PASSING STORMS

The joy of a storm that's passed,
the glow
of rain washed
bands of light
in an afternoon sky
Bright steel grey with the blue and golden tinge of the evening yet to come
Luminous greens on an undulating landscape
Scattering the rays in glistening raindrops
Buckinghamshire or Darjeeling?
It hardly matters
The greens blues and the greys are the same
As is the search for the end of the rainbow
that no one yet can claim



OCEANS OF CLOUDS

Islands in an ocean of clouds
Castaway
with flourishing Rhododendron and Pine
Ox Eye Daisies
Dancing in the sun
Different seasons to be sure
Interconnected
The ocean currents converted to monsoon clouds in the summer
bereft of salt
To feed the multitudes
Thousands of feet below
past the Magnolias and Teak
Where an understanding of the beauty lying above does not exist.

18

MEMORY

Fleeting thoughts captured
in Digital moments
Chemical and physical flows
Harking back to the yearnings of youth where everything goes
The past is the present
tempered by what has gone before
Little changes whilst everything does
Backup and reboot

19

CHARACTER

Gentle ripples
On an infinite sea
masking bruises deep within
Despite
the chemistry of life
Performing miracles
And learning just to be.

CHOWRASTA

Chowrasta in the wet
Perambulations around a peak
For Tibetan and Christian
traditions marked in timber and stone
The freedom of roller skates
And coal fires drying the damp
in clubs at either end
Sitting under an umbrella hiding in the mist
the drizzle turning to drips
on the black fabric
As the exeat ticked away to the final bell on the next
hill

BLUE MOUNTAIN HAZE

Blue gold and orange mountain haze
taming the greens of the hillsides
As the sun sets
No clouds to sink into the valley yet
Magically forming overnight
as puffs of white cotton wool
to jump into
from above.
And as the following day
unfolds
warmth
causing each wisp to rise again
laden with moisture from below
Wrapping the colours in the mists of time
Respiration, evaporation, condensation and refraction
another cycle begins.



WORDS IN CHAPEL

The lesson on the right
 The sermon on the left
 And the prayers led from below
 May those thoughts in part
 Even the meditations of that heart
 be acceptable
 (most of the time)
 in thine eyes
 O Lord our God
 The lesson on the right
 The sermon on the left
 And the prayers led from below
 Tagore, the parable of the Prince, marking time and scripts, hymns ancient
 and modern
 The mind without fear
 Heads held high
 If I had the gift of prophecy and could fathom mysteries
 Sign language to the choir
 All things bright and beautiful
 Nature made them all
 The snow capped mountains turning golden against our sky
 The rivers in the valley
 turbulently
 flowing by
 Searching for four leaved clovers along the way
 on that sunshine holiday
 Walking leave to Keventers
 That was never all too long
 Whilst the clouds were rolling up the hill to prove the Rector wrong
 The lesson on the right
 The sermon on the left
 And the prayers led from below
 And the only meaning
 there ever was
 in those voices
 singing from the loft
 that set our hearts aglow

A PATCH OF MINT

A patch of mint
The first seed to sprout
In a mind that grew
Cosmos in the shade
And in the burning sun
Cajanus cajan
gave way to mildew
saved by the appetite of hungry cows
Fodder for grades
Fast forward to
making hay whilst the sun shone along the Rother in a different world
skinny dipping
The only link a solitary bay
in a garden
of plenty
Now *Morus nigra* rules staining the dahlias and roses that fight for light
Whilst the pear cannot understand the fuss



THE DECEIT OF TIME

The slow count in days

to things of relish

Anticipation

The race in seconds as those moments arrive

reassessment as they then drift away with the ebb of the tide

The inconsistency of time and how we record it.

The inconsistency of memory and recall

as the slow count begins again.



25

SCHOOL CHAPEL

Swirling mists
rising
through crushed pine needles
gnarled and moistened bark
In the gathering dark
Eden falls on mossy stone below
yet Hark
a mechanical Angel sings
through the bleak mid monsoon
With Rufus Paul in minor key to restless prayers,
ghostly chapel
wrapped in red and white
barely in sight
Whilst major colours line the other side
No Michaelmas daisies yet
Golden hot rods at attention and on parade to salute where Bishop and Canon
lie in repose
on the knoll below
Keepers of drifting thoughts and secrets that many have told.



MEETING MOTHER THERESA

Steely wizened eyes
Piercing through your soul
What could she see?
Unblinking
The examination was brief
PK flinched as the gaze chose him next
The world knows her as a saint - we knew her briefly as examiner

THE MILKY WAY

Ink flooded skies
above and below
in blue black,
mountains rising in ghostly white to touch those stars
We lie in wonderment on the grassy bank behind the chapel.
Down below the lights of town glisten within a dark pool
trying to hide the inadequacy of reflection
of that cloud of stars blazing above
The moon
a shining orb of chalk and shadows
bearing witness to the school
silence on those icy slopes on the other side
Enough light to prevent a step into the abyss
But dark enough to behold the miracle of life.

28

CHATTAWALA

From the low and steamy plains
Upward the moist clouds call
Red roofs at school
Puddles and pools
and umbrellas on the Mall



29

MAJOR COLOURS

Major Vyse is at the ready
Three nought three held quite unsteady
The Millman hall lights are on
“now look here”
should be lights out in the dorm
But Lochan wants to mug
and the Major wants to glug
the next whisky waiting in his room
The door flings open fast
the lights are out - oh blast
Coz the wire above the door
has been tampered with
to break the current's flow
As all pretend to sleep
So out again he creeps
it's the drink he thinks
And as his door shuts close
there is a scramble in the dorm
tip toe upon toes
to reset the switch
Physics lessons put to use
and applied not quite how the MCR would choose

SABRY'S DARE

Sabry wakes them up at two
whilst Millman hall sleeps
The rest don't have a clue
they creep out in silent step
For the dare they planned at prep
To roll the jeep out to the gate
and start the engine outside school
for a drive past Ghoom
towards Rangoon
And be back before four
The jeep behind garage door
And altering the log
So that the school driver is saved from trouble
for an act not of his doing
Boys sneaking back across the field
The sky a black inky blue, it's still dark
Most, unaware of this lark
and up those wooden stairs and through the circuit breaking door
where sleep is largely unbroken save for the occasional snore

PLAYING CHESS WITH PIGEONS

And as the years have swept
Each passing phase
six ages of man near done
Playing chess with pigeons
Rather than throwing them buns
In the royal hunt for the sun
Why is it that as you reach each mountain peak
Several feet closer to that fiery star
The bones they chill
Instead of searing warmth instill
Wise question
arising from playing the fool
Galvin seeks an answer
from that intellectual pool
of pregnant pigeons, geographers and three legged nanny goats
who in their dotage now row similar boats.

32

MEANING

As the seconds tick
Towards
that burning pyre
And crackling flames
of sentiments that disappear in a puff of smoke
Unknown
To those for whom it might have meaning
lost for now
and perhaps forever.

