

Satchi Master - My teacher, My colleague, My friend

By Basil Patrick



Velupillai Satchithananthan affectionately known as ‘Satchi master’ was one of the best known teachers of my era at St. Patrick’s College, Jaffna.

Seldom do you come across a teacher, one who transcends the norms of a typical teacher. Satchi master was one such teacher.

He was a man for all seasons and for all reasons. He was a dedicated teacher, an amiable, humorous, and kind hearted person. He was tall and lanky with a characteristic gait, and walked with a spring in his steps. His sharp eyes studying everything around him and with a friendly wave to greet those passed him by. He was a warm and loving personality. His willingness to listen and impart good honest advice were all, but very rare, even in those days. When I listened to the tributes paid by his loved ones at his funeral, they was perfectly captured the person that I knew.

I met Satchi master when he came to St Patrick’s college when our very dear rector the late Rev.Fr. Mathuranayagam recruited him for his newly established technical institute known as the 'Long's Institute' at the college. He was an affable character, witty and knowledgeable. Though he was a strict disciplinarian, he had a keen sense of humour, and an easy going manner. He had a friendly demeanor which endeared him to his students. Although I had limited interactions with him at the college, I always remembered him with much warmth and fondness.

Many years after I left college, I returned back to Jaffna and had a short stint teaching at St Patrick's. At that time many of my teachers of the likes of FNC Saverimuttu, Sam Alfred, Gnanam master, were still teaching there. Being the youngest teacher and more so as a

student of all those wonderful teachers, I felt a bit out of place, sharing the staff room with them. So I avoided going to the staff room during my free periods and loitered around the upper school and the school grounds.

I assume Satchi master had noted this. One day after school he asked me to accompany him for a quick snack at the cafeteria at the Jaffna Railway station. He would order some patties, pan rolls and tea and we would talk about various issues. This became a regular occurrence and on occasions another young teacher by the name of M.A.N. Anthony also would join us. I was so grateful to him as at that time I had no friends left in Jaffna, as most had left Jaffna to find their future overseas. I came to know Satchi as a very knowledgeable man and someone who was quite at ease to converse on any topic. Of course, his love for mechanics was always evident. I distinctly remember him carrying around with him motor mechanical magazines.

Not long after I left Sri Lanka and migrated to Australia. At that time it never occurred to me that our paths would cross once again.

It so happened Satchi master also migrated to Australia. As fate would have it, we were both working for the same organisation, Telecom Australia. He worked in Sydney and I worked in Melbourne.

It was then we had the opportunity to continue our relationship once again. We conversed very often by telephone. His concern for our people back home and family life in Australia, were constant themes in our conversations. I found him to be an honest and sincere person with whom you could discuss even the most intimate problems and issues. He was a very confident and forthright person.

It was he who encouraged me to start the OBA in Melbourne after he himself founded the Sydney OBA.

Our friendship continued, and I visited him on a few occasions when I travelled to Sydney. I also became familiar with his son Prabha, with whom I continued to communicate with. It was Prabha who kept me informed of his welfare. He told me when he was admitted to a nursing home. About two weeks ago, Prabha advised me that Satchi master was in palliative care. Last week he sent me a message to say he passed away. It was indeed a great shock and I was very saddened to say the least. Satchi master was well loved by all. Everyone I spoke to had a good word to say about him and expressed much sadness on losing such a well-loved teacher.

As for me, Satchi master was once my teacher, and then a colleague, and finally my friend. I will miss him dearly along with the many Patricians who mourn his loss.

May his soul Rest in Peace.

Basil Patrick - Melbourne OBA.