heaviness in my chest.

The familiar drone of countless chatter greets us as we enter the school yard. "Look, Shabbir! The cycle stands are still here!" We walk up to the church which is now barricaded by a steel fence. One thing is certain no one can sit on the steps anymore under the bell tower and share stories during lunch break, like we often did.

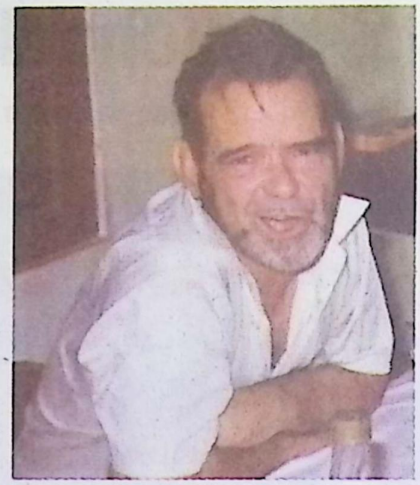
Shabbir and I enter the large central hall of the Main Building the very heart of St. Gregory's a place we would visit at least once everyday (even if our class was in another building) because it had, among other things, the library and the notice boards.

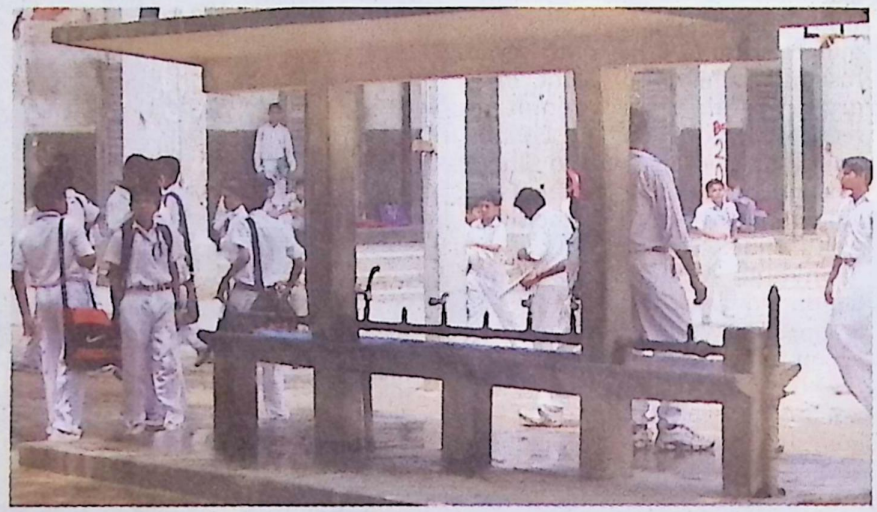
It was the notice boards, in particular, that we were always attracted to because they announced everything, from those as heartening as *"Rainy day No school"* to attractive gifts (that were up for grabs) pinned onto the notice board by Brother Hobart.

I am forced by the child in me to scamper up to one of the notice boards for a closer look it is not a rainy day today, Brother Hobart's gifts are not there anymore. Standing there, 35-40 years later, I can almost smell the sweet pungent aroma of a cigar, and almost feel a familiar punch on my arm as a resounding voice booms above me, "Ki Koros?" ("What are you doing?"). I turn my head and look up Brother Hobart Pieper is not there.

The deafening silence of the main hall nearly knocks me over; the sound of multitude familiar footsteps made all the more prominent by their very absence. I turn to look around the haunting emptiness of a place once bustling with life hits home... as I realize that this place is now abandoned.

I am informed that since a new massive building was being constructed, everything was in the process of being moved out of the older edifice to prepare to tear it down. It was not only saddening but also distressing to realize that this majestic structure that had nurtured





countless young buds of talent for more than a century, helping them to bloom into the movers and shakers of this country, was to be disemboweled and then destroyed.

And so I take my time looking around; taking in all those familiar features we hold so dear...the arched doors, the stained-glass windows, the statue of Saint Gregory, the steel beams holding up the ceiling, the crack in the paint and every intimate curve, corner, nook, niche and cranny of St Gregory's High School...that I will perhaps never see again.

My attention is instinctively drawn to the door of the Teachers' Room across the hall. I can almost see our teachers...Mr. Peter D'Costa (wearing the familiar salmon-colored shirt, always a size larger), Mr. N. K. Sarker (in his immaculate white 'dhoti'), Mr. Nicholas Rozario (looking as sharp as a scout master should), Mr. N. C. Sutradhar and a few others walking out... books and attendance register in hand, as they make their way to our classrooms where we are raising hell between periods.

Shabbir and I then wander into the smaller hall further down from the main hall where the library used to be. The massive shelves and the hundreds of books have all been removed. The room looks as bare as a flower robbed of its color and fragrance. Quite surprisingly, though, the small desk at the corner meant for issuing books is still there. I touch it lightly as I try to travel back in time...imagining that I am waiting there as the librarian puts the 'return-date stamp' on books about airplanes, ships, trains or planets that I am taking home to read.

Opening into the library area (right at the bottom of the stairs) is Class 9 with its saloon-style swinging doors. I was in this very class exactly thirty seven years ago. The desks and the benches are all gone. I walk into an eerie silence and a ghostly emptiness.

The familiar gray cement floor, the arched doors and the blackboard (taking up most of one wall) stirs up