

School of Hard Knocks

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Getting off from the school bus, I walked towards my classroom. The horror of class tests made me sluggish. Walking along the corridor, I pondered on the things around. Unoccupied staff rooms, where teachers exchange their opinions about students, decorated bulletin boards displaying the final upshots of cookery competition, dark classrooms waiting for the tenants, water coolers which at times get devoid of water, fire extinguishers and the fire hose reel, also the fire alarm, frequently played on by some of the crazy pupils. Everything gradually modified over time.

Another inevitable scene was that of my own classroom, wearing whitish shirt and creamy trousers. Its beauty, enhanced with the colourful chart works, was close to being adorable. Keeping the bag and reserving the seat, I turned around to find something interesting. There it was, soliciting my attention for past few days, the sliding windows. The white light shone from it, as an outcome of the persevering efforts of UV rays to find out our matters, was sort of captivating.

Standing next to the window, I overlooked the school premises. The flock was still flowing out of bus no.28. To the left was seen the kindergarten students with angelic faces, wearing an intensely hued red and white uniform. To the right was seen the primary and the lower secondary pupils with cheerful faces, wearing royal blue striped shirts and navy blue pants. The narrow center column was that of the higher secondary students with matured faces, wearing plain white shirts, the symbol of purity, sacrifice and virtue. An appealing early morning layout of Gulf Asian English School!

Admiring the scene for a few moments, I irresistibly flashed from the past memories. My first day in Gulf Asian as a fresher is one of the few things that are preserved by my cerebrum with every minute detail. Being from a Malayalam medium school, the experience offered by English medium school was both terrifying and thrilling.

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Entering the 'Nâ' division of 6th grade, I saw my chemistry teacher lecturing the nerdy spectators. (Well at then, I could not perceive that it was the chemistry class that was going on). Right away, I was allotted a seat in the middle row as she couldn't figure out if I was a first bench or a back bench lad. My first friend- Fahad Sunil, whom I had already met last night in his apartment as a precaution, instructed me to take out an one sided two line book from the backpack and reproduce what was on the white board. That was an astonishing moment for me as I have seen only black boards in Kerala.

The contrast was marked. From wooden door to sliding windows, incoherent tables to handy chairs, professionalized teachers to westernized students and so on were more than sufficient to experience a gratifying school life. I was privileged, but not resourceful. Moreover, I was not interested.

After 80 minutes of the silent film, I was called out by my class teacher for enquiring what my second language was. My nerve impulses came to a standstill, not just because I failed to follow her English, but the feeling of being an outsider was at the point of exploding my brain. I couldn't restrain my lachrymal apparatus from shedding salty liquid.

Realizing my limits, Miss. Geetha Thampi repeated her queries in Malayalam. Unluckily she failed to get the fact that I was unfamiliar with the word '2nd language' as A.K Memorial School had only one language and that was my mother tongue. Being tired from the efforts to prize words out of my mouth, she then took my bag and started searching it. Soon she felt lucky and found what she needed. Holding 'Malayala padavali' she told, 'This is your second language'. Entering back the classroom, I was like 'the only alphabets I knew belonged to a language that is considered second'. Shortly it was class teacher's period and I got introduced to the class.

It was not hard to integrate into the life of Sharjah. But to mingle with my school-mates seemed to be almost impossible. I was unaware of what was happening in the world encompassing me. This flaw of mine made me abstain from all sorts of enjoyments. No expressions and no comments, like a passive parliamentary member. Just engrossed in studies. No surprise that people around me thought I was a single-minded and boringly studious chap.

I saw people taking my name into their conversations. Sometimes, they would come to me with queries. I will reply you sometime in future, In Sha Allah, I thought to myself. Someone wanted to test me in my Malayalam and came up with a question as to what the Malayalam word for 'college' is. I failed, but later proved myself with the multiplication table.

I was admitted without a preliminary test and my first terminal examination marks were going to be the benchmark for the belated decision making of school management. My uncle, Mr. Sudheer Salahudeen took up the challenge and prepared me day and night. Although a comparatively diminished score, 61% was a peak point for the student of my kind, the principal remarked. Next year I scored an astounding 70% and then an 80% and I finally touched 95 per cent. Bit by bit, I got the white label of first bench boy.

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Life went through frequent ups and downs. I had a way with English in my text books, but not yet with that coming out of my friends and teachers. Nobody did I find with whom I could verbally practice English. High order novels provided me with boredom. Advanced newspaper language was not a good choice to begin with. When I found a way with that even, I was reluctant to open up my mind in the public. It took four years for my larynx to express the vibrations of vocal folds. I started communicating with my teachers and other fellow beings.

Finally here am I, with a heart so firm and actions so skilled, resulting from life's hard knocks. I can read, I can write, I can speak, I can run, I can jump and I can dream! Who else deserves my gratitude than the almighty Allah - My creator? '

'Hey dude', someone yelled from behind.

My buddies have come and are busy chitchatting. Let me join them. 'Assalamualikkum.'

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