

Woven into the Fabric of My Life, My Teacher

Anonymous

I have been fortunate to have been at the receiving end of many enlightening teachers and educationists all my life. Part of the charm of studying at a convent (mission school) was that when I emerged, my world view was not myopic and that I was not preferential towards patriarchal hegemony. Instead I knew I could embrace my own gender-centric identity while stumbling over various coming off age experiences.

There was one moment in time though, when a certain teacher raised the bar. It was in a university that did not believe in setting any standards other than how much money could be milled in against useless new students, who just needed a degree on stamp paper. It was an institution empty of the academic challenge that college life is supposed to present one with. The challenge that tests the pristine preconceived notions that at least my sheltered notion had preset.

I was in a new city: having lived my entire existence as an only child, I was used to people pandering to my daily needs. Here, I was alone, without the routine vehicles of comfort that I was accustomed to. Car, domestic help, a large space to myself; I had chosen another life over all these corporeal aids. Then my boyfriend died. And I found myself back at home. This time, to return to that university was not just about a coming off age obstacle. It was a stubborn affixation to trudge on.

With a classroom full of first years, all bristling with the alpha desire to be right, it could not have been easy for her to identify that one student was just going through the motions. She was barely older than me, yet she was entrusted with the responsibility to teach a bunch of first years the basics of the human mind. And she took it without any inhibition. She would engage the meek ones into giving their opinions, she would draw the back benchers into stimulating discussions and she would be a friend without ever blurring the lines of respect. And I repeat she was barely a year older than I was.

We would engage in class only when something with a spiritual nuance caught my ear. It was perhaps a self serving psyche but after my whole world had fallen apart, for me it was an appropriate defense mechanism.

Perhaps the dean of my department asked her to keep an eye on me, or perhaps my monochrome responses made her ask why this one student was such, either way she started acting as a scaffold. The first time I remember acknowledging something was wrong with me when one winter morning; she asked if she could speak with me. We went and sat on the stairs at the entrance and oblivious of the human thoroughfare. With the sharp sheets of winter sun blurring the outlines, I had my first posthumous conversation about him with a stranger.

And I know, this sounds much more dramatic in retrospect. A young girl loosing her boyfriend and a young teacher acting as a life line. Back then, it was just about the necessities. I had to continue and she was an empathetic support system. She was a

teacher in the classroom, where she and I had a secret silent relationship. And outside, via the world wide web, we grew closer.

I think she understood that I needed this intellectual and emotional connection to stumble through the grief. Her empathy never reeked of pity and she never enabled any lasting dependency. I remember we discovered that we both loved to set new standards for ourselves and daily discourse over Rumi, human emotions and silly girl things became my secret that led me through each day. With her I also discovered that scientific enquiry need not be void of spiritual affinity.

Our relationship was not held together with any ties or strings. We were equals in and out of the classroom. Where she taught and I learnt, there were also moments when she would suspend her disbelief and hear not just me, but my fellow peers when we created our own perceptions about what we considered orthodox theories formulated by reductive minds. Considering our country's system of authoritative education, our classroom was not a place with any hard binding rules or distinct boundaries. It was a tiny just island that fed a just world view in the minds of young individuals creating their own groundings. And she was the inclusive young elder who governed.

She left the university. Our relationship became a part of my daily fabric: not as an active participant but as the seeds for a new lease on life.

The author is a freelance writer and photograph. She has the improbable dream of owning an animal shelter one day