

# Connecting the Student and the Scholarship

Nazia Arif

Ms. Naila was my favourite teacher. Just seeing her enter class used to lighten my burdens. She was short with thick long hair, blessed with the gift of intelligence.

I wasn't good in my studies at first. Ms. Naila changed some of that. She was associated with an NGO by the name of CARE and worked at the government school near my house which I attended. I wanted to be like her one day. She was our science teacher. Science was now the subject I found it the easiest to learn for. Because of Ms. Naila who made it all seem so easy. I secured the third position in the class ninth final exams, which were home exams. She applauded me for my achievement and encouraged me to continue my education beyond matric too. She told me about the multiple benefits of getting an education, trying to convince me to not quit school after class tenth. Initially my reply used to be, 'But I am engaged now and my parents will not allow me to continue my education. They would much rather have me stay at home and learn to do household chores. There are few girls in my family who have studied as far as matric, and no girl has studied beyond this point.'

Life went on and I sat for my matric exams. I passed my exams securing an A grade and getting the highest marks in my own class (Arts section). This, Ms. Naila felt, was all the more reason for me to go for a college education.

She asked to see my mother. She spoke to her about the issue. My mother had her own realities to deal with.

‘I would love for my daughter to study,’ she said, ‘but I live with my two brothers and their families and they will not allow this. My circumstances don’t permit me to do what you want me to.’

My uncle, my mother’s brother had a son and daughter who had done their matric. It was only the boy who went on to take admission in eleventh grade. Ms. Naila knew what my background was, and how we were financially quite weak too.

Ms. Naila had made up her mind. She taught me how to cross all these hurdles; she pointed the way for me. Following her instructions, I approached the NGO CARE. The official there took one look at my grades and recommended that I seek admission in Punjab College. I rejected the suggestion, saying it was an expensive college and the dues would be beyond my means. At this the official responded, ‘Just decide what you want to do. You are being given a scholarship.’

Once this happened, my mother stood against the entire family and supported me in my educational career. My uncles continued to criticize my choice, saying that colleges are corrupt places which make a girl lose her morals and forget her manners, but my mother paid no heed to their malicious gossip.

Thus I continued my education.

Today I have a BA degree. My major subjects were Statistics, Mathematics and Economics. I am a teacher at a school that is all about awareness and enlightenment. I am so content with what life has brought my way. Even today I recognize Ms. Naila to be the

source of all this, of helping me find a scholarship and persuading my mother to rethink her stance towards education.

*The author is a teacher at the Sanjan Nagar Public Education Trust School,  
Lahore*