

# THE POWER OF A STRONG VOICE

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When I got admission in St. Lawrence College, Karachi, I decided to study Islamic History and Islamic Studies. I am a Christian. My choice of subjects perturbed some of my Muslim class-fellows who locked me up in a room. I was sitting there quietly weeping when Ms. Qudsia and Ms. Shahnaz came and rescued me. They took me to the principal Ms. Khadija. As I sat there crying, all three tried to comfort me.

I lived in the nun's hostel in Karachi. I wanted to become a nun myself too. That is why the cardinal of the Karachi Diocese Mr. Joseph Cordero knew me quite well. He visited the college and gave the principal written permission for me to study the subjects of my choice. His permission letter was immediately sent off to the then Minister of Education. It was with the Minister's written permission that I was allowed to take compulsory Islamic Studies (which was compulsory only for Muslims) and Islamic History.

During that time, one day, out of the blue, the college was closed on emergency grounds. I was very surprised. Until I noticed that many girls were raising slogans against me and there were even some stones thrown close to where I stood. Communists that existed in society had spilled over inside our college. It was like in the movies. Except all this was real. It was my life.

After that incident Ms. Qudsia made it a point to pay attention to all aspects of my life. That is why I am happy to follow in my teacher's footsteps even today.

I still think about her because what she taught us almost twenty five years ago is still relevant today. I didn't just receive knowledge from her as a student of FA, but to this day I am still benefiting from her iconic personality. She was simple and dignified. I

still try to follow her way of speaking, be it in Urdu or English. She used to tell us to make our point in a confident and rational manner.

Ms Qudsia would always enter the classroom with a smiling face. She would always greet first. Her braided hair hung on her back; her face was pristine and devoid of all signs of make up, her smile being her only adornment. She usually wore high heeled shoes. She would push her spectacles on her forehead while teaching. She would walk in with her bag on one shoulder, and a stack of thick history books in the other hand. I would always step forward and offer to carry the books for her, at which she would always be very pleased.

Ms. Qudsia has been a reference point for me throughout my teaching career. When she spoke she spoke with great acumen. In our class we often used to discuss political events and expressed our views on India, Afghanistan and America. This was during Zia-ul-Haq's regime, when I was in second year. She used to tell us how Indian and Pakistani politics was dominated by a few dynasties and how the common man was wronged and under-represented. Ms Qudsia had great faith that the future of our country would be better than the past or the present and that the corrupt rulers' days will soon come to an end.

I still remember fondly how she used to pull her dupatta from one side and spread it out, how she would get in her car at the end of the day, still as alert as she had been in the morning, and drive off.

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