

# Yesterday Once More

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This story is from the decades of 50s and 60s about my teacher Abdullah Shakir. His memory fills me with a feeling of rigor, respect for human endeavour and to this day adds new vigour to my life.

He taught us Urdu literature in grade nine in a rural government school in Kasur where we learnt all the important lessons, lessons that were in and beyond the textbooks.

One day there was news in our school that the Inspector was due to come on his quarterly school visit. In those days school inspections were serious business and had a lot to do with academics and less with counting missing facilities, tables and chairs. In fact we all sat on the proverbial '*taats*' (gunny bags). The inspector arrived true to form carrying an impressive but typical leather bag, worn out due to its excessive worthwhile use and its bulges indicated that it housed within it half the office, documents stationery and all! Someone came to our classroom calling for Sir Shakir, who declined to leave his classroom. Not responding to an inspector's call was very daring indeed and confusing for the inspector.

A bit shocked the inspector decided to come to our class. He wanted to see himself who was this daring teacher Sir Abdullah Shakir, who had refused to rush out of class to meet him in the principal's office. The Inspector came to our door and watched what was happening in the classroom. A couplet from Mir Taqi Mir's poetry was written in the beautiful Nastaleeq script on the blackboard and discussion was going on its interpretations when another student raised his hand and said, "*Parallel to this verse that Ibraheem Zauq has said is the verse by Mir Taque Mir ....and what a verse that is!*" *The student wrote the verse he was referring to on the board and recited it too. Both the hand-writings on the board were equally beautiful, the teacher and the student making their mark side by side, none less than the other, each outdoing the other. The Inspector was awe-struck by everything he experienced in the classroom that afternoon.*

On this discussion ensued until yet another student got up to share another piece of poetry. This quality and intensity of academic interaction completely shocked the inspector who then asked Mr. Shakir, 'Do you mind if I too can sit on the side and on the floor Sir? Sir Shakir said 'absolutely not, you are most welcome' and continued with the discussion. The inspector sat down observing the class completely awestruck until the very end. After our class concluded they (Sir Shakir & the Inspector) went towards the principal's office. We overheard the conversation.

Sir Abdullah told the Inspector, "These children come on their bicycles, some from a distance of ten miles, some on special trains..., I cannot bear to take the burden of wasting a single minute of their time. If I do, then I have to keep them back for extra time to make up for the lost time and they tend to miss their transport back home. That is why

I could not interrupt my class. I hope you understand why I could not leave my class ". The inspector put his arms around Sir Shakir's shoulders, the image said it all, an inspector's complete happiness at a teacher's outstanding performance. That must have made his day... a difficult act to follow.

I often think of that day, of standards which were absolutely a cut above any prescription, professionalism and humanism with impeccable taste. I can still feel the air of excellence in my classroom with Sir A. Shakir's brilliance and the inspector's expressions\_\_ humility and acknowledgement of a Great Master... These were our guiding lights, these were our teachers...

*The author has worked extensively in the field of education. He is a retired Director Public Instruction, Department of Education, Punjab.*