REFLECTIONS

TO THE TEACHERS WHO BUILD US

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In class 10, I was elected as the class president in my school. I remember this one instance when I was carrying a stack of homework copies to the teachers' lounge, and a teacher, whom I liked dearly, shot me a rather steely look and asked whether I really was the class president. I was 15, but that day I felt smaller than a speck of dust.

That was 10 years ago, but I remember the incident vividly.

This story definitely is a sore spot, but it would be criminal if I didn't write about the teachers who carry us, push us, and build us.

Like many of my peers, I developed an affinity for English when I was in primary school. But it wouldn't be fair if I didn't mention my English teacher, who instilled in me a love for the language and an appreciation for the effort that goes into every paragraph.

Then, in high school, I had my fair share of teachers who made me feel as though the world was my oyster and others who made me feel rather less so. But looking back, apart from that first incident, I remember only the good parts. The teachers I truly cherish were the ones who made learning fun, rather than berating us for not knowing how to spell a word we had never even heard of before.

University, however, was a real game changer. Through my own, rather humble experiences, I began to understand that there was so much more to teaching than pedagogy.

I remember being at university, losing my mind over Judith Butler's wonderfully complicated *Gender Trouble*. Late one night, I wrote a rather strange email to my professor about an equally bizarre question involving lipstick and gender performativity. To my surprise, my professor wrote back with a detailed response, explaining that, yes, conditioning is a significant part of what Butler describes as performance.

There are some teachers you come across only rarely. But when you do, they turn your world upside down. They listen to your academic ramblings and somehow make something coherent out of them. They are patient when you are impatient and can turn your half-formed thoughts into a research plan. These are the teachers who love teaching. Their love for the profession translates into the effort they put into their course outlines and, more importantly, into actually following them because they want to give their students as much as they possibly can.

Of course, I know that students and teachers are not always on the same page. But for those who are following the lecture, the effort is unmistakable. You can tell when a teacher has put their heart into the lesson.

My *nanabhai* and *dadabhai* were both teachers, so whenever I hear someone introduce themselves as their student, a rush of emotions washes over me. Because even when these teachers are no longer with us, the impact they leave on their students' lives makes their presence linger.

This is for the teachers who make teaching feel like something more than a profession. The teachers who are patient with their students and let them meander over lessons that have little to do with tests and assignments. The teachers who push their students towards their fullest potential, while understanding that not every student is walking towards the same destination. The teachers who make time, even when they have very little of it, because a student needs them.

It is incredibly difficult to be a teacher, especially in Bangladesh, given the conditions in which we expect our teachers to work. So, when someone manages to make it through that labyrinth of hurdles and still leave a positive mark on even one student's life, it warrants both love and respect.



ILLUSTRATION: **SABAA ALI HAFIZ**