

All is Forgiven

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This is an incident that profoundly affected my professional life as a teacher. I joined my service as a school teacher after the pandemic, when educational institutions had just started again. From my childhood, I had dreamt of becoming a teacher. However, the reality was totally different. The school where I joined was situated in a remote village of Dhalai district in Tripura. Almost every family was involved in cultivation (step cultivation in hilly areas). Apart from infrastructure and other problems, there was a problem directly related to my job, which distressed me a lot. This problem was about language. I could speak Bengali, English and Hindi fluently. But, the students of our particular school knew only the language of the Reang community, to which they belonged. There is no Bengali family in this village. However,

Bengali was the language in which their books were printed initially. The only sources of learning Bengali were the textbooks and the teachers. Thus, it was challenging for the teachers to make them learn Bengali.

At that time, only 46 students were there in my school though it was a senior basic school. Moreover, among them, only 15–20 students attended the school on a daily basis. We had to make the sitting arrangement of Primary students in one classroom and in another classroom, the Upper Primary students used to sit together. This system is still running.

There was a boy in Class 5 at that time. He was a backbencher. He acted naughty and turned a deaf ear to the teachers most of the time. This may have happened due to the language problem mentioned earlier. He seemed to take a strong

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dislike to me. Whenever I entered into the classroom and saw him, his contorted expressions, which were made intentionally, angered me. As a teacher, I believe that we should not punish students; we need to be in limits. I tried my best to make him understand that whatever he had been doing was not good. But, he refused to change his behaviour. Sometimes, I calmed myself down by reminding myself that perhaps he were a first generation learner. Perhaps, his parents couldn't teach him at home how to behave with the teachers, thus, his behaviour reflected a strong prejudice against me—a Bengali-speaking outsider. I felt that our language difference stood between us. He threw mud on my motorcycle, let the air out of the wheels, mimicked me during the classes and provoked me beyond self-control. I didn't realise when his deeds made me hate him. It was like a silent cat-and-dog fight between us.

One day, I was washing my hands after lunch. The tap was located at a corner of the school ground. There was a mango tree a little ahead. The naughty student had climbed the tree, and was making some sounds and saying something in his language to irritate me. I ignored him. I never

thought that I would experience such horrible things in my career. I was scolding him in my mind and turned my back, while returning to the school building. Right at that moment, I heard a loud cry of pain. Immediately, I turned my head towards the source of the sound and found that the boy had fallen from the branch of the mango tree. I ran to him. The pain in his eyes made me forget all his bad behaviour. I lifted him and ran towards the health centre, which was behind our school. The health officer gave him treatment and within half an hour, he was almost fine. I was there all the time, standing near the bed on which he was lying. He kept his eyes on me throughout the time, from carrying him to the health centre to the time he became fine. I discovered something unusual in his stare. Eyes never lie. His eyes were begging forgiveness; the few drops of tears that fell from my eyes were also asking for forgiveness. Since that day, we became friends.

This true story tells us that our activities as teachers affect the mind of the students. Darkness cannot be met by darkness, we need a source of light. Love, care and patience can change the mentality of the students.