



## **Letter to the Editor**

### **On Becoming a Teacher in a Medical College**

When I took the teacher's oath three decades ago, I didn't know how different it would be from my profession as a doctor. Teachers occasionally have unpleasant emotions, ups and downs during their tenure as a teacher, there is a risk that the job becomes confusing, and all these emotions are associated with this thankless job. I, however, learned that it is up to me to remain steadfast and uplifted all through my long journey. Priorities of busy life in a medical college, the competency with which a teacher's life is so much associated, courage to defend my rights and my student's rights to a healthy environment of reciprocity of teaching and learning, were to be always considered.

I can say I always enjoyed my additional responsibilities as a teacher. At times it was even my primary responsibility and medical profession the second. Every teacher agrees that challenging days are common to our lives as teachers but the feeling that you are a part of development is so pleasing that you don't regret why you are there. It never happened to me to decide to quit, but I strongly feel that a teacher cannot go ahead successfully if he or she doesn't feel happy or recognize and appreciate himself or herself from time to time. I went through these different feelings, that I used to jokingly, share with my intimate colleagues and now I like to share it with you. I never regretted that I am a teacher and this should be every teacher's feeling. Senseless time flies away, it cannot teach anything to anybody; time on its own has no power or skill or worth much, but you grow, learn, and change if you are lucky in a good way. You try to be important and develop as well. You try not to repeat the same year of your career over and over again but continue to change, adapt to the changes around you and try and learn skills that will further one's chances to keep up to say the least. The question that comes to this editor's mind is whether change has any limits and how to respond to what someone may think is a system or limitations imposed on him or her.

I became a teacher at a medical college nearly 30 years ago and soon fell in love with the never-ending challenges, learning opportunities, new colleagues, staff, patients, and, above all, students. What an experience to walk around and see dynamism everywhere! The routine work of a doctor has been complimented by the juvenile environment of new adults moving around me and looking at me as if waiting for some miracle to be performed or for miracles to happen, which would make their journey shorter and help get them to their desired finish line faster. They grew fast and were soon ready to swim in the ocean. If the house is an aquarium, then the college is a pond, and the world at large is an ocean; somehow, they grew and mature in the ocean. To me, however, college is but a farmland. We had to observe preparing the land, ploughing it yearly, planting fresh saplings, gardening, and taking care of the new plants to mature, then reaping the harvest about 5 years later and enjoying the success and achievements from each delicate and timely activity. At orientation ceremonies, I would tell parents that their wards would be in the safe hands of our experienced staff and would tell them that we should all wait for good results. I always considered myself in the rank of guardians, the "owners" of our products. Soon, with the passing of time, I came to the realization that the "products" that I "created" and "owned" were but temporary visitors; they left us for their environments and didn't look back. I gradually realized that I don't own anybody, and they come and go.

They belong to their families, relatives, and localities. In about ten years, I learned the reality that I am not at the level of guardians and cannot claim anything!! What was I then? The second stage of my transformation started taking shape. I love books and am always fascinated by Franz Kafka's look into life. He wrote about what he called metamorphosis, which may be translated as transformation or mutation. From being a doctor, I became a teacher, then transformed into a guardian, and now, yes, I was mutated and became a farmer.

It was still good; I was young, energetic, and excited. Good to claim it. In the second decade of my career, I did not stand at the level of parents and guardians but at the level of our farmers. Yes, I had become a farmer. In orientation ceremonies for freshmen my address to all had evolved and I would say that our farm is ready to take on new challenges, and the parents and guardians should trust us and not worry. Like saplings, their wards will be planted,

nurtured, educated, and skilled, and they can enjoy what we produce at the end of five-year seasons. It is not a bad feeling to be a farmer and actually it is a good feeling to have! Farmers are important to society and the nation. Without hesitation, I declared my position. I will work as a farmer. I am a farmer of a different nature, and my products are unique and special. Another decade was nearing its end, and soon I started to realize my limitations and my enthusiasm was curbed as I never created routines, or ever issued ordinances, or made curriculums, and syllabi. Everything is so prefixed and set up in such a way that there is no room for change of any magnitude. I didn't have the slightest freedom to change anything. I was never lost because I was not free! Nearly another 10 years passed (now it was almost 20 years), same lectures, same tutorials, clinical classes and so on. The feeling of being a dynamic teacher gradually faded away. A farmer has a choice of its product; he produces what is good and has a good demand and market and goes for it, but here no choices were given to me; I can't decide what to teach, how much to teach, elaborate on some topics, discard others, and even the students themselves decide to learn or not to learn according to the syllabus and earlier students advice. With my notes not changing for years and repeating the same thing over and over again, the only change is a little change in the timing and distribution of classes to different years and phases. Where am I? Am I a machine? No, it is a farm here, not a factory. The 3<sup>rd</sup> decade of teaching experience is in the middle, and I feel a mutation in me- a kind of metamorphosis with my firm belief that we are on a farm with products, owners, farmers, and land that needs ploughing every year by never-tired, never- complaining cows. I gradually found myself at the bottom of the list, in the ranks of various other characters that contribute in the farm, like the animals and the machinery. I looked outwardly and inwardly, and I realized that I have only ever been a cow from the beginning of my teaching career till now. No sound, no autonomy in how to be a teacher or how to oversee the education of my pupils, no new pictures in front of my eyes, no any new aims and ambitions ahead. Kafka is right; I was functionally a cow in a self-declared comparison of my environment to a farm with different but unique products.

However, these reflections added to my positive attitude towards my profession. A teacher's aim is to produce humanity, and not just humans with skill and knowledge. Teachers are satisfied when they see their former students are doing better than their teachers and it is by accepting the fact that my student is better than them, that a teacher is elevated in his own self.

***Prof. Dr. Cyrus Shakiba***

*Professor, Department of Orthopaedics*

*Jalalabad Ragib-Rabeya Medical College, Sylhet.*

*E-mail: cyrus.shakiba@gmail.com.*

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.3329/jmj.v20i2.79445>