

School Topper

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The Second World War was just over and India awaited her freedom eagerly. It was a time when the air was filled with the sound of the indistinct buzz of the radio. Gandhiji declared, "Indians will build their own India." The whole country was filled with an unmatched optimism. I secretly wished for a chance to do something for my country. For this, I needed to study in a good school. But I never dared to ask my parents, as I knew they wouldn't be able to afford it.

One day my father came up to me and, to my utter surprise, said, "Abdul, I know how you've always wanted to pursue higher studies. Your mother and I aren't highly educated, but we have great dreams for you. Don't worry, we will somehow find the money for you to study in a good school."

The Schwartz School was in Ramanathapuram, a bustling town that lay across the sea from Rameswaram. My brother took me to the school and I was admitted.

It was a very good school. When it was hot and humid, the students were made to sit under trees, as there were no fans in those days. We would run from under one tree to another when we changed classes. One day, as I was in a hurry, I stepped into the wrong class, where my math teacher was taking a class.



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He glared at me through his glasses and said, "What are you doing in this school if you can't even find your way to the right class? You should just go back to the village where you came from." He then caught me by the scruff of my neck and caned me in front of the whole class.

I felt crushed. My family had made great sacrifices to send me to this school. I felt terribly homesick at times, but I was determined to make my family proud. From that day on, I made up my mind not only to be a good student but to be the best. I studied night and day. Many months later, my dream of scoring full marks in my math exam finally came true. I was thrilled!

The next morning, during our assembly, the same teacher who had punished me earlier, stood up, smiled and said, "Whoever I punish becomes a great man!" Everyone in the assembly burst out laughing. He then recounted what had happened. He pointed to me and added, "Mark my words; this boy is going to bring glory to his school and teachers." His praise quite made up for the earlier humiliation.

I went back home after that semester and my entire family rejoiced. My mother made sweets and my father went all over Rameswaram distributing them. I finally felt that I had done something worthy, but there was still a lot to be achieved.

THE END



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Vocabulary

(All meanings given in context to the story)

Bustling	-	Full of people and traffic moving about in a busy way
Declare	-	Say something officially or publicly
Eagerly	-	Very excited and happy that something is going to happen
Freedom	-	The right to do or say what you want
Glare	-	A long angry look
Humiliate	-	Make someone feel ashamed or embarrassed
Indistinct	-	Unable to hear clearly
Optimism	-	A feeling that good things will happen
Pursue	-	Follow in order to achieve something
Sacrifice	-	The act of giving up something important or valuable

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Questions for discussion:

1. Little Abdul Kalam was beaten by his teacher. Was that right or wrong? Why?
2. Have you ever been beaten or hit by your teacher? Was that right or wrong? Why?
3. Does a teacher have the right to beat a student?
4. What can you do to protect yourself, if a teacher beats you?
5. Can you think of teachers who never beat anyone?
6. Did you know that 2 out of 3 children in India report being beaten? What can you do to stop this practice in your school?



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