Professor Anita Ghulam Ali (S.I.)

Preface

Prof. Anita Ghulam Ali has always been a fresh lively and graceful person. She is a very keen observer and pleasant to you every time you meet with her. She was kind to tell us about her journey from school to where she is at today. It is evident from her story how sports and extracurricular play a role in shaping ones personality. There are many other things one can relate to and learn from her experience. I also found it very interesting how the leadership instinct in her could be seen in such varying colors since her childhood. Her story truly inspired me; I hope it does the same with other women who read it.

Her Story…

Since my childhood I have always been a very active person. I have always been full of creativity and vivid imagination. Leadership has always been embedded within me. The leadership trait was very apparent when I as a little girl I would always compete with my male cousins and male class fellows.

My house was near large fields which were full of donkeys. Being a tomboy to the heart, I used to saddle and ride the donkeys with my male friends. We invented a game in which we had to ride on the donkey through a narrow passageway without letting our knees touch the walls of the passage.

I truly believe that such challenges actually prepared me for the journey I have undertaken to reach where I am today.

I was a very naughty student, one who was never studious, always up to mischief. It was my regular habit to bunk school during lunch break. The school was full day, 9am to 4pm those days. There was a proper dining room for lunch break. A man used to carry the tiffin boxes of my whole family to school. I would bring mine to the open fields where the donkeys were. Gradually, the teachers at Mother Superior St. Lawrence Convent noticed that I was missing classes and started complaining about it. That was when my parents discovered that I was missing school!

In college I would never attended botany class. The class took place at 3 in the afternoon, the same time at which the student matinee shows used to be on at Paradise Cinema. My botany teacher was very particular therefore I would do something naughty to get punished. I wouldn't take my own razor to sharpen the pencil and this simple mischief was enough for her to ask me to leave her class immediately. This was always the best opportunity for me to go watch the shows at discounted rates.

Other than being a naughty student, I have always been an avid sports person. I was the vice president of the Students' Union at university. I used to be in the badminton,
netball and table tennis teams. Sports played an important role in my life, due to my active background, I would deal with situations better in the future.

I had a very supportive family. My grades didn’t allow me to get admitted for medical studies, so I chose to major in Microbiology. On the B.Sc level I did an internship at the Glaxo pharmaceuticals where I became the in-charge of the filling section. Again my leadership qualities were reflected during the internship period. I also involved myself in doing voluntary work with Red Cross at Lyari.

As my studies became more specific, I started enjoying more. Microbiology, being closely linked to the field of medicine enhanced my interest towards studies. I topped in my masters, and got a gold medal. When I would meet my teachers from school and college, they were always surprised to hear that I got a gold medal.

Now it seems obvious that I tend to accomplish things that bring me into the lime light. Teaching was one of these things. After completing my masters, I started teaching Bachelors students at SM College. The college was a small one, and it wasn't so prestigious. I used to teach boys and men, some who were even elder to me. Some of these men used to come from work; they belonged mostly to the lower economic strata.

I was just a fresh graduate teaching at the bachelors’ level. I knew that to control such a class I needed to be on my toes and know my subject. My sporty background also helped me a lot and I had no problem interacting with my students. I would slap them in a friendly way and even rip their pockets. I was very flexible with my students. I knew I had to give my best if I wanted them to respect me in return.

My class would always be full of energy. Sometimes I would share a cup of tea with my class to get them fresh. If an important cricket match would be on air on the radio, we would postpone the class. I knew their concentration would lie in the match and me being a fan of cricket, we would all listen to the match on the transistor together.

From 1961 to 1985 I taught at the same college without getting transferred. During this time I also became a part of the Pakistan College Teachers’ Association. I progressed from being a unit representative to the vice president and I finally became the president of the association.

I led the movement for nationalization of colleges. At that time there were around 78 private and 10 government colleges. The private colleges had no regulatory body and the government would not take any responsibility for how the teachers of private colleges were being treated. In private colleges the teachers were ill treated and disrespected by the management. The teachers’ terms of reference were not set. We pressed that the TOR should be documented.

In 1970, for the first time an ordinance was passed by the government. But this ordinance was just passed in order to subside our movement. In the ordinance the
government declared that the TOR and contracts of the teachers should be given in writing. But no regulatory body was formed for private colleges.

When Mr. Bhutto stood for elections, he held a hunger strike and in that camp he announced that if elected, he will nationalize all colleges. In a memorable picture taken in the camp I can be seen standing next to him. During this movement I even spent time in jail, our processions were lathi charged but all of that always had a very positive impact over me, I would still enjoy leading the processions.

A white paper was written about what nationalization would mean. The following things were enlisted:

- Only the government would be entitled to pay the teachers
- Colleges would be allowed to keep their own names and keep their own character

On 1st September 1972 MLR 118 was passed and all private schools and colleges were nationalized. This was a great achievement. And so, in 1972, overnight I became a government servant. In 1985 I was appointed as the Managing Director of Sindh Teachers’ Foundation. Under this foundation, the Sindh Education Foundation was founded in 1990. Since then I also became the Managing Director of Sindh Education Foundation.

To get my work done I have to be very firm and stern. I know what I want and I make it clear that that is what has to be done. If people know that you are playing straight with everybody then no one will mess with you.

I have received various awards and medals; the President’s Pride of Performance medal, Sitara-e-Imtiaz and the Benazir Academic Award. I am also the President of President Girl Guide Association in Sindh. I am mentioning these awards not to boast of myself but to portray the spirit of leadership inside me.

I always believe that it is easier to get to the top then to remain there. I enjoy my work. I think the reason I learn something new every day is I am interested in people. People come to talk to me and I always find it refreshing to hear what the youth has to say. I feel that we all have the capability of a sponge, to observe and absorb whatever good can be learnt and observed.

I believe that one must learn to take things in their stride and enjoy what is happening to the fullest.