**Foggy beginning (Al-Sohail Model School)**

The journey started amid much cold and fog. It seemed as if our car was enveloped by a soft yet mysterious white shield. When we finally reached our destination, we had left the busy, car honking streets and were surrounded by open lush green fields and ‘kachi zameen’. We were given a warm welcome by Mr.Khaliq and his wife and despite our protests to have any comestibles, we were offered tea and biscuits. Such was the graciousness and generosity of our hosts. From Sohail Bin Sadiq Model School, Mr.Khaliq took us to Al-Sohail Model School which was a few kilometres away and further into the hamlet. Our car could barely remain on-track on the mud road. However the lush and crisp surrounding view kept us wondrous, happily oblivious to the tribulations of our little vehicle.

The thought that struck me the most was the distinct difference that existed only two hours away from the metropolis of Lahore. There was so much underdevelopment, poverty and lack of facilities here in Dera Mehran wala. The school entrance was polluted. Children of different grades were grouped together, where they sat in rows under the open skies, dreary and precipitous. There were not enough chairs and tables to accommodate them all. Most of the younger students were sitting on the bare and cold floor. There were no classes in progress. ‘It is their exam week’, I was told. I went in to see the only two class rooms that were part of the school building. There was a blackboard and a few chairs randomly sitting inside the room.

Since, I had to evaluate a teacher’s performance; I requested Mr.Kaliq to ask one of the teachers to deliver a demo to the 5th grade students on any topic of their choosing. The teacher who initially started with that task seemed shy and confused. He said he hadn’t prepared any lesson plan as it was their exam week. Then, a second teacher took over. He seemed confident and knew what he was teaching. The students seemed involved as well and enthusiastic to answer questions.

Then, it was the turn to evaluate the students. The students seemed confident enough during the test. They could mostly read all the English words with correct pronunciation and also knew the meaning of most of the words. They were also good at English comprehension. They were able to solve the Maths’ division problems with prompt adeptness and proficiency (which was even more distinguishable when I tested the children at APS. I was very disappointed with the Maths and English skills of APS students.)

Then the time came for a little chit chat with the parents and their perception about the school’s performance and their thoughts on their children’s education. It was time for my Punjabi-speaking skills to come into play. The parents were very zealous about their children’s education and were very satisfied with the school’s performance but they wanted a proper school building for their children. Their demands also included upgrading of the school to class ten and even to an intermediate college level, if possible. Their grievances included lack of transport system for their children as some have to travel miles to reach school, which becomes even more laborious in the scorching heat and severe cold.

I felt very small looking at these people. They have to struggle so much to gain a basic necessity as education but are still so hopeful, so resilient about it. Teachers, students and parents all alike were very passionate about it and wanted a progressive future for themselves and their children. It was a deeply humbling experience.