



Namita sat on the floor, intently poring over the Math problem. The shanty she lived in was dimly lit even in daylight, and the summer heat was making the floor unbearably warm. Yet, she was oblivious to it all. She wanted to study commerce, and she needed to do well in school to have

her chance. With a pencil in hand, she began scribbling the answer onto a tiny sheet of paper. She didn't have the luxury of a notebook for her rough work. Her only notebook was meant for schoolwork. Sitting on the floor next to her, guiding her through the problem was Tejas 'dada', as she called him. Namita was the daughter of his domestic help, and he'd taken it upon himself to help the girl pass her school Math final exam. Tejas had gotten her pens, pencils and other stationery for Geometry. And there he was, in person, trying to help her with her academics. She had a dream, and he wanted to contribute in his own small way.

When asked why he does it, or whether these small gestures can change anything, Tejas calmly replies, "Since childhood, it has been my firm belief that everyone's life has a certain purpose. My purpose is to make a positive difference to the lives of others and spread the light of knowledge."

Educator, activist, friend and world changer - this alumnus of AVM Bandra West wears many hats. This is his story.

Tejas Suma Shyam was born in June 1989. Even before his birth, his parents began divorce proceedings. Right from day one, he was raised by his mother and maternal grandparents. His mother, in order to provide for the family, began working. A lot of hardships ensued. His family would spend hours after dropping him to school at D'Monte Park, Bandra, rather than pay for a two-way transport fare. Medical issues culminating in astigmatism made Tejas put on a pair of glasses at the age of four, a source of traumatic ridicule in those days at school.

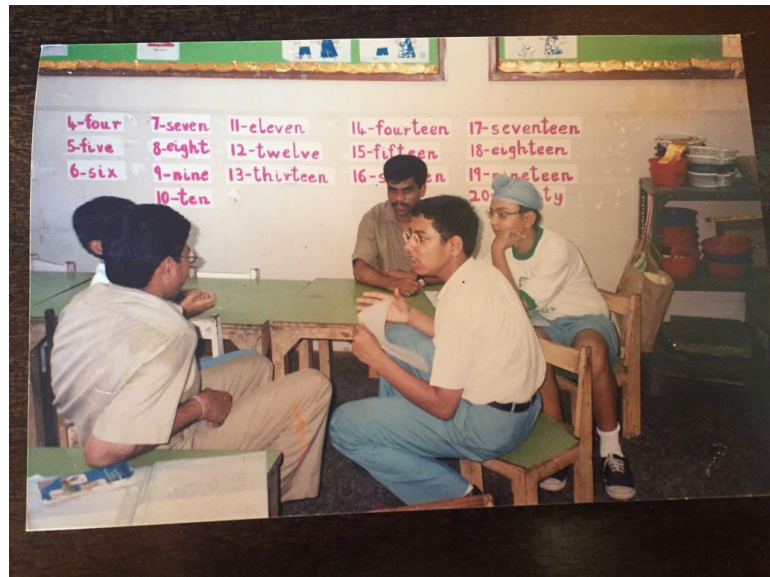
The resolute boy learned an early life lesson: he had no safety net. A much-needed father was missing from his life at crucial junctures. A witness to his mother's hardships, he did not want to be a burden. His response was truly magnificent: he chose to shine out from the crowd, refusing to live a victim's life. Instead, he decided to



excel and carve his own identity. Nothing could have expressed his intent more clearly than him dropping his surname in school. He was known as Tejas D. Tejas.

Writing, drawing, music, quizzes, drama, debate and compering events- there was hardly an activity Tejas did not excel at, besides academics of course. He bagged Merit Scholarships for All-Round Excellence in five successive years to pay back, in his own modest way, his mother for school fees. In grade ten, he was awarded the "Arya Kumar".

Tejas fondly remembers all his teachers. Mrs.Meeta Tongaonkar, Mrs.Usha Upadhyaya, Mrs.Alka Agrawal, Mrs.Jyoti Kumar, Mr.Jaywant and many other teachers always had encouraging words and provided a platform for him to exhibit his talents. Above all, the AVM values helped in shaping his character. "Meal prayers, Shanti Paath and the Gayatri Mantra made me feel like I am a part of a system that is making me a better person. It made me happy." Well after school hours had finished, Tejas had to be dragged away from his basketball practice.



Yet, a seminal experience was awaiting Tejas at AVM. He was to taste what it was to give back to society. The Each One Teach One programme allowed kids to teach a bhaiya or didi useful English during lunch break. And Tejas relished it.

A person of Tejas's talent was bound to have a world of opportunities at his doorstep after school. A Dual Degree (B.Tech and M.Tech) at IIT Bombay was followed by a stint at Wipro Technologies and then as the Technology Head of a Swiss company. Finally, he could earn plaudits from society and show the world the identity he had strived so hard to carve out. However, Tejas had stirrings of another kind. At the young age of 24, he gave up his corporate career to pursue his passion: teaching.

"Corporates were working for profits and nameless entities. I wanted to work for people, to improve their lives. Ever since I participated in the Each One Teach One programme at AVM, I loved teaching. So, rather than choosing to play it safe, I decided to plunge into teaching full time", he says.

Tejas has quickly established himself as an innovative teacher. His core philosophy is rooted in the overall well-being of students, putting their mental and emotional development before academic excellence. Thinking skills and application take precedence over rote learning. He

wants “his kids” to become better people. “Compete to pull yourself up, not to put another one down”, he teaches them.

True to his values, Tejas also decided to give back to AVM a year and a half ago. The Young Genius Program was established at school to deliver value to kids – lateral thinking, practical knowledge and developing an interest in Math and Science.

Does he regret leaving a corporate career? “Partly”, he says. “People believe value is associated with having a corporate career. Initially, people did not understand my reasons and demeaned me. Being a teacher was, to them, a low-level choice of a failure, not caring to know why one makes that choice. You choose to become a teacher because you care. You want to make a difference. Despite people not understanding me, I want to follow my conscience.”



Tejas’s future vision is to try to make education less focused on rote learning and more on application. “I want to reform the system in my own small way. We are a nation of exam takers. I’d like to see us become a nation of thinkers. The people who made a difference to India were those who thought out-of-the-box. The change can only come from educators.”

May those whose lives this inspiring, dynamic, caring human being has touched, continue to carry his flame of inspiration within them.