

How Amita Verma is improving attendance in her school

By | Aug 24, 2016

Even as we were discussing the present state of affairs in education, our vehicle drove fast towards Village Naubasta Kala. Does our government in actual fact understand the significance of education, does it really want to educate the sections of society that have till now been deprived of education?



The driver was new to the place and was therefore every now and then asking about the right way to the village. Then, as we observed greenery on both sides of the road and the widespread yellow bed of mustard flowers, it seemed that we were, after all, on the right path. Soon enough we were at the Primary School of Naubasta Kala, Lucknow. The vehicle stopped just in front of the school, we stood at the gate, but there was no one there to open it. As our eyes fell on the scene inside the gate, we found children busy playing and a teacher engrossed and engaged with them. We could hear the children's cries of 'catch him, catch him', as also their laughter that was a pleasure to the ears. Suddenly the teacher saw us and he signalled a child to open the gate for us.

Immediately after entering the gate, just as I was moving towards the Headmistress's office, the teacher signalled me towards a classroom. I moved in that direction. As the room came into view, and I could see into it, it seemed that the children inside were students of the first and the second class. As soon as the teacher saw us, she welcomed us with a warm smile. Dr. Amita Verma is working as the Headmistress of the Primary School at Naubasta Kala. A Ph.D in Social Work, she has been working as a teacher for the last 10 years. She has been in this school over the last 5 years.

I had met Amita quite a few times over the last one year in the meetings of the 'Change-makers' Network' but had never had the opportunity of coming to her school. The simplicity of her personality, the honesty with which she spoke and the truth in her eyes were all reflected in her school too. Even as we were conversing, I came to know that she had not taken even one casual leave during this year. My colleague Ashutosh was eager to know about her innovations and so he asked her about that.

She calls her innovation 'Bulaavaa Toly' – the 'Call-to-School Group'. Attendance as well as regularity of children is a problem in all schools. Till some years back her school was no different in this regard. She did not look to any official or authority for a solution, nor did she blame the children's parents for this. Amita looked upon the two or three students who were quite regular in each class as a 'Toly', a group and gave it a name – the 'Bulaavaa Toly'. She gave them the responsibility of going to the homes of children not present during the Morning Assembly and exhorting them to come to school. Having taken steps in this regard, this group would also tell the teacher about any child with a genuine problem that prevented her or him from coming to the school. Daily the members of this group would be changed so that the responsibility would not fall on just two or three of them. These children would also tell the concerned parents about the utility of and positive aspects about sending their children to school. As a result of these efforts initiated by Amita, gradually the attendance and regularity of children in the school started improving. Now the names of 148 children are registered with the school, of whom 142 are regular in their attendance.

Even as we were conversing with Amita about this innovation, two children, Asif and Salman came to Amita without hesitation and fear, saying that they had to go home to take care of younger siblings as their parents were going to the forest for wood. Amita very affectionately tried to make them understand and declined permission. But her feeling of sadness was evidently reflected in her face, the cause of her feeling unhappy being the fact that many of the children could not study in spite of their wish and desire to be educated. They do want to come to school daily but have to help their parents in the struggle for earning a livelihood.

Amita told us that the parents of many children sell vegetables in the village market and most of the children also accompanied their parents and so could not come to school. Being shy and hesitant, they would not share their problems with their teacher. On coming to know about this, Amita herself went to the vegetable market to meet the parents. She talked smilingly with the children and tried to make the parents understand why they should not bring their children to the market during school-hours. She tried to convince them about sending

the children to school. By and by, the number of children in the school began increasing. According to Amita, many of the girls who used to sell vegetables are now continuing with their education after their schooling.

My eyes fell on two smilies on the blackboard. On being asked about them, Amita responded by saying that she draws them on the board daily before the class begins, and says that we should always be smiling thus. But if anyone acts wickedly or does not concentrate on studies, the smiling face would turn into a weeping one. The children now look at the smilies and whole-heartedly concentrate on studies.

Having heard so much about them, I now had a strong urge to meet the children. I began with talking to the students of Class V, followed by the rest of those in other classes down to Class I. The children answered many of my questions, and also treated me to lots of stories and poems. One came to know that their levels of learning were good too.

The self-confidence and efforts of Amita made me feel that teachers such as she are the backbone of our education system. It is efforts such as these that will ensure education for children of sections of society that are still deprived of education.

Ramnik Mohan translated the original article from Hindi. Click [here](#) for the Hindi version.

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