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# Determined to change the face of education in volatile Kashmir

The trainers of Sri Aurobindo Society are risking their all to encourage teachers to adopt and share innovative teaching methods to transform education in the disturbed valley

4 Min Read



On a quiet, dull day, Reetesh Gupta is busy conducting his teachers' training session as usual. Little did he know that he would witness something he had only heard of all his life.

Addressing a group of government teachers in Avantipura block of Kashmir about innovations in teaching that improve the quality of education in state-run schools, Gupta was engulfed in stone pelting carried out by some disgruntled locals protesting the training session during a strike call.

“The protesters were hurling stones from all directions. Everybody ran to hide themselves. I stood numb for a while and could not understand what was happening. I fitted myself in the podium and stayed there for 15-20 minutes,” Gupta, capacity building trainer of Sri Aurobindo Society, said.

He said that he resumed the training after the stone pelting ended and he regained composure. As if it was not enough, Gupta faced stone pelting on his way back to Srinagar and hurt his back.

“It was madness. I was in a shock for a while but I am ready to take the session again as it is for a good cause, for the betterment of education in this disturbed region,” he added.

Gupta is one of the 21 trainers of the society that took up the mission under its Zero Investment Innovations for Education Initiatives (ZII EI) to improve the quality of education in government schools.

ZII EI, which is part of the society’s nation-wide education transformation programme Rupantar, aims to sensitise the teachers about the critical need for innovations in teaching and educate them about the potential of innovation that require zero investment.

The teachers were introduced to 11 best practices in teaching, including children’s parliament, learning through games, art and craft for holistic development, simplified English teaching, concept mapping and future envisioning during the ongoing training session that started from April 6.

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Till now, nearly 4,000 teachers from 10 districts of Kashmir have been oriented toward introducing these techniques in teaching to make learning more joyful and engaging. They are also encouraged to share their best practices in teaching so that they can be scaled up to millions of schools across the country.

The districts include Srinagar, Anantnag, Baramula, Kulgam, Ganderbal, Budgam, Pulwama, Kupwara, Bandipora and Shopian.

Abhishek Srivastav, who was leading the team of trainers, said, “we motivate the teachers to be a part of the program and give their ideas in teaching that aid overall development of children.”

He feels that teachers in Kashmir have a tough job at hand as compared to other states in the country given the volatile situation in the region.

The ongoing insurgency has hampered the development of the region affecting tourism, horticulture, agriculture and above all education. The unrest often leads to curfews resulting in the closure of schools for months at a stretch. The state of education in the valley is in shambles due to recent burning of schools and continuous clampdowns.

Venturing into Kashmir was a conscious decision by Sri Aurobindo Society as children there are facing a lot of mental pressure leading to a surge in the drop-out rates of students.

“ZIIIEI innovations not only make learning interesting and engaging but aim at the overall development of children by adopting a holistic approach toward school transformation. This approach is especially important at a place like Kashmir where children witness protests and violence on a daily basis, deeply affecting their emotional and mental growth,” Sambhrant, Director (Education), Sri Aurobindo Society, said.

Children are the building blocks of a nation and if they are not guided well and given proper education, the country’s progress ceases. It is imperative for a nation to have a values-led, aware next generation that can contribute to its development. This can only be achieved if the schools and teachers focus on the all-round development of children from the primary level.

In the words of Nazir Ahmad Dar, a primary teacher in Bandipora district of Kashmir, “teachers here want to do a lot to help students excel and find their potential but whatever time we get with them, we focus on completing the syllabus and preparing them for exams.”

Jabeena, a primary school teacher in Srinagar, said, “Good things do not reach us due to the circumstances we live in. Students suffer a lot due this volatile situation in the valley. This is the first time that someone has come to us with so much of useful information.”

She said she was hopeful of bringing changes in her teaching after attending the training session.

“We can bring a drastic improvement in the teaching methods if we introduce these small changes in our day-to-day routine,” she added. ■

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