

# These Teachers are Taking Schools to Communities

If the local community won't pay attention to education, schools reach out to them, leading to some of the most effective social change ideas

*6 Min Read*



For students of an upper primary school in Uttar Pradesh state of northern India, Champa Singh is a role model. Apart from being a teacher, she is also an active campaigner to spread awareness about social evils in the community.

Out of the 1.3 billion population in India, 70 percent live in rural areas. Many of them are illiterate and do not value education enough to encourage their children on the path of learning. Their ignorance, biases toward the girl child and superstitions hinder their social and economic development and their children's overall development.

Singh is tackling these issues by organizing science-based shows and honoring mothers celebrating the birth of the girl child. Singh has done it all to strengthen the bond between her Junior High School in Jungle Kauria village in Gorakhpur district and the local people.

The Communities' growing superstitious beliefs like self-proclaimed godmen producing gold from thin air, making milk out of water or magically producing flowers in their closed fists were disturbing for Singh as they were directly impacting the thought process of the students in the school.

Singh felt that reaching out to the community was paramount for a healthy society as children spend only one third of their day in school and the rest with their family and friends. "Education has to be around them."

"A girl child was continuously absent from class. On enquiring, her family told us that she faints every morning while getting ready for school because she is possessed by evil spirits. More such incidents started pouring in that acted as a trigger for me to conduct a science-based show in the village," Singh said.

She said that she was successful in explaining to the family of the girl that she might be suffering from a psychological problem.

"As a teacher I strongly felt that it was my responsibility toward my community members to make them aware about what was behind the so called divine tricks- it was magic of science," she said, adding that she was able to make the community and students think rationally.

Singh is not alone in her efforts. Many government teachers in different Indian states have felt the need and importance of going out to the communities to bring about a positive change in the society and nation as a whole.

Sushil Kumar, teacher at the primary school in Firozabad, started the tree plantation drive in the school, making the children aware about the importance and uses of trees and other plants in their lives.

Kumar says that students whose birthdays fall during a month are encouraged to plant a tree along with their parents on the last working day of that month, increasing community participation.

Another initiative 'Supermom' involves honoring mothers who are very attentive toward education of their children. With emphasis on earning a livelihood rather than education, parents do not encourage their children much to attend school regularly. In some areas, the attendance in schools drop at the time of harvesting season as boys join their fathers in the fields and girls take up household chores.

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To make the children come to school regularly, it is necessary for the community to understand the importance of education and felicitating the parents is one such step toward this goal.

“I am always there when my child needs me. I make sure he spends his time in useful activities and does not loiter around,” Phoolmati, who was crowned Supermom by authorities of Junior High School in Jungle Kuria for being a concerned mother for her child’s needs, said.



The schools also reach out to the communities through adult education wherein the children are encouraged to teach their illiterate parents to read and write.

Besides tackling the social evils, these ideas encourage community participation in schools leading to a healthy environment for students’ holistic development.

Such best practices are now not limited to just a few enterprising teachers. Nearly 23,000 schools in different parts of the country have chosen to adopt these ideas through an initiative called Zero Investment Innovations for Education Initiatives (ZIEI), a mass-scale teacher outreach project of Sri Aurobindo Society’s education-based program Rupantar.

A silent “Innovation Movement” by more than 600,000 teachers wherein they share and implement such innovative ideas, is turning a new leaf in the teaching methods of government schools.

In India, where education in state-run schools is considered to be of the lowest quality, such initiatives prove to be a positive step in building a strong foundation for students at the grass roots. ■

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