

Man of responsibilities: story of a passionate head teacher

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NCF 2005 talks about role of teachers in providing a healthy space for learning and sharing, understanding problems of students, supporting them by various ways and more than that giving them a free space to express, enjoy and learn. Various thinkers and educationists believe that freedom and fearless atmosphere along with a healthy environment of resources and TLMS strengthens learning atmosphere of a school. Bringing all such important inputs in a school is responsibility of all teachers of that school and especially head teacher's role becomes more and more important in this regard as s/he can generate a positive path for whole school. Recently in the block where I work, an energetic head teacher got retired from his work and along with me, most of the persons who know him are missing his presence in that school and other meeting platforms where he was always very active and vocal. Mr. Satyapal worked as a head teacher in upper Primary School, Sunali of Purola block (Uttarkashi), before this school wherever he worked he made a good bond with community and his farewell party proved about his Bonding with Sunali village too.

That was a session of In-Service Teachers Training when I met him first time, he was so energetic in participation in that age when he was just two years back to his retirement. He did acting in a short play based on the need of session, he was vocal on all important inputs in discussions. After Interacting with him in the lunch time I found him interesting as he was discussing about teaching-learning problems in schools and the quality of in service teachers training. On a discussion about problem of adolescent age he said that we should discuss issues of adolescence with students, this time they need some important care. We should talk about changes of body, we should intermingle boys and girls to make them good companions otherwise this age creates several mental issues for adolescent students.

After some months I got a chance to visit his school. The school was looking normal as any other school but talking to students gave me a glimpse that students are very interactive along with

respect and academic interests. Their freeness also showing that their teachers don't trap them in hard discipline. That day I was conducting a session on litmus paper test of acidic and basic substances with students and being a head teacher he supported me in every step, brought litmus paper from Almira, was standing with kids and motivating and praising them when they were doing litmus paper test.



Mr. Satyapal with his life partner Ms. Shimla Devi, on his farewell day.

He gave me good quantity of litmus papers and said "sir give them more and more things to test. We have enough quantity of litmus paper. This is for students only and it's good that they are using it.

He always used to take part voluntarily in all activities of school. Either subject related or other events such as a Maths fair, farewell of eighth grade students, etc. When one year was left for his retirement he said "*I don't see it as one year, I see it as 365 days*" His passion was reflecting from this statement. One day I found he was busy in developing PPTs and doing voiceovers for a ppt which he had developed based on the activities of textbooks. He collected pictures of vegetables, fruits, body parts, etc., from internet and made a ppt and then wrote English and Hindi meanings of content in that ppt and then by voice over explained English and Hindi name of the fruits. This is just an example to show that he made several ppts and videos on textbook exercises of English and Hindi, difficult words, tenses, grammar, etc. According

to him he uses technology to modify the content of chapters in an interesting manner. Each class comes for a period in that TV/computer room for this video session. Another day his colleague was working for organizing a *Maths mela* in which they all had invited other school teachers, he was cutting chart-papers, cardboards, thermocol along with his companion Chandrabhushan Ji (Maths teacher) to make Maths puzzle & TLMS. He always supported his team who is equally energetic.

This school shows a picture of collective and collaborative work where teachers and head teacher work as a unit to give their best for the students. He was a regular visitor and participant of TLC events of Azim Premji Foundation and always ready to read and learn more and more. Not only this, everyone in Cluster and teaching community always showed respect for him. Recently he got *Rashtrapati Puraskar* for good organizing of *Jan-Ganana* in his place. Talking about his motivation he said that he thinks that he should work best for students because of them he has a job and it's his duty to serve his job honestly and to do something for students which are not well enough in background¹. On holidays also he engages himself to visit schools of his hometown and discusses with teachers about improving education quality and motivates them.

Unfortunately I was busy in some engagements and missed his farewell. After sometime when I visited his school I talked about his absence. Bhajan Singh Ji (a teacher of Sunali upper primary school) told that it was 8-10 years old journey and we were very comfortable with his presence because we knew that he'll manage everything and now it's difficult to manage things suddenly without him. We are still not believing that he's not in school. He told that still he asks about files and documents and he (Satyapal ji) tells him each and every step and helps in finding documents via telephonic conversation. Another madam sitting there said that he gave exact locations of files by his pen-drive (in which he has saved important folders of computer in similar way) when we were struggling to find hard copy of it. And it seems that still he is supporting us from far.

Interacting with students about him was very emotional. Students said he never talked strictly to anyone and he always said to be punctual. He himself followed it and even in rain also he used

to come on time. He was head teacher but in all activities he used to support everyone. One girl said *we'll always remember him as he always treated us like his own kids*. Interesting thing came to me when I was showing them onion peel cells by microscope and they said we had seen it earlier. I asked "who has done this exercise with you?" They said head sir (Satyapal Ji). So onion peel activity was also performed by him among students along with other science sessions. He always gave space to students to express their thoughts. According to his colleague Bhajan Ji *"he was a different type of person and I learned to react calmly on every situation from him. Still I lose my temper some time but he was always cool on every discussion and talk, I think he was a different and one of unique persons His absence always gives an emptiness and it's difficult to get a colleague like him"*. When I interacted with more students and asked them how they feel after his retirement, they told me that they all cried on his farewell and they all miss him. One girl said he never talked roughly and supported us on every front and gave example of one cultural event for which he bought artificial jewels by his own contribution and made other ornamental stuff with students. In that block almost every teacher knows about him and his contributions in nurturing his schools, either his previous schools or UPS Sunali. His initiatives not only gave a shape to school but developed a culture of cooperation, sharing and openness.

There is a common saying *"where there is a will, there is a way"* means when we work for a cause and do it honestly things become smoother and people also come forward to support us. Similarly, when Satyapal Ji developed a healthy atmosphere of school and nurtured it along with his team, other educational officers and team supported and appreciated his works. According to him *"without community's support nothing is possible in school development and village community has always supported me"*. He gave an example that when he agreed for computer application and learning programme that time electricity was also not there in school but he assured officers that they should send computers and he will arrange electricity. He talked with Pradhan of village and other members to resolve the problem of electricity and just in one day village Pradhan arranged electricity pole and community provided electricity connection to

¹ Uttarakhand: *Ummeed Jagate Shikshak*, Azim Premji Foundation.

school, to ensure successful running of computers. His School Management Committee had once got prize for good management. Another example is related to school's building which was near to forest land and two times in strong wind pine trees fell down on the building and fortunately that time the school was off. Because of Satyapal ji & community's request Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan officers approved the construction of new building. Not only this his applications and demands of computer, television, etc. was fulfilled by system. In addition to this, his work was recognized by Azim Premji Foundation's team and not only an article has been written on his journey in *Uttarkhand: Ummeed Jagate Shikshak 2* (an Azim Premji Foundation's publication to highlight teachers who are working passionately in different districts of Uttarakhand) but the whole village, teacher community and Azim premji foundation members of Purola gave a farewell to him on his respect and honor. His efforts are like counterpoints for those who make a generalized notion that government schools and staff are effortless and lack passion.

As John Holt has written in his book "*Underachieving school*" that there should be a relation of respect among teachers and students and they should be given space for expressing themselves. By his efforts we can see example of healthy relationship among students and staff in Sunali upper primary school. I had an experience of my school's principal sir who was extremely rude and hard core discipline and punishment on rule breaking was his first priority.



Gathered villagers for his honor on his farewell day

But when I saw Satyapal Ji's school's discipline and his friendly relation with students and colleagues I discovered that kind of discipline which NCF 2005 says that *Discipline should be for enhancing freedom, options and autonomy among teachers and students. And students should be included in rule making so that they will understand the reasons behind the rules and feel their responsibility of maintaining norms* (NCF , 2005). Here Point is to not punish students but to develop an ownership in being responsible by self-discipline. By this they can be exposed to way of doing democratic decision making and will learn ideas and codes of self-rule (NCF , 2005).

A farewell given by villagers

Every year he and his colleague teachers, Chandrabhushan ji & Bhajan ji give farewell party to eighth class students by contributing their own money and organizing special lunch. Students and villagers also maintained that culture and almost more than half of villagers came to wish him for his next journey. Unfortunately as I told above that I missed his farewell but my colleague told me that villagers had come along with drums and trumpet to give him honor, they gave gifts such as *Rajma Dal*, fruits of their orchards, etc to Satyapal ji. Former colleagues, staff of Sunali primary school and several other people were gathered there with best wishes for their beloved Head Saab Ji. Students and colleagues cried when they were sharing moments of togetherness and He himself cried on that emotional moment. His colleagues along with students also gave him best wishes with their wet eyes². What he left a legacy of being responsible, humbleness and togetherness. Still from his hometown Saharanpur he talks to people and shows interest to come back for workshops and trainings. People like him do their work honestly without pressurizing anyone and because of their honesty and passion others also learn several things. For me at least this was a best example of what a head teacher can do for the school and community without making hard discipline, giving punishment and pressurizing teaching staff.

² Thanks to my colleague Anup Dubey for giving me details & pictures of the farewell.