

Ushering in a change

March 6, 2013

Sarita Brara

A village school in Uttar Pradesh endeavours to be at par with the best ones in metropolitan cities

Post his retirement from the Air Force, when Satya Veer Singh — an electronic and communications engineer — visited the government school he had studied in Kuri Ravana village close to his own village in Uttar Pradesh, he was disappointed. Even after more than three decades, he found no perceptible change in the infrastructure or quality of education in the school. Same was the case with most schools in the nearby villages which had poor infrastructure and lacked trained teachers.

This stirred him to start a village school that would be at par with the best schools in metropolitan cities. It was a daunting task but Mr. Singh took it as a challenge and began working on his dream. He chose Bhikanpur village, two km from his own village, because it was centrally located and connected by both *kachcha* and *pukka* roads to a number of villages around the area from where children could come and study. Also, there was no other CBSE affiliated school in a 20 km radius.

It took him more than seven years, all his savings, loan worth lakhs of rupees from a rural bank and help from friends and well wishers and untiring efforts to materialise his dream.

Today there are around 900 students who come from nearly 30 villages study in this school named after Mr. Singh's father Rajendra Singh who was a science teacher and had worked all his life in remotely located schools in the State and retired as a headmaster in a junior school. The school was affiliated to CBSE in 2011 and now it has been upgraded to a senior secondary level with effect from first of April this year.

Spread over 2.49 acres, the school campus is fully Wi-Fi/Internet enabled. It has well equipped physics, chemistry, biology, home science, mathematics labs, music and dance room and a room for counselling. There are separate toilets for girls and boys, safe drinking water, water cooler and generators, a well-endowed library along with facilities for indoor and outdoor games. Most importantly, the teaching staff is well qualified and trained.

Mr. Singh says he knew that the main reason for teacher absenteeism in government schools or refusal to join rural schools is that instead of getting an incentive to work in villages, they get reduced house rent and other allowances and on the other hand have to spend a lot of money and time on commuting. He overcame this problem by providing transport and other facilities to the teachers.

Keen that the girls too should have an opportunity to study in a good school, Mr. Singh opted for a co-educational institution despite initial opposition from a section of the villagers.

Since most of the students come from agricultural backgrounds and their families do not have a monthly income, the payment of the school fee is as per the cropping pattern and the school management is flexible about payment in instalments.

Mr. Singh says the school management would be reserving 25 per cent of the seats for weaker sections, as per the RTE Act. Seventy such students are already getting education free of cost.

Private schools have mushroomed across the country with their number increasing from 18.7 per cent in 2006 to 25.6 per cent in 2012, according to the recent findings of Infrastructure Development Finance Company (IDFC). But for few elite schools, quality of education in most of these schools is not significantly better than the government schools. Most of such schools in villages lack both infrastructure as well trained teachers and do not follow the norms mandatory under the Right to Education which has to be implemented from April 1.

<http://www.thehindu.com/features/education/school/ushering-in-a-change/article4478897.ece>