



INSPIRING STUDENTS THROUGH STORYTELLING

A visionary teacher

By Ramesh Kumar Raja

The right to Education Act may have pioneered a sort of revolution across schools in India, but this is simply not enough to channelise children into making it a regular practice to attend their classes with utmost zeal. It requires an inspiring teacher like Vishnu Sharma, the author of the famous Panchatantra Ki Kahaniyan (The Panchatantra Stories), through which he used to impart practical and value-based education to the children of the king.

One such exemplary Vishnu Sharma of the modern day is Shiv Narayan Singh, 47, principal of an intermediate college in the backward district of Deoria in Uttar Pradesh, who must have created a record of sorts. For the last decade, he has been telling his students a story every day. In the past five years alone, he has told 500 narratives. The stories are not new, but carry moral values. Singh, innovate to make his History who inspirational, is the recipient of a number of awards at the national and state levels, including Bharati Ratan Samman by the National Rajbhasha Peeth and the Teacher's State Award in 2009.

Such is his influence that the students have made it a point to attend the morning assembly regularly as they know fully well that they will get to hear an inspirational story from their principal. No

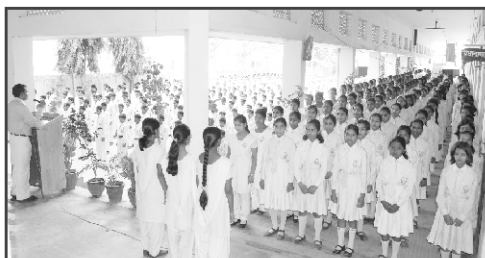
wonder, the prayer-hall of the school, which has a strength of over 1,500 students, is always packed to capacity when Singh tells the stories. Thanks to his years-long practice of storytelling just before the commencement of classes, that the school (Prestige Tutorial Intermediate) is known for its discipline and education all across UP and some parts of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

Interestingly, not only the students, but the other teachers and staff of the school also listen to Singh in rapt attention during the session. The story narration normally lasts 10 to 12 minutes. The principal is so regular with his storytelling that the students and others begin calling his home and sometimes even visit to enquire about his well-being on the rare day when he misses school due to illness or other preoccupation.

QUOTES FROM EPICS

In his stories, Singh quotes heavily from the ancient Indian epics and gives numerous examples. He also cites Gautam Buddha, Jesus Christ and Ramakrishna Paramhansa. Says Singh, "I pick up the theme from our age old traditions and happenings of daily life and include them in my stories to give some concrete message to the students. I also draw inspiration from the Vedas, and Upanishads. All these stories instill a new confidence in us and provide us the guidelines to be followed in the life."

Born in modest farming family, the postgraduate in



science laments that the modern education does not contribute towards the moral development of the students in any way.

"Education should make a student a good human being. Hence, my effort is to establish a communication with the students through inspirational messages so that they become good international citizens. I find sorties are the best way to communicate with the children," he opines.

So, from where did he get this kind of innovation? Singh said that during his childhood his grandfather used to regularly tell him a story before he retired to bed. "His (grandfather's) words used to be in my heart when I woke up in the morning," he recounts.

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Needless to say, Singh's stories force the students to ponder

over what they want to do in their lives and they also apprise the students about their responsibilities to society and the environment.

Singh has received hundreds of appreciation letters from educationists, parents and politicians. His wife Shiva Singh is also a source of encouragement for him. So far, five volumes of his stories have been published, but interestingly, the volumes are not his writing. He says, "Some people who were inspired by my stories, decided to record whenever I told a story and then compiled them and got them published in the form of books.

"In fact, I was myself surprised when I heard my own utterances...I could not believe that it was I," Singh says.

On whether he makes preparations in advance for telling the stories, Singh says that even he does not know about the subject on which the day's story will be based. "I only keep one thing in my mind that whatever I say must have a positive impact on the minds of the students" says the modern-day version of Vishnu Sharma.

A research study is under way on his books at Kanpur University.