

Steering education revolution from Azamgarh shacks-Abu Zafar

Uttar Pradesh: A single bamboo stick holds the thatched roof together, the discoloured floor serves as both bench and chair, the kids sit in neat rows and a man sits on a printed mattress. It is from humble rooms like this that a quiet education revolution is unravelling in this eastern Uttar Pradesh district that was associated in public memory not long ago for alleged involvement of some of its youth in extremist activities.

Tanzeem Al-Farooq, an NGO formed in 1987 with just Rs.10 as initial capital by some youngsters, has set up at least 300 such primary schools in villages in Azamgarh, about 220 km from the state capital Lucknow, and nearby areas that have a substantial number of Muslims.

The founding members, who were then working in the Gulf region, have managed to educate over 50,000 kids who would have otherwise forever remained illiterate. Some of these members came back to India while some pledged their support sitting abroad.

One of the founders of Tanzeem Al-Farooq, Asrar Ahmed, embarked on the idea of identifying micro-rural, small and unknown villages of the district that don't have schools or any other arrangement for primary education. These villages sometimes have as few as 15 houses.

The modus operandi is something like this: the NGO identifies a village, convinces the locals for the need of an educational institute, builds a school and then hands it over to a village committee.

Only those villages where government-run schools are rare and people hesitate to send their children to schools due to lack of quality and different medium of instructions are chosen.

'It was hard to manage it all, especially in the beginning,' Tanzeem Al-Farooq president Maulana Obaidullah told IANS.

'We start schools with our own expenses but try to educate and spread awareness among locals to take the responsibility further. We have established 300 such schools,' he added.

Though the project started with just Rs.10 investment, close to Rs.1 million is collected through public donations every year.

Sixty-year-old Islam Ahmed, a Class 4 pass-out and one of the founder members of the organisation, thinks it was the need of the hour.

'It is not mere building schools, it is an educational movement. Our aim is to motivate the villagers to teach their children and build schools to preserve their historical inheritance,' Ahmad told IANS.

Mohammed Sadique, a teacher in such a school in Azamgarh's Aamgaon village, said: 'It is hard to be here and survive on a small salary, but I am happy to teach these children.'

Sitting in an open one-room hut of a school on a chilly, foggy morning while wearing a white kurta and lungi with skull cap, Sadique teaches the Quran, Urdu, Hindi, Mathematics and basic English to 30

students -- half of them girls.

'If I am not here, then who will teach them? I have been here for three years. Earlier, only 10 percent of the kids in the village would study as the government school was two km away. Now, 50 percent of the village children study,' said Sadique, who hails from Bihar's Araria district.

The chief motive of the NGO is to provide quality education in micro-rural areas.

'We have lit a small lamp of knowledge and hope for a bright future,' said Obaidullah, who thinks there's a need for collaboration among primary schools to design a joint mechanism to fight illiteracy and ignorance.

Mohammed Rashid, a farmer and resident of Aamgaon village, sends his two children to the shack school.

'I am an illiterate man, can't even write my name. I was worried about the future of my children. I thought they would have to follow my footsteps. But thanks to god, the situation has changed,' he says with a smile.

Efforts like these in a place like Azamgarh make a difference in a state where the literacy rate is 69.72 percent as compared to the national average of 74.04 percent.

Azamgarh was in the news some years ago for the wrong reasons as police claimed that affected Muslim youth from this district were associated with militant groups and a large number of Azamgarh Muslims were arrested for suspected association with serial bombings in many cities in India. Because of the association, Muslims from Azamgarh, who tried to find rental houses and apartments in other cities in India, found it very difficult to do so. But things are now changing for the better.

(Abu Zafar can be contacted at abuzafar@journalist.com)

Links:

<http://www.sify.com/news/steering-education-revolution-from-azamgarh-shacks-news-national-mbfkoadjgd.html>

<http://gulfnnews.com/news/world/india/an-education-revolution-that-started-with-rs10-1.962041>

<http://news.in.msn.com/national/article.aspx?cp-documentid=5727755>

http://www.ummid.com/news/2012/January/05.01.2012/education_revolution_in_azamgarh.htm

<http://nvonews.com/2012/01/05/steering-education-revolution-from-azamgarh-shacks/>

http://twocircles.net/2012jan05/steering_education_revolution_azamgarh_shacks.html

<http://www.newkerala.com/news/2011/worldnews-139327.html>

<http://www.prokerala.com/news/articles/a271189.html>

<http://www.wespeaknews.com/india/steering-education-revolution-from-azamgarh-shacks-12725.html>

<http://www.mathrubhumi.com/english/story.php?id=118706>

<http://www.punjabstarnews.com/UP/BIHAR/Steering-education-revolution-from-Azamgarh-shacks-19268.html>

<http://hamaraphotos.com/news/general/steering-education-revolution-from-azamgarh-shacks.html>

http://www.indiaedunews.net/In-focus/January_2012/Steering_education_revolution_from_Azamgarh_shacks_15201/

http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/steering-education-revolution-from-azamgarh-shacks-with-image_100588576.html
