

MUSINGS

A steep learning curve

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24 months.

In these months, my experiences have been varied, diverse and sometimes even intimidating! Traveling through the various nooks and corners of the country, meeting various government officials, teachers and most importantly little school children- all of this has shaped me and moulded me so differently from what I used to be 2 years ago. The experiences I have had have been as different from each other as chalk and cheese. From being stuck in landslides for hours to an end to interacting with children despite the language barrier- the experience has been exhilarating to say the least! But what remains with me through all these experiences are the invaluable learning's I have gathered and which would probably stay with me for years to come.

It is said that India is the same between the vast expanses of the borders. This argument never really found favour with me till I stepped into the field for myself. The teachers instruct and teach each class in an identical manner. More often than not, she/one of the students read out a lesson and the students are made to repeat each line after them. Ironically, the student reading out the text can read at a much faster rate than the teacher themselves. Amidst all this, the silver lining in the cloud is that there are officials and teachers who are doing their bit to orchestrate a change, a change in the right direction.

Something that I have observed is that changing a system which has been in place even before the concept of the system came about, is no child's play. The system can't be altered by changing the policies or by just hoping that our presence would make all the difference. The system would also not get transformed by just ensuring a regular inflow of money or human resources for quality development. A system will only change when the change agents take cognizance of the need for this change. The change agents must be motivated themselves and should be willing to give in their very best so that a change, irrespective of its magnitude, can be engineered. A system will change when it's every aspect is dynamic.

Another such observation that I made was through my continual visits to the schools and through repeated interactions with the government functionaries at the state

and district levels. Working with the government is an uphill challenge and only brings out the best in an individual. One needs to constantly address the debate of inertia vs. initiative. The inertia of the government has to be broken by an external initiative, but at the same time the initiative should be made keeping in mind that you are doing it as a facilitator.

During the past 2 years, I have attended various workshops and trainings with the government functionaries and teachers. I have gathered, over the various interactions, that there are no ready, available answers for each question that is raised. The government teachers and functionaries are raising questions, today, not to seek answers but just to be heard and understood by many. One does not have to answer all the questions the government functionaries are raising. Some time it might be phrased like a question but it is just a statement they wish to make. They have to ensure that the platform they have been granted to voice their opinions/misgivings be utilised effectively. Patience is a virtue we should hold very dear while working.

I must also confess here that children remain to be my biggest motivators. Each time I spend time with children I feel this burst of newfound positive energy which triggers me to work and aim even higher. They come from all walks of life; have their own struggles and battles for survival. Yet their enthusiasm and passion for learning is unquenchable. They yearn to imbibe something new from each visitor who may walk in into their classroom. They forget the hassles of home when they are in school, they just want to learn. The enormous onus which is upon the teachers for ensuring good learning of these children is unnerving but at the same time inspiring and challenging.

I have spent the past 2 years, travelling through the course of different states, seeing different geographies and cultures across the country. Despite the marked changes in the geographies, what remains unchanged is the honesty and hospitality of the people. The crumbling infrastructure of schools may have a sordid story to tell, but the respect for the teacher and the curiosity of the children between the four walls, remain the same, everywhere. That for me and many others is an encouragement and a beacon of light.

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