

## All they need is good education



Children of Shalamar village at a Koenig Koshish coaching centre

"I'm upset that my marks couldn't get me an SRCC admission," says teary eyed Manisha who scored 93 percentage in 12th board exams. Sitting on the floor of her classroom, she looked calm with her oiled-hair neatly tied in a braid.

On the contrary, her parents, teachers, and village elders are beaming with happiness. And why shouldn't they? Getting 93 percentage is no mean feat. She has made Shalamar village proud.

The village is home to daily wage labourers who often struggle to make ends meet. Their children generally attend overcrowded local government schools with limited resources. It isn't surprising that the students learn very little in these schools.

"I was not scoring good marks in Economics and English. My parents couldn't help

me. Preeti Ma'am gave me regular coaching. She helped me prepare short and crisp notes. She took weekly tests also," says the school-topper Manisha, who takes free coaching classes that are a part of the CSR project Koenig Koshish.

Her father is the owner of a small-shop, while her mother is a housewife. They live in a small house in the village.

Walking through the narrow lanes of Shalamar, Secretary of Gram Vikas Sabha, Hari Ram Sainik says, "In 2007, some people came to me. They said they wanted to provide free coaching to our village kids. I gave them the dharmshala (village rest house) for the free classes without charging any amount."

The classes that started in the dharmshala with a few students, now, take place in four different centres in the village. At present, around 800 students come to the centres for the free coaching.

"Our dharmshala is used for weddings and other village functions. So, they had to cancel their classes regularly. After a while, they thought of taking few rooms in the village. Everyone was happy to provide them space because they are good people. They came as a ray of hope for the poor villagers," adds Sainik.

The children are attentive in the classrooms. Their performances are evaluated regularly, informs the teacher. The records of which are pasted on the painted walls of the small room.



Preeti Saini, the teacher and a local resident, says, "These kids have a lot of potential. They just need the right guidance. We are just filling those gaps."

Mohammed Khalid, the Maths and Science teacher, says, "Earlier we took classes for children studying in the ninth standard and above. But, we realised that they didn't even have the knowledge of a fifth-standard student. Now, we have more teachers working in our coaching centres. We provide coaching to students studying in the fifth standard up till twelfth."

Like Manisha, Bhavna Joshi has also given the villagers and tuition teachers a reason to smile. She scored 92 percentage in her tenth board exams. She aspires to do Master of Business Administration (MBA) from a reputed institution.

Her proud mother says "These teachers guided Bhavna. She always used to work hard. But, she could not score good marks all the time. After taking admission here, her grades improved." Now, Bhavna's siblings - Ankit (10th) and Neha (7th) - inspired by her good performance, also come for the coaching classes. "They don't waste time playing on the empty village streets anymore," the mother adds.

Sanjay Manocha, the director of the initiative, visits the village every weekend. During the visits, he interacts with the students and parents and learns about their problems and hears their suggestions.



These discussions have led to the establishment of a vocational training centre in the village in the year 2010. The centre provides training to Below Poverty Line (BPL) twelfth-pass individuals training in various domains – web designing, hardware and networking/MCSA, MS- Office. The training help them earn a respectable living.

The vocational courses are conducted for a duration of three months. They take place six days in a week, four-and-half hours per day. The classes include one-and-half hours of English lessons. Each batch comprises of 15 students with four batches of students taking classes daily.

A confident-sounding Akansha Sharma, who teaches MS-Office, says “We get most of them placed successfully. Some of our students are working in Big Bazar, Airtel, and Koeing Solutions also.”

Interestingly, the ex-students inform the teachers about job openings in their respective organisations. This is how most of the students of the centre get recruited easily.

Zeal Consultants, recently, came to the two-room training centre and offered job to a few of the students. “The word has spread that our students get job-ready with the training we provide. Previously, we used to send them for interviews to private companies. Now, some companies have started sending their HR people here,” says Suraj Kanojia, who was once a student of this vocational centre, worked as a trainee in the same centre for a few years, and is now, a website developer at the Koenig Solutions head office.

The villagers feel government jobs will provide them job security. Manocha says the need for “coaching students for government exams was also felt in the village”. This need gave rise to a new initiative. The CSR programme, now, includes competitive coaching classes for undergraduate students. “We started it this year. Let’s see how it works,” says Manocha.



Koenig Koshish has significantly improved the prospects of the students of Shalamar village. “We took a small step. We wanted to educate underprivileged kids. Now, we have opened centres in other villages also -- Haiderpur , Saipur, Shakurpur. We recruit well-qualified teachers and conduct classes in small batches of 30-35 students. Sadly, we have to say no to many needy students because of insufficient space. We don’t want to comprise on the teacher-student ratio,” says the CEO of the company who started the noble initiative and prefers not to be named.

More students like Manisha wait for free classes across the country. More villagers wait to see their kids score good marks. And more individuals belonging to below the poverty line (BPL) families need courses that will get them employed and take them out of the vicious cycle of poverty.

“Honestly speaking, we need to do a lot more to overhaul our education system. These kids, belonging to poor families, are hungry for good education. They wait for teachers and books to learn. They aspire to become educated, employed and self-reliant,” says the CEO with the hope that many more individuals and companies will come forward with similar initiatives.