

BREAKING THE MARGINS

THE TALES OF THE UNSUNG HEROES

Samrat Munshi works to provide second chances to students who have dropped out. He believes that dropping out of studies further lessens the already limited scope of education and social emancipation, and is driven to ensure that dropouts receive another chance to study and continue studying. His efforts have returned more than 300 dropout students to school over the last few years, who have gone on to have successful careers.



Samrat Munshi: Giving Drop out a Second Chances

'It is not unusual for students to drop out, particularly in Mangalkote block in West Bengal. Once they drop out of school, there is no return for them. Many of them land in other states working as migrant labourers, some as young as 14 or 15. Dropping out of school diminishes the little hope of social emancipation which education had provided to these students. Munshi Ziaur Rahman, who goes by the nickname Samrat Munshi, has made it his life's mission to give the students dropping out of their school in the region a second chance. 'Over the past few years I have ensured that more than 300 students who had dropped out for various reasons return to the school and continue their studies,' Samrat Munshi said. The story of many such students for whom he has become guiding light remains fresh in his mind. Samrat remembers how Fakruddin dropped out of Class IX from his school and was admitted to Khalatpur Al Ameen Mission in Howrah.

Fakruddin secured 35th rank in the West Bengal Medical Entrance Examination and is studying MBBS at Bardhaman Medical College and Hospital.

Sk Omar Faruque, now a final year medical student of the medical college has a similar story to tell. Anjum Khatum sold forest produce to make ends meet.

Her parents had decided to discontinue her school and get her married when she was only 15. With Samrat Munshi's intervention, not only was the marriage stopped but she also completed her education with a graduate degree in Geography and went on to become a teacher at a primary school. Now, she has been empanelled to be appointed as a teacher in a secondary school.

For the 40 year-old Samrat Munshi, whose only source of income is a small medicine shop, helping so many students is a daunting task. But coming to the rescue of poor but meritorious students is something very close to his heart.

In 1997, his younger brother had secured very good marks in Class X examinations but the family couldn't afford higher education in the stream he wanted to study. His father had lost his job and the family was going through a financial crisis.

'My brother wanted to study Science but he had to study Humanities. I saw how lack of support led him to give up his dreams. I could never get over that incident, and after a few years, in 2002, when I became economically self-reliant, I gathered some money and distributed among poor and meritorious students,' Samrat Munshi said, explaining how his journey began.

Years later, he set up Mangalkote Educational Welfare Society which helps young students who want to study but are unable to do so because of financial constraints.

He feels that meritorious students who have an urge to excel can come from poor families and it is the responsibility of the society to make sure that they are not left behind. Samrat Munshi refuses to call himself a social agent, and agrees, at best, to be identified as a catalyst of change.

‘My father was associated with a non-government organization once. He used to tell me that the work needs to be done with lot of dedication and without any desire of recognition,' he said.

Every year, when the results of Class X board examinations are released, Samrat Munshi tries to track the students who have performed well in the examination but face an uncertain future because of financial constraints. He feels that teachers and headmasters of government schools should prepare a list of such students and make it available to authorities.

“I try to get them admitted to institutions which have a hostel facility so that they can devote all their energy to studies. Many of the students are so poor that if I leave them at home they will not be able to study,' he said.

Asked what he gets in returns, he says that sometimes the students insist that he accompany them when they join a new job or get admitted to prominent educational institutions. “The respect which they give is a lot. What else can one ask for? Then there is the satisfaction of making a difference to someone's lives,' he said.

Indeed, the students whom he has helped secure a future through a second chance at education have been vocal in their appreciation and gratitude to Munshi Sir. His efforts and organization have recently received attention from newspapers and students have been known to have acknowledged their thankfulness to Musnhi Sir on those forum.

A number of these students' statements have been published in the various newspapers that have published articles about his work and endeavours. Ismat Ara Khatun, one of the students, said 'I would have been lost without his support. His advice and guidance have given me a second chance at life through education'. Milan Sheikh, another student, is similarly thankful of the support he has received.

While Mangalkote Educational Welfare Society ensures that students do not drop out of school, he has another novel way to provide encouragement to school going students. A society named after his mother, Begum Roshnara Charitable Trust, holds regular events to honour students doing well in their studies.

Awards like Kumud Shahitya Puroskar and Nazrul Medha Bhriti encourages a healthy competition among students and helps them perform well in their studies.

Samrat Munshi was born and brought up in Mangalkote, a rural hamlet in West Bengal's Bardhaman district. He occasionally describes the region as having a rich past and has some archeological exhibits that he has gathered from nearby villages to drive the point. 'Instead of excavating and preserving the area, it is being promoted for building house and property,' he said.

He is unable to reconcile that parents are not concerned about the education of children and all they are after are government doles and easy money.

'It is heartbreaking to see that many parents are still not keen to educate their girls. They think that if girls study then it will be difficult to find a match for them. If the girl becomes smart or educated she will bring disrepute to the family,' he said.

Samrat Munshi hopes that someday he can set up an academy in Managalkote where students can Study and he does not have to take them to charitable institutions in other districts.

'Breaking the Margin: Tales of the Unsung Heroes', an initiative of West Bengal Minorities' Development and Finance Corporation(WBMDFC) , presents examples of inspirations, hopes, and accomplishments. We are pleased to present the the stories of individuals drawn from the minority communities, who fought all kinds of odds and broke the barriers of stereotype. They triumphed over deeply entrenched poverty to set the examples for emulations. The first aim of the series is to capture the journey of different individuals, what were the enabler and triggering points that moved these heroes to embark upon the path travelled by a few people. The second principle guiding our this effort is to tell the stories of these unsung heroes to motivate others, especially those who come from similar backgrounds. One of the common threads running across every profile is the story of grit and determination.

Sustain the stories: Nominate your own unsung hero

There are many such stories of unsung heroes that remain unheard, this is the first attempt of this kind, we urge people to share such stories for another edition of this series. Your little effort can enlighten a large audience of an extraordinary achievers, and encourage a thousand of aspirants to emulate the stories who have cross the hurdles.

For Details visit <http://www.wbmdfc.org/icons>

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