

JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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Abstract

The fabric of this school is plural and diverse as students are not from any distinct culture or identity. They are from various ethnic groups like Gojars, Bakerwaals and indigenous Kashmiris speaking different languages. The school prioritizes the importance of plurality and diversity. The school has a large catchment area and maintains close linkages with its feeder schools. The school head and team developed the infrastructure of the school with support of community, SMDC and Panchayat members after making them realize the ownership of the institution. The school head motivated teachers to continuously improve teaching practice. Innovative teaching pedagogies were initiated for teaching of subjects; creation of Circle of Hope for facilitating peer learning among students and start of Winter Tutorials after the political turmoil of 2016 greatly improved the academic interest of students and helped their retention.

Socio-Cultural Context of the School

Atop the breath-taking hillock famous for the quality apple orchards and the serenity this institution stands unique as an epitome of academic excellence among the various other private educational institutions around the vicinity.



A view of the Administrative Block and the newly build academic Block

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The examples put forth by this institution in various fields set the foundation for the strong social set up and sense of collectivism between various sections of the society irrespective of their class and status. The institution has feed of students belonging to both economically and socially backward and prosperous background. The least percentage of 10% is from ST's and SC's families and the other 90% belonging to other categories mainly General.

This institution is highly plural and diverse as the students are not from any distinct culture or identity. They are from various ethnic groups like Gojars, Bakerwals and the indigenous Kashmiris having the different languages. They respect the values and ethos of diversity and are always ready to embrace the exotic lifestyle and thinking. And they are being engaged in cultural activities to make them feel proud about their cultural and traditional roots. This is how this institution prioritizes the importance of plurality and diversity.



The students performing the traditional folk dance ROUF on Annual Day



An acrobatic pair performing a THANG PA during a sports event

The institution is a reputed one in its respective jurisdiction and is having more than 500 record numbers of wards and the largest catchment area of cluster schools having almost 1600 students under its jurisdiction. The cluster schools are directly monitored supervised and examined by this institution. However, all this happened after a dedicated hard work and restless perseverance for the past three years by facing the various challenges cautiously as the state was going through the political turmoil.

Challenges for the School

In contrary to the aforementioned merry story, this institution was highly congested before my joining here as a principal. Only one dilapidated building with few messy rooms was not just enough to cater the needs of hundreds of students. Both processes of academics and the admission-cum-administration were

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badly affected. The other issues which used to keep faculty and the students on tenterhooks were the lack of drinking water, gender-specific washrooms, library etc.

The demand for the development of the infrastructure geared up after the concerned stakeholders expressed the need for the same. Subsequently, a meeting was convened in the principal's chamber and necessary way out for the plan was discussed by means of threadbare discussion with the community including **Auqaaf** (local governing body of senior citizens) and the Panchayat members after making them realize the ownership of the institution.



A view of newly build academic block

The outcome appeared fruitful. Through proper persuasion by the office of this institution a humongous contribution was made by the community by providing an amount of rupees **89 lac** which was utilized for the construction of much needed two storey academic block with the capacity of eight spacious rooms including the examination hall. The whole process was proceeded officially by taking the District Development Commissioner and the Chief Education Officer on board for the same. This move generated the public applaud and is still being weighed as an amazing step to be taken ever in the district.



The then worthy Chief Education Officer on his inspection visit to this institution



The then ADC Anantnag on his inspection visit to this institution

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And many other such developmental initiatives were followed and successfully accomplished as well. Face-lifting of older building, availability of drinking water and likewise activities were completed with an utmost ease.

Prior to this major developmental work, in 2015 soon after I joined this institution I called upon the then local MLC Honourable Dr Bashir Ahmad Veeri and apprised him about the dire need of infrastructural development. He made a visit to the school and after spot verification an amount of **Rs 18.80** lac were granted from the Constituency Development Fund, from which the following infrastructural developmental works were executed and accomplished:

Serial No.	Name of the work	Estimated cost in lacs
1	Construction of Canal with foot crossing and bed treatment.	8.50
2	Leveling of ground/playfield/lawns.	1.00
3	Beautification of parks.	3.00
4	Fencing	3.00
5	Construction of concrete path with tile flooring.	3.3
	Total	18.80



The then Honorable MLC Dr. Bashir Ahmad Veeri (centre) on his visit to this Institution in 2015.

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Meeting with local populace including the SMDC members regarding the adopting of this institution as a Model School



The local populace including the SMDC members keenly listening to the developmental plan being apprised to them

Apart from all these challenges which were managed judiciously. The major challenge ever faced by this institution was the political turmoil of 2016 when whole Kashmir was reeling under the reign of intense crackdown.

In 2016, many schools were razed to ground by the unknown miscreants. The ruckus was created all around and none had any answers even the administration was clueless about the invisible hand behind the curtain. Safeguarding the school building becomes the biggest challenge. In those testing times, the faculty members risking their lives kept vigil to guard the institution by making a night stays in the institution.

They all are having a pride of themselves turning out successful in guarding the institution and remaining alive themselves by braving the eminent threat from the stone-pelters and the invisible hands behind the curtain.

Such a challenge was not faced by any tactic or strategy. It only needed courage which was expressed by faculty that time.

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Efforts Initiated or the Process of Transformation

The office of this institution took the innovative and public friendly initiatives regarding the accomplishment of infrastructural plan by mobilizing the community, board meetings, awareness activities/programs and confidence generating events.



The meeting with local AUQAF and SMDC Members



SMDC members overlooking the needs of future developmental works.

With regard to the academic development the strategies adopted include school based innovation as a best driver for transformation, embracing new pedagogies and a shift in practice for a possible transformation, empowering teachers to make relevant changes in pedagogies and to value innovation as an opportunity for the ultimate learning experience.

And such pedagogies were straight away adopted on my joining this institution. Within a very first week it was observed the mathematics teacher adopting a lackadaisical approach while teaching the subject in a conventional one way flow. On my guidance the students were filtered into three categories viz; below average, average and above average. Two students from each category were encouraged to make a peer group (*Circle of Hope*) for peer/group learning. This way, their Chemistry and camaraderie start to develop and they approach the problem solving task collectively to elevate their comprehension levels.

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Students engaged in peer/group learning

The other problem, this institution used to face was the unprecedented events that unfurled during the political turmoil of 2016. Only the least number of 90 days were utilized after the commencement of new session. Rest of the year witnessed prolonged shutdown for the consecutive five months. The longest shut down in the history of J&K. The first casualty of the shutdown became the education and the school children were worst hit victims. The following winter vacation was the only hope to recuperate the losses. The students during the vacation period were free and were not having any accountability regarding their academics. They used to waste the vacations in idle activities. To compensate such a loss, this institution started winter tutorials. The faculty members rendered their services with full zeal and zest solely for the purpose of making the best use of vacations in the interest of the students. This has positively brought a better change in the academic level of the students. Since then the winter tutorials are continued.



The Students in a Winter Tutorial Class

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The institution has time and again acted as a torchbearer for all the Cluster Teachers falling under its jurisdiction. They are being frequently invited to the institution for the necessary guidance and motivation. They are also being imparting the trainings in their respective subjects either by this institution or by any external agency through this institution. Recently the Cluster Teachers were trained here by an NGO namely PRATHAM to develop their learning process abilities. This institution provided them all the logistic and infrastructural support.

This institution has kept doors open for all the possible initiatives which aim to alleviate the level of school administration-cum-academics to optimum mark. This institution believed in engaging the stakeholders. And will remain forever open for engagement.

All this comes with a change in the learning environment; the roles and responsibilities of teachers and peers. The physical learning spaces and of course, the technologies and techniques that are used.

Visible Results of Transformation



The front page of national weekly CHAUTHI DUNIYA featuring the staff and students during the Kashmir conundrum event

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The result of any dedicated hard work is always fruitful. So has been the case with our institution as well. The students who were struggling with many problems are now looking satisfied. The problem of congestion had made their minds disturbed; now they are peacefully attending the classes in their respective class rooms. They can read in library, relax in the well decorated lawns and can freely go to the gender specific toilets.

They wear the expression of satisfaction. Both the psychological and academic change is evident. And that change is positive.

The most important confidence booster for the students happen during the event on theme titled “Kashmir Conundrum” organized by the Delhi based NGO Lehar Foundation. The guests on the event were eminent journalist Mr Santosh Bharti editor-in-chief of national Urdu weekly “**Chauthi Duniya**” and Ms Arti Agnihotri, a Chandigarh based accredited journalist.

The event was held in the institution wherein the students delivered the speeches on the said theme and also debated the related issues impressively. All this happen only because of a transformation that took place in these three years.

Further Areas for Change/Transformation

Despite the many issues which were sorted out, many other resurfaces for the redress. Though this institution almost laps now all the infrastructure still it lacks the sufficient play ground which is essential for the extra-curricular activities. The institution is already having a decent compound occupied the gigantic Chinars (Kashmiri’s heritage trees). The compound is sufficient enough to cater the needs of daily activities like morning assembly etc. However, the major outdoor games like cricket and football are not being played there.

The students have demanded the establishment of the playground for giving wings to their sports talent. Consequently, the office of this institution mobilized and acquainted the community about the same requirement. The community owned a large unused land among which 27 kanals were donated to the institution. The same patch of land lies behind the newly academic block and has been officially transferred to the department of education for the further course of action.



A view of elevated table land in the back ground of academic block which needs to be bulldozed down for a play ground

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The same patch of land is elevated and needs to be bulldozed for leveling it down. The action in this regard has been taken and its completion will be accomplished soon within the realms of the administrative norms.



Developmental work underway



Filling up school premises

Moreover, the extremely passionate plan is to maximize the role of students in developing their overall personality by strengthening their mental ability and physical capabilities. The motto is to secure their future not only by making them excel in academics but to make them outshine their potentialities in skill oriented and market oriented avenues.

This plan will be executed by imparting a temper of logic and reason among the students. Some of the faculty members will indulge in adopting the creative ways of making the students understand their real worth. This will continue till some sort of constructive change may appear among the students.

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School Leader and Transformation

Honestly speaking, I would feel satisfaction in the things done which requires dedication, patience, perseverance and social approval. I do whatever I could do in my capacity during my tenure here. I feel satisfied to see the institution today well equipped in almost all aspects. I took the challenge to develop the infrastructure of the institution and today the change appears visible. I believe in change, the belief to change the domain under my control. I don't need magic to change the world, I carry all the power I need to change my domain and I tried it. The journey started from one just dilapidated building to the two new buildings with the old one repaired. The institution also holds now the state of art labs and libraries. My job as a principal would be to try and find the avenues that work for the welfare of the institution. If I am able to do that and try to find a way, I would have the audacity to be a comfortable.

I would say, I see myself a satisfied and a motivated school leader with a hunger to do more for the welfare of the school development. I love failures and I learned many great lessons from the failures but I never gave up and continued to churn out the success. I always presented myself as a positive force when things were not working out. It's much harder to continue when nothing is working out. But that's when I always believe in myself and realize the worth of being positive is worth a prize.