



EDUCATION

MADHYA PRADESH

This Former Banker Quit His Job to Educate Underprivileged Children in Madhya Pradesh Villages

by **Aishhwariya Subramanian**
7 months ago

Sanjay Nagar, a former banker started the Kohka Foundation to help educate students attending secondary schools in the tribal belt of Madhya Pradesh. This is his story.

Geeta is a young girl from a tiny village that does have the resources to help children successfully pursue higher education. But being part of NGO Kohka Foundation's various educational programs changed her prospects dramatically. As a result of the coaching and mentorship she received, she went onto to playing handball in the national level and also scored 70% in her Board exams. Today she is pursuing her graduation from a college in Jabbalpur. Geeta is a role model.

Sanjay Nagar, the founder of the Kohka Foundation says his goal in life is help create more role models like Geeta who go on to achieving great things in life. The foundation which currently operates in the tribal belt of Madhya Pradesh, covers 25 villages which share about six schools. The foundation, through a slew of programs provides Secondary School students coaching required for them to do well in their Boards.

Sanjay's own life used to be drastically different not too long ago, when he was working with top foreign banks. In order to get away from the stress that his job inflicted, he would often take off to Pench National Park. It is in that area, in the vicinity of the tribal belt of Kohka in Madhya Pradesh, that he came in contact with a middle school. "I started volunteering at that school quite often. I would arrange for benches,

or shoes, or anything else that was required. And the time and effort I put into the school kept increasing to the point where it became far more important than my actual job.”

Hence six years ago, he decided to quit his job entirely and start the Kohka Foundation. The first four years his work was entirely self funded. “The primary program is a yearlong engagement where teachers who part specifically hired by Kohka Foundation provide coaching classes to students from Grade 8 to 12 on weekdays before the school-day begins. And there are four hour coaching classes held on Sundays.”



The foundation is exclusively focused on secondary school education because that’s where, according to Sanjay, most of the students drop-out. “Up until Class 8 there are no exams in the schools here, and hence all students tend to get promoted. But from Class 9 there are exams, and they fail, and then they drop-out. Our goal is to help them pass their Board exams and then take up graduation.”

The other initiatives include sex education, Christmas celebrations, melas (fairs) and more. It has also started a computer science program that caters to 555 students in total. The reason the efforts of the foundation is exclusively focused on secondary school education is because that’s where most of the students tend to drop-out. “Up until Class 8 there are no exams in the schools here and hence all students get

promoted. But from Class 9 there are exams and they fail and then they drop-out. Our goal is to help them pass their Board exams and then take up graduation.”

All of this did not come easy. Sanjay tells us more about the difficult path to acceptance from the students and their parents. “In the beginning everyone kept wondering about me. They didn’t understand my motives and were probably wary. It took effort to convince them,” he says.

And the efforts are still ongoing as Sanjay notes it is still hard to get the parents involved. For instance, a parent-teacher conference organised by the foundation for the 200-plus students will probably only be attended by four parents.



“That’s the reason we go to the villages on a fortnightly basis and directly talk to the parents and address their concerns. We explain to them the need and the necessity

for education,” he explains. The team also works closely with the villagers to dispel societal biases and gender disparities. “In these villages, households either have two children or they have seven or eight kids. If they have a son immediately they stop, if not, they keep going until they have a son. We talk to them about the value of a girl child and why she also needs to be educated. We tell them how impossible it is in this day and age for families to sustain on a single income, and try and get through to them.”

Which is why girls like Geeta are even more important for the model. The year after she passed, the pass percentage shot up by 20% and Sanjay expects it to be even better this year. And with more success as well as funding, Sanjay believes he can easily expand his work across other villages and schools too.




“The model can be easily replicated. We want to expand to schools in Piperwani, Reddy and Khawasa by next year,” he notes. But for now, he is focused on creating more children like Geeta because those are the real success stories.

Learn more about the foundation [here](#).


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