

Unsung Heroes

“What we really need to make democracy function is not knowledge of facts, but right education.”

Mahatma Ghandi

In remote NE Karnataka, there is small village undetectable to most people. The village is a scheduled caste village, which meant that it was at the bottom of India's social pecking order. However, that didn't stop the local head master Lingappa. At 33 years old, he is a graduate with teacher training on top. He made a difference where many thought none could be made.

Vadarahatti School was a single room school, where all the 45 children from all classes were taught at the same time. There were no toilets, no playground and no surrounding wall. Accidents could easily happen. This really was a backwater school! 80% of all parents are illiterate, including the head of the local school development committee. Most earn between US \$0.25 and \$1.75 per day.

What Lingappa had was a goal: to secure the future of the children and the school. He instilled a desire to learn in the children, who would show up for school early and willingly stay behind at night. He utilized every square inch of the classroom wall in lessons, (even the bottom 4/5 inches!) With an assistant he taught the classes and encouraged peer learning. The community was behind him as he wanted the children to have conviction and to "qualify for the Navodaya School" when they leave the school. To do this they must acquire "strong fundamentals and concepts".

It's amazing what is possible when you need to do it. Through sheer hard work and determination, the school qualified at the top of a list of 850+ schools in the "learning Guarantee Programme Award," which was a joint initiative of the Government of Karnataka and the Azim Premji foundation. Now the school has its toilets, more classrooms and a playground. There are even plans for a library. Lingappa believes he can win the award next year as well.