

Brick by Brick : The Story of Moinuddin Mansuri

How an Education Support program in Rajasthan is helping young people build their lives

Every Eid, 20-year-old Mainuddin Mansuri makes a call from his village in Chittorgarh district to his former teacher Yashodhara Kaneria, who lives in the city of Udaipur. He asks her for Eidi – a gift traditionally given by elders and relatives to youngsters in the family. Yashodhara always responds by promising to hand over his Eidi the next time he comes to Udaipur, and demands hers in return. “Keep working hard and excelling,” she says, “that will be my Eidi.”

Mainuddin met Yashodhara in 2018 at a Residential Summer Camp in Udaipur organized by Shiksha Sambal (SS). SS is a unique joint initiative of the Government of Rajasthan, a corporate agency (Hindustan Zinc Limited) and a non-government organization dedicated to education (Vidya Bhawan Society). The programme provides academic support in Science, Maths and English to over 14,0000 children in 64 Government Secondary and Senior Secondary Schools across five districts of Rajasthan. It has many components, including regular teaching in government schools by teachers trained by Shiksha Sambal, Winter and Summer camps for intensive learning, and home visits by field staff.

The free Residential Camps in Udaipur are a particularly popular offering. The focus of these summer camps is to engage intensively with children and provide them the necessary academic inputs, and also give them an experience of an alternative learning environment. Mainuddin, who was 17 years old, and had just joined twelfth standard when

he went to camp for the first time in 2018, shares:

“The learning environment with SS teachers in camp was very relaxed ...I never felt scared or hesitated to ask them a question. They were so patient, always spoke to us in a gentle tone, and joked around with us all the time!”

This approach – of providing a safe, nurturing environment for students to overcome their fears, follow their curiosity and help them flourish – is at the heart of Shiksha Sambal’s approach to teaching. The word ‘Sambal’ means support in Hindi.

“Many students come from homes where their parents are uneducated and struggling to make ends meet – they are unable to provide the optimal environment and resources for students to flourish. Shiksha Sambal aims to fill this gap by supplementing the efforts of government school teachers,” explains Arun Kumar, Programme Coordinator of Shiksha Sambal.

One of the key aspects of the program is year-round teaching by Shiksha Sambal staff within school hours. Each semester, teachers trained



by Shiksha Sambal work out a timetable in collaboration with Government School teachers to offer extra classes in Science, Maths and English to students of 9th-12th standards. The primary objective of the program is to strengthen conceptual understanding and improve the results of boards examinations. Mainuddin, who is currently doing his B.Sc. (Bachelor of Science) and also teaches as a Science teacher through Shiksha Sambal in his former school in the village of Ajoliya Ka Khera, recalls his days as a student and explains:

“The teaching style in schools is bookish, but the program’s approach to learning is practical. I never understood the concept of a cell clearly, till the day our SS teacher placed an onion peel under a microscope. It looks exactly like a brick wall – each cell is a building block. Because I saw it, I understood it clearly, and have never forgotten it.”

Mainuddin’s own journey with education has not been easy. A first-generation learner and the youngest of three siblings, he is the only one in his family to have completed his education. His mother, Sharifa Bano, fled to her natal village with her children after her husband gambled away their family’s house. Mainuddin was a little over a year old at the

time. “I have been doing hard physical labour on construction sites all these years. I have raised my children alone, and built a house for our family with great difficulty”, shares 50-year-old Sharifa Bano. Her oldest son Saddam - Mainuddin’s brother – had to drop out of school in fifth standard to learn a trade and help run the household. Saddam now works as a tempo driver, ferrying passengers between villages and the city of Chittor.

Mainuddin, who always excelled at studies, studied for his board exams while working at the flour mill run by his maternal grandfather. Omprakash Acharya, a government school teacher in Ajoliya Ka Khera, remembers the batch that Mainuddin was part of as a ‘notorious lot’. “Several of the students would misbehave, smoke in school...sadly, this is the social environment in many of our villages”, he says, “Staying focused on studies in this mahaul is next to impossible.”

Despite these constraints, Mainuddin managed to score well in his board exams: he topped his class in Tenth Standard with a score of 76.7%; and came second in Twelfth Standard with a score of 71.3%. Mainuddin says that Shiksha Sambal had a big role to play in helping him do well in his board exams. He is currently doing his B.Sc. from a college in

Chittor – he routinely calls his SS teachers to keep them updated on his performance in college, and to clarify conceptual doubts.

He has long dreamt of becoming an officer in the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) – a position that will enable him to do jan seva (public service), and secure a good job to support his family. His family has high hopes from him: “I have been praying every day for years that Mainuddin gets a good job so that life can become more secure,” says his mother.





However, the family's economic situation has been fragile, and preparation for IAS exams can be an expensive, time-consuming process.

The COVID pandemic exacerbated the family's distress, and Mainuddin was forced to look for a job. For a while, the only feasible option seemed to be physical labour in a marble factory near his house, till Shiksha Sambal offered him a job as a teacher. He now works on a contract basis on weekday mornings through SS at his old school, teaching two classes a day. The income from this part-time work as a teacher – 6000 rupees per month – enables him to offer his family partial support while pursuing his studies alongside. He spends the afternoons in Chittor studying – at a two-month long free coaching program run by Hindustan Zinc, in subjects like G.K. and Geography. He resumes his studies for B.Sc. at night.

Sitting in his former school at Ajoliya Ka Khera in Chittorgarh district, he reflects:

“If I had gone to work at the factory, I would have had to work long shifts, and would have lost touch with my studies. It is possible that, over time, I would have lost the will to keep working towards my dream.”

Jyoti Sharma, Field Coordinator of Shiksha Sambal in Chittorgarh district, shares that many students have dropped out of school

during the pandemic. To prevent this, the SS team is conducting home visits to motivate the children and parents to stay in school. The dropout rates are higher amongst boys because many have been forced to migrate out of their villages to find work.

For Mainuddin, this job has become more than a means to earn income. He enjoys teaching – it keeps him in touch with his subject areas. Moreover, he tries to mentor his students with the approach employed by his favorite teachers:

“I try to keep the atmosphere light in class, and crack a joke whenever things become too monotonous. I also focus on using a practical approach – using diagrams and examples to make it easy for the students to understand.”

The experience of teaching with Shiksha Sambal has shown him a path forward, a way to continue striving towards his goal. Mainuddin has decided to pursue a Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.) after completing his B.Sc., and strive for a job as a Government School Teacher in order to earn some income while studying for the IAS.

Asked if he ever gets frustrated in the pursuit of his dreams, Mainuddin says,

“Yes, but the people at Shiksha Sambal are always watching out for me...for example, they told me they won't take me on as a full-time field staff right now because they don't want my studies to be interrupted,” he laughs. “They have also said they are willing to help in case I need any support with my IAS prep.”

The school bell clangs, announcing the next period. A group of students pour out of a classroom, clamoring for Mainuddin's attention. Sir, Sir, come to class, they call, and he waves at them affectionately, promising to be with them soon.

Back home, his mother smiles and says, “bit by bit, my prayers are being heard...”

With the support of Shiksha Sambal, bright young people like Mainuddin are building a better life, brick by brick.