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## The School Headmaster

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For all the school children and teaching staff, it was shocking surprise that headmaster Rajveer Sharma had come to school that day plastered on his right hand. There did not seem any apparent reason to it. He was a long, stout and strong man in his late fifties. His shining face, heavy but clear voice and deep black eyes made him an effective personality. His intelligentsia juxtaposed with civilized manners had made him a popular teacher in the entire village.

When Rajveer Sharma was newly appointed in the Primary School of Johripuram, the entire school building was in a dilapidated condition. All the four class rooms leaked badly. And the stinking foul smell spread everywhere. The school, having no boundary walls, attracted neighbors for dumping garbage; and teenagers would play various games in the verandah of the building. The poor upkeep of school deterred the villagers from sending their wards to study there. The school had only fifteen admissions that year.

Things changed after Mr. Sharma joined the school. Priority was given to cleanliness. With the help of students, the entire compound was thoroughly cleaned. Students of senior classes climbed up the roofs and cut the three feet long grass grown there in the past few monsoon seasons. One of the class rooms was made worth enough to study in. Neighbors were requested not to litter around the premises. The village headman was contacted to issue a hand pump from the government scheme.

After a month or so, things came under a little control. Mr. Sharma went door to door requesting the parents to admit their kids to the school. Simultaneously, he wrote several letters to the District Education Officer for transferring some teachers to this Primary school. Good news came with the appointment of one male and one female teacher. Krishna Pal Tomar from the nearby town Baraut, and Rakhi from Johripuram itself joined as assistant teachers.

Within three months the strength of school increased more than a hundred. Appreciating the progress, the DEO issued a small fund for school development. Encouraged by the praise, Mr. Sharma kicked off a charity program. He took his staff and visited almost every

house to inform the villagers about the progress of the school and to ask them a small monetary help for mending work. After some initial hiccup, money started flowing in and construction work began.

By the end of the year, all the roofs were repaired and a new room was also constructed. The number of students too almost touched the two hundred figures. By this time, two more teachers had joined the school. The Motto was simple- hard work and nothing else. The head master was strict disciplinarian and did not spare anyone, if found not working up to minimum expected standard. Nearby villages were approached now for school funding, donators donating more than five hundred rupees (six dollars) were named on stone plank that was fitted in a wall. The construction of the boundary wall started and completed within target period.

Five years were gone since Rajveer Sharma joined the school as head master. Three hundred plus students were getting education in this school now. Invitation cards were distributed to several people for the Republic Day Function. A beautiful cemented stage had been built just outside the verandah of the school facing *Sirsali* road. The Primary School now looked like a senior secondary institution. Mr. Sharma was trying to get it promoted to at least secondary level; but officers could not be convinced anyhow.

Almost half of the village came to behold the Republic day function. People were equivocal in their praise for Mr. Sharma's efforts and perspiration. He had prepared the students himself. Wrote several *Ragnis*, the folk songs for the kids and practiced the students; wrote a drama and chose characters befitting the play, rehearsed them well until they were furnished. Wrote speeches to be delivered by the students and helped them in learning and delivering.

He loved children by heart and children loved him too; but at times he beat them black and blue. For, he did not compromise any negligence in study or discipline on part of the students. And he dealt with any issue of indiscipline very sternly. But today all the people in the school were astonished when they saw his right arm plastered. Without giving any air of pain or concern he gestured with his usual smile, exposing his one pale tooth among the rest all white ones.

When he sat to teach, the students requested him once again to tell about his hand injury. He reminisced the whole episode: "*Every morning and evening I venture to my fields.*

*Yesterday, being Sunday, I happened to prolong in the fields a bit more than usual, and while binding the green fodder for the buffaloes, I heard some deafening shrieks. I stood up and saw in the direction of the cries. Two young boys ran past me shouting and crying horribly one after the other as though they were running for their life. For a moment I could not figure out the reason of their fear. As, children generally would pick the ripe black berries fallen from the jamun trees in this part of the jungle. My eyes chased into a distance to get to know the reason of their run.*

*To my great horror and disbelief, a female jackal was furiously rushing towards me at an alarming speed and before I could understand anything, jumping on me, it grabbed my hand in her mouth. It, most probably, had got a new motherhood and for the sake of the safety of her young ones, she was after the children mistaking them as a threat to her own kids; but now mistook me to be the main villain and was eating my hand like anything. I tried to get off my hand from her mouth but in vain. I got imbalanced and both of us fell down. She was biting me like hell. There was no one else around to be called for help. I gripped her by the throat, made myself stand somehow and lifted her up in the air and smashed her hard on the ground. She, still, did not loosen her grip and kept doing her work. I hit it on the ground for the second time but no use.*

*Then keeping her up in my hands I rushed towards a guava tree and hit her against the trunk of the tree for as many times as I could, finally she left my hand and fell down on the ground, head broken. The female jackal had died. My hand was bleeding profusely. Riding my bicycle, I reached the village doctor and after the first aid, I was referred to the town hospital, where apart from bruises, a hair line fracture was also diagnosed.”*

All the students were listening with rapt attention. The bell rang for recess; but the students were still praising the unflinching bravery of their teacher. Headmaster Rajveer Sharma had all the elements to be called a hero for the entire school.