

NATIONAL TEACHERS' AWARDS

From small towns to big cities, over 300 teachers awarded by President

ADITIVATSA
& SOMYALAKHANI
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 5

FROM ACROSS the country — remote villages, small towns and big cities — 346 teachers were presented the prestigious National Teachers' Awards 2015 by President Pranab Mukherjee Monday afternoon at Vigyan Bhawan. The President began his address by quoting Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan — "You cannot make or build the nation by just bricks; you have to establish the minds of young people and then alone can the nation building take place". Instituted in 1958, the award ceremony is held on Teachers' Day. The recipients were awarded a silver medal, a certificate and Rs 50,000.

Here, we speak to 10 teachers about their journey, love for academics and what they wish to change in the education system in the country.

Saiqa Shafi Wanchoo (40) awarded posthumously



Taught in Girls Higher Secondary School, Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir

Experience: 16 years of teaching English
Salary: Rs 40,000

In the midst of tight hugs, endearing smiles and countless selfies stood two women — sombre, teary-eyed but very proud. The

awardee was missing, and all that remained was the conversation between her mother, Mehbooba, and sister Kahkkashan, who had shown up to collect the award on her behalf. Saiqa, a victim of alleged domestic violence, died on May 16 this year. "She was a very dedicated teacher whose aim was to provide a platform to all the students in J&K. She also took a keen interest in extra-curricular activities for her students," says Kahkkashan, a journalist.

"She didn't have a child and her in-laws would often trouble her. When she was taken to the hospital that night, the doctors pronounced her 'brought dead' and called it 'suspicious'. Police hasn't filed an FIR yet. Today is also her wedding anniversary," adds Mehbooba.

Born and brought up in Kashmir, Saiqa witnessed the turmoil the Valley has undergone. According to Kahkkashan, that didn't deter her from her goal. "We have grown up knowing that anything can happen at any time and we must save ourselves. Even in such an atmosphere, she would care most about her students and still go ahead with workshops," she says.

Govind Sharma (47)



Teaches in Government Hari Singh Higher Secondary School, Jammu
Experience: 21 years teaching Maths and

is now associate NCC officer in the school

Salary: Rs 44,000

For eight years, he taught at a school in Rajouri where homes didn't have electricity. Sharma would often trudge to Jammu to buy kerosene for his students. This was a decade ago. For the past many years, Sharma has been posted in one of Jammu's oldest schools. "That experience taught me that in remote areas, children are eager to learn even when there are no facilities. But in the cities, though schools have infrastructure, students lose interest in studying," he says. Once Sharma joined the school in Jammu, he resurrected the NCC. He noticed a change in the way children approached studies after joining NCC. "Once they joined it, they did better in studies. I cannot stress enough on the importance of sports and extra-curricular activities," says Sharma.

If I could bring about one change: "Remote areas or big towns, I would make sure every school introduces extra-curricular activities. It's very important for them to learn how to balance academics and other interests."



Chumzay Nangpa, 54
Mangan Senior Secondary School, North Sikkim
Experience:

20 years
Salary: Rs 80,000

As she waits to receive her award, Nangpa can't help but

wonder where she will escape to if an earthquake shakes the foundations of Hotel Ashok. The teacher from upper Dzongu in Sikkim, which was the worst-affected area during the 2011 earthquake, understands a thing or two about trauma. "Apart from imparting education, as teachers we have to help our students get over fear and trauma," says Nangpa.

If I could bring about one change: "I would take away all the gadgets that children are busy with these days. They don't talk to each other or understand time-management because of these."



Chaman Shukla (61)
Shanti Purva Madhyamik Vidhyalaya
Experience:

32 years
teaching English, Hindi at Farrukhabad district, UP
Salary: Rs 54,000

A first generation learner in her family, Shukla has been teaching English, Hindi, and physical education to students of classes VI-VIII for the last 32 years. "When I was a child, it was not common for girls to go to school. I remember how I would go on a hunger strike to make sure that my parents sent me to school. I was the first girl in my family to go to a school. I have spent my entire life to ensure that girls get access to school education," she says.

If I could bring about one change: "I would ensure that girls, especially from backward sections, are mentored by educators

who will fund their education and keep them motivated. Many students, mostly girls, drop out due to family pressure."

Dave Prakash Kumar Batukray (50)



Galkotdi Primary School, Gujarat
Experience: 30 years
Salary: Rs 54,000 per month

In the last 30 years as a primary school teacher in a village of 700 residents, Batukray has donned several hats — as a teacher of Sanskrit, Gujarati, Science and Mathematics and also as a facilitator for raising funds for the school. "Initially, the schools did not have basic facilities such as electricity, water supply and toilets. We approached local bodies and village councils to raise funds so that basic amenities could be provided to students. This was the situation 30 years ago when I started teaching. Things have improved now with various government schemes being introduced," he says.

If I could bring about one change: "There are around 300 students in my school. While I would like to ensure that all amenities and infrastructure is provided to them, the main issue is of students dropping out. Due to poverty, children are forced to work as labourers to support their families. This is happening despite government schemes aimed at reducing dropouts."