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Cop gives rural students a shot at life in library-cum-study centres

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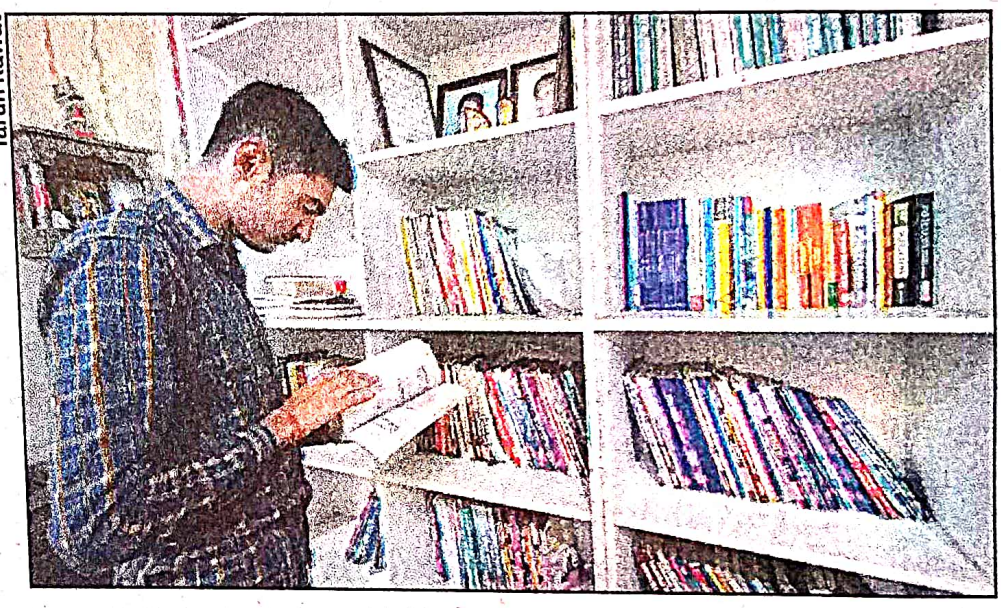
New Delhi: A library-cum-study centre, the brainchild of Sonu Bainsla (35), a sub-inspector in Delhi Police, has metamorphosed from being an old panchayat to a place teeming with students from Ganauli village in Ghaziabad and elsewhere within a few days. It has now become a model that has been emulated by about 250 villages in UP, Haryana, Rajasthan and as far as Maharashtra.

Tarun Rawat



Gram Pathshala at Ganauli village in Loni, Ghaziabad, is run by Delhi Police SI Sonu Bainsla with the help of other cops, villagers & students

Ganauli is a small village of about 5,000 people in Loni, Ghaziabad, which sends its youth to police forces around the country and for petty jobs in government offices. The height of their aspirations so far has been getting a constable's job. It's not their competence which limits their ambition. The circumstances in families nip any ambition in the bud.

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This cop's motto: To make it easier for others to dream and think big

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Photos: Tarun Rawat





The library-cum-study centre has two rooms that have separate cubicles for students, space for carrying out group discussions

Bainsla had this epiphany while in quarantine during the first wave of the pandemic in 2020. Faced with a sense of gloom and doom which made it seem that the world was coming to an end, he reflected on his life and the reasons why he could not realise his full potential. Returning home to a rousing welcome from the villagers, he decided to make it easier for others to dream and think big.

"I wanted to do something for my village and did not want the teenagers here to have small goals," said Bainsla, who is fondly called bhaiya. "Our village has several policemen and others who are in government service. We set up a WhatsApp group called 'Gram Pathshala', fixed a minimum contribution of Rs 5,000 and collected around Rs 7-8 lakhs." A mason was hired and the students themselves pitched in with labour to build the place "which they now value more than anything else".

No one knows the worth of the place more than Bainsla, who had faced a lot of difficulties while preparing for competitive exams. The library-cum-study centre has two rooms which have separate cubicles for students, space for carrying out group discussions, even a place to sleep, two toilets, a handpump, an inverter and 24X7 CCTV surveillance. The free Wi-Fi is another thing that people treasure a lot because connectivity here is quite bad though the area is just 20km from Delhi. The centre is open 24X7. Students feel motivated to share this space besides knowledge, lessons and notes.

Lokesh Tanwar, 18, had come all the way from Fatehpur near south Delhi to stay with his uncle in the village as he just loves this centre. "At home, they are always asking me to do some or other work like looking after the buffaloes and preparing hookah for the elders. There are no such distractions here. I can share books with others and, in fact, they help me out as well," he said.

Rohit Bainsla, 27, has completed his graduation and is now preparing for competitive exams. Living in a joint family with children at home, he had no peace of mind. "I have three children at home and my elder brother and his family stay with us. The place is always noisy and I am unable to study without interruptions. Here, it's quiet and the space also fosters a competitive spirit."

The centre has expanded his horizons, says Gaurav, 19, who spends time here with his elder brother. "There are people from different backgrounds here and we work even harder to keep up. People also donate books and there are many which bhaiya and others bring," he says. Vishnu Bainsla, 24, has already reset his goals. "We should prepare for competitive exams and aim for IPS or SSC," he says.

Since most of the students have studied in Hindi medium, steps are being taken gradually to help them with English. The library gets almost all the English dailies, monthly tests are conducted and even awards handed out to incentivise good performances.

Bainsla has now roped in around 125 others from his village who work in the police forces of Delhi and UP and some others in government jobs to join the initiative. Cops and servicemen from around 250 other villages are now on board for setting up such centres.

Bainsla says the project would not have succeeded without the support of Lal Bahar, who is posted in NHRC, head constable Devendra Bainsla and constables Ravindra, Amar and Monu. They are now planning to open another such centre for the girls in the village.