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FROM BEING SHOT IN THE SPINE TO OPENING AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL, PADMA SHRI JAVED AHMAD TAK SHARES HIS STORY WITH US

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Padma Shri Javed Ahmad Tak, an educationalist from Kashmir, who holds a one-year Diploma in Human Right and Computer Applications from IGNOU & a two-year Special B.Ed, has a very unbelievable life story.

Javed was shot in the spine during a disturbance in Kashmir in the year 1997 and lost the ability of his lower limbs, but he did not sit at home filled with despair and depression. Instead, he decided to start an organisation to help people in a similar situation.

Within a short span of time after the unfortunate event, he established the HUMANITY WELFARE ORGANIZATION (<http://www.humanitywelfarehelpline.org/index.php>), catering to the betterment of society by uplifting the less-privileged women and providing medical assistance to the needy ones. Full of perseverance, this inspiring man then turned into an incredible full-time educator when he laid the foundation of **Zaiba Aapa Institute of Inclusive Education** in Bijbehara, a town in Anantnag district of the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, that provides free education to children with special needs.

Read the excerpts from the hearty conversation Scooews had with Padma Shri Javed Ahmad Tak:

1. What made you think of establishing Zaiba Aapa Institute of Inclusive Education?

Zaiba Banoo, my grandmother, was a community worker. She has worked all her life for the betterment of society. She used to create and provide free homemade medicines to cure the victims of Kangri/Kanger burns when there were no dermatologists available or when the snowbound roads would make it impossible for us to reach the hospitals. I was inspired by how others' misery motivated her to become this selfless.

In addition to this, she often prepared extra food and served it to those in need. I still remember how people recommended the homeless to visit Zaiba Aapa's house to satisfy their hunger.

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Let's promote him as the Daddy of the Year, already!

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"It is a small effort from my side to educate children through

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He was awarded National Award for his work in the government...

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She was felicitated with the National Award for her unique

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2. Did you ever face opposition from the girl-students' parents in the community? If yes, what did you do to resolve the issues?

In the beginning, people were against sending their daughters with disabilities to school. They had concerns and we completely empathized with them. But to come to a solution, we would consistently speak to families and explain to them the importance and benefits of sending their girls for basic school education.

In addition to one-to-one dialogues, our organisation also started to show our participation in various national festivals and cultural programmes to create easy communication with the community. We conducted many local shows with child care institutions as well. In this way, we managed to spread awareness on a larger level which ultimately made the families overcome their agitation towards us. Afterwards, many parents got motivated and made efforts to reach out to us.



3. It was stated that you used all the ex-gratia amount given by the government for the organization. What were the first few tasks that you accomplished with that money? Also, how is the organisation supported in the monetary front now?

The start-up assignments included renting the rooms to start the classes and the salaries of Special-Ed teachers & other social workers. We had to spend on purchasing matting, stationery & toys as we didn't want to leave out on anything our children would need in the long run. Then there were travel expenses involved for those coming down to work from afar and even bring the special students along in some cases.

In fact, in the beginning, we needed a lot of money to make people aware of our cause. We printed posters and leaflets that were sent across the valley. In short, in that particular amount, we left no stone unturned.

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4. Would you like to share one success story from your classroom with us?

Saima Hussain (an ex-student of Zaiba Aapa Institute) suffered from visual impairment, which made her drop-out from the local school. She was then identified by our volunteers in the village and was immediately admitted to Zaiba Aapa School. She diligently studied using Braille and continued her education up to class 8 with us. She was given full support in terms of soft books, different teachers for extra classes, and scribe/amanuensis in examinations. Later, she joined a local higher secondary school after which, she grabbed a job in Cultural Academy Kashmir as a junior artist. In our school, she was given the training of classical music that ultimately helped her expand her career horizon. Currently, she's pursuing graduation through distance mode, making all of us proud of her.



5. What effect did COVID-19 have on the work your organisation does?

Many adverse things happened, for example, children with disabilities got detached from the schooling facilities. However, long before this virus struck us, the situation in the valley was already not favourable for the students.

Here, in J&K, the children have been out of schools since August 5 last year, when the state was declared a Union Territory. After this, the snowfall began and the winter vacation was announced. Soon after that, in March 2020, Coronavirus pandemic hit us, making the school closure a long affair.

Under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, 48 special educators were appointed but due to consolidated salary, 26 of them left the Job. Under RMSA, more 60 special educators were appointed for higher secondary schools. Thus, the state now has only 86 special educators for 22 districts that have about 70,000 children with different disabilities to be looked after. Special-needs educators from outside the state have left, too.

We have been paying the staff on a continuous basis but our resources have now dried up. During the holy month of Ramzan, our organisation was getting a huge public donation that was fulfilling our half-yearly needs. But now, carrying the school activities and additional activities like the outing of



chil... sional counselling, and sports events will not happen this year. Apart
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It breaks my heart to see some of the parents who give up their kids because they
aren't in a position to look after their physically-disabled kids, especially those with back strains and
disc dislocations. Their stagnation in one place makes them grow up with mental health diso
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For now, I miss my students. I wish I could give them developmental therapies via online facilities but
that's not possible because we don't have access to high-speed internet. Moreover, some of these
children have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and can't concentrate for more than
five minutes straight, especially on the screen.



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6. If your school was located at a different geographical location, do you think the journey would have been easier?

Yes, and one of the major reasons I say this is because we've no (plain) land available for sports activities here. The roadsides can be used to enjoy physical activities but when the buses are parked there, that option is gone, too.

7. Lastly, what is the most satisfying aspect of your work as an educator?

A lot of specially-abled children were considered the 'dependent population' earlier. They were called 'less disciplined', too, but once their proper intervention began at our school, they started helping their families in agricultural activities and other home assignments. The children with speech and verbal impairment, who were out of schools, are now pursuing secondary schooling and regularly visit other states for sports tournaments. They're getting appreciation and medals everywhere. In addition, the dropped out students with disabilities are pursuing higher secondary and undergraduate courses. I consider these independent and empowered children my medals and appreciation and I am extremely grateful for being able to help them in whatever way possible.



ScooNews admires and salutes Javed's dedication and commitment.

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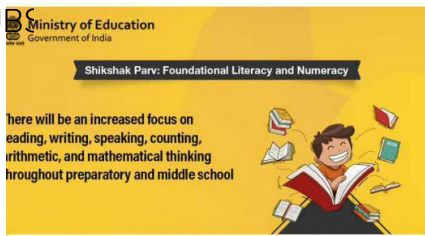
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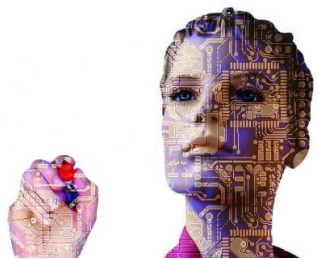


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