

# The Closing Bracket . . .

We feature here Mathematics teachers who we encounter in the course of the Foundation's work, unsung heroes and heroines who are often the gateway into and out of mathematics for many a student. Math phobia has been endlessly discussed, it is time to focus on those whose dedication to the subject creates lifelong learners.

In this issue, we feature Sandhya Sundas, primary teacher, presently posted at C S Rai Govt Sec School, Arinthat, Gangtok, Sikkim. This is one of the schools in which the Class IV and Class V textbooks created and designed by Sikkim SCERT in association with Azim Premji Foundation is being piloted. Here, in Sandhya's own words is how she reacted to the pandemic situation.

*When lockdown was first declared, we all were not aware that it would last more than three months and that school would remain closed for such a long period. Like every other teacher, all my school/teaching related items were closed in the school desk. This included the class register in which the contact numbers of the children were recorded. I was left with no means to connect with them. When the situation started getting worse and there were fewer chances of opening the school, at that moment a thought came into my mind that "No you cannot sit at home like this, you must do something so that the teaching learning process goes on." I felt that I must reach the children somehow. So I posted a video on Facebook where I tried to get connected with the students through their parents. But, it did not work well from my personal Facebook page. Then I thought of an alternative - if any digital media platform would give me their support, then I could not only get connected to my students, but perhaps I could help other students too, as like me, most of the teachers were unable to help them. So I requested "Sikkim Varta" a digital medium platform to support me. They asked me to visit their office - that was during the peak lockdown period! I convinced my family who were worried about my going out due to the pandemic situation and I walked to the Sikkim Varta office. On the way, the police stopped me but when I shared my idea with them, they let me proceed. At the office, when I described my initiative, they very warmly accepted my request and provided me with their media platform to conduct a session of Class V maths online. On April 12th, I made my first attempt to reach my students and got a very good response. At least 40 to 60% of the parents and guardians in Gangtok, as well as within and outside Sikkim were able to access the program. After that, every day, I walk to the studio and make my presentation as if I am teaching in the real classroom. But an online class in front of the camera is very different. It was definitely not as easy as I thought. To start with, I had nothing with me - not even a board or chalk. I then approached an organization near my house and they provided me with their blackboard and chalk - it was in poor condition and I couldn't even buy polish for it because all the shops were closed. I managed however, and then, one day, I posted a request for a board on Facebook. Luckily, a teacher, Mr Deoraj Bagdas readily shared his white board. So things were getting better in small steps. But I missed the interactivity of my classroom, so often, I deviated from my lesson plan because of the surprising responses from the students. Here, I had to assume that they were with me all the way. Sikkim Varta, in spite of their busy schedule, supported me to reach maximum students through the media - I often had to wait in the studio for my turn, then I had to spend 3 to 4 hours with their editor to edit the video before telecast. Sometimes it would get dark by the time I returned home. Walking on the silent street, made me feel like I was in a horror show - again, the responsible Sikkim Varta staff accompanied me whenever I got late!*

*And it is going on. I share the links of my talks with my students and then they reach out to me with their doubts. The new textbook was designed to make the child think and reason and understand mathematics. Very often, the children have to rely on parents and older siblings who have been given a procedural understanding of mathematics. So it is a difficult task to get them to take the harder but more interesting route. I am also learning a lot - and last, but not the least, the team of SCERT and APU are always supportive with their books and guidance whenever I need them.*



Here is a link to one of Sandhya's talks.

Sandhya: [https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=2622640997842256&ref=watch\\_permalink](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=2622640997842256&ref=watch_permalink)

Now you know the effort and dedication behind that clip!