

## INDIA'S HEROES

As Mrs. Reeta Barua entered her class, the students were still unsettled in their seats because thrill and enthusiasm prevailed in the atmosphere of the class room. She gave a few seconds to them to settle down.

The class was eager to listen to Mrs. Reeta Barua. She asked them as to how many of them were ready to speak on the topic 'What You Would Like to be When You Grow Up'. All forty students raised their hands together. Mrs. Baruah was very happy to see that. She thought her assignment would not prove waste of time as all the students were so much curious to do it.

She further specified to the students that they could speak of someone whom they consider their role model, mentor or they may speak on a particular trait or quality that they admired in a person whom they would like to follow in life.

The students arranged the pages on which they had written their assignments. They were curious to speak in front of the class.

It was Ajit Basu's turn first. He spoke as to how he would like to be a great cricket player like Sachin Tendulkar. Gaytri Chhabra spoke that she would be a social worker like her mother and Sanjay Damle felt excited in becoming a pilot so that he could fly an airplane with the air and clouds as his terrains. The students spoke one by one about sports-stars, actors, politicians and so on.

Now it was Kabeer's turn to speak. As he stood up to speak, he felt so nervous that drops of perspiration (sweat) appeared on his forehead. He was not accustomed (habitual) to speaking in front of the whole class. He was very well aware that he had no flair (natural ability, talent) for making speeches. In spite of that he had worked hard on the

assignment and written it from the very depth of his heart. Another thing that made his assignment different from others was that he did not focus on one profession, person and quality. He took persons from different walks (fields) of life as the subject of his speech and those were the people who had stirred (moved) Kabeer's heart.

Before speaking, Kabeer cleared his throat and then spoke that he would be brave like Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan, the thirty-one year old National Security Guard (NSG) commando, who sacrificed (laid down) his life while fighting the terrorists in Mumbai in November 2008.

There was a pin-drop silence in the class room. Kabeer went on speaking about Major Unnikrishnan. He further added that Sandeep Unnikrishnan had made up his mind to join army when he was just eight years old and studied in class III only. He served the country for two tenures (period of time) with his battalion in countering (fighting) insurgency (revolt, riot, etc.) and terrorism. He became a part of NSG in January 2007. Major Sandeep was deployed (set on the position) on the 27th of Nov. to clear Hotel Taj from the terrorists.

As soon as Sandeep entered the hotel with his team, he gave a very fierce (violent, ferocious) gunfight to the terrorists. He did not care for his own life to evacuate (vacate) one of his commandos when he was injured in the exchange of fire. He also chased the terrorists facing all danger to his life. He was so much courageous and confident that he told the rest of his companions not to come up as he would handle them alone. Saying that, he followed the terrorists to the other floor of the hotel. The gunfight went on for some time, but unfortunately bullets hit him. Before he succumbed to injuries, he saved the life of his soldier Gajender Singh.

Now Kabeer paused for a little time. All the students were watching him with full attention and wondered as to what

would follow next. Every student had been allotted three minutes and Kabeer had spoken only for one minute. Now the author describes the scene outside the classroom. Birds were chirping, cars honking and the younger children were enjoying the recess time. But the class 8 A was oblivious (unaware) to everything and paying full attention to Kabeer. After that, Kabeer expressed his desire to become like Vishnu Dattaram Zende, who was an announcer for ten years at Mumbai Railways, heard a loud explosion at one end of a CST platform on the 26th Nov., and also saw people running with bloodstained clothes. Sensing something unusually wrong, he used the public announcement system to tell people to go out from different exist doors. He did not leave his place to save his life; he continued making announcements for about half an hour. He knew it very well that the terrorists could attack him. They also fired a bullet towards Vishnu's cabin, but it could not hit him.

Next he said that he would also like to be like Karambir Singh Kang, the General Manager of the Taj Hotel. He did not feel worried about his own and family's safety first, but instead he helped his guests and staff goes out of the hotel. His family and children were trapped in a room which was ablaze with fire. They died there in the room due to suffocation, but he kept on doing his duty even though he had lost his family. After that tragedy, he did not leave his job. He is still working there and helping to restore the heritage structure of the Taj Hotel.

Kabeer's presentation was so touching that it made everyone in the class spell-bound and emotional. Swati's eyes were filled with tears.

Kabeer paused for a few seconds for he had also become emotional. He suppressed a sob and continued saying that he would also like to become fearless like the Anti-Terrorism

Squad Chief Hemant Karkare. He had chased the terrorists in a jeep. But unfortunately, he was gunned down by the terrorists near Cama Hospital. His two companions DIG Ashok Kamte and Vijay Salskar also sacrificed their lives to save the country's honour. Hemant Karkare was a brave officer and he had served in Austria for seven years in the Research and Analysis Wing of India in the capacity of Intelligence officer. He sacrificed his life so that we may live in a terror-free country.

Kabeer had made everyone in the class emotional. Even Mrs. Baruah's eyes were filled with tears and she was not looking up as she did not want that her students could see her welled up eyes.

Kabeer went on saying that when he grew up, he would be caring like Mohammed Taufeeq Sheikh, popularly known as Chhottu Chaiwala. He was a young man who ran a tea stall at CST station. He was the person who reacted at once in transporting the injured persons to Saint George Hospital. In this way he had saved the life of many injured persons by acting promptly.

After that, Kabeer said that he would be like Sandra Samuel when he grew up. Sandra Samuel saved the life of a two year old Moshe Holtzberg when the terrorists attacked Mumbai in 2008. It was the time when Nariman House was attacked.

Moshe's parents were killed in that attack.

Next he proceeded to say that he would also be the caretakers like of 'kabristans in Mumbai, who refused to allow the dead terrorists to be cremated there. They proved that the terrorists had no religion and the true religion is that which preached love for all human beings.

As Kabeer reached the ending point of his presentation, all the students stood up to give standing ovation to him. Mrs. Baruah's eyes were still wet. She knew it well that in front of

her were the children who would be the future of the country and who would support the virtues of peace, tolerance and selflessness in an India that would become terror free one day and would lead the whole world.

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