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I felt celebrated when I shook hands with Obama

...says Revathi Balakrishnan, who was recently honoured at the White House by the President of the United States



Revathi Balakrishnan with Obama

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It was a proud moment for all Chennaiites when Revathi Balakrishnan, an Indian American, was recently named the 2016 Texas Elementary Teacher of the Year and honoured at the White House — after all she was born and brought up in *amma* Chennai! After being felicitated by the POTUS Barack Obama himself, Revathi recalls fond memories of Chennai, her decision to take up teaching, leaving a corporate job, meeting Obama and more. Excerpts...

GROWING UP IN CHENNAI

I am a product of Rosary Matriculation School, Ethiraj College for Women and Stella Maris College from Chennai. I did my major in Economics. Meanwhile, I was very active in sports as well. I used to be a part of different sports teams in school, especially tennis.

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WE MUST NURTURE GOOD TEACHERS TO HAVE GOOD STUDENTS

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FROM A SYSTEM ANALYST TO A TEACHER

I like to try different things. I enjoyed being a systems analyst, but I also knew that I was a good teacher, based on the feedback from my days as a graduate assistant at Northeastern University. So, when it was time to change careers, I chose to go with teaching, also knowing that my experience in the corporate world will allow me to bring the real world into the classroom. I have never regretted this decision.

NO LONGER LIMITED TO A CLASSROOM

This achievement validates what I have been advocating all along — building resilience in students and building a working relationship with them that is based on trust and respect. My application essay was based on all of these practices in my classroom and I am glad that the state of Texas approved of this through their selection of me as their state teacher of the year. Now, as a Texas representative on the national scene, I am invited to conferences to dialogue with teachers from other states in the US, to discuss educational policy and to see how all of us together can make education a priority and a wonderful experience for students. I feel that I am no longer limited to a classroom. There is so much more to

learn in this field, and I am excited for the opportunities that come with this award.

NEED TO NURTURE GOOD TEACHERS TO HAVE GOOD STUDENTS

It is a great honour to be recognized for my work by the President Barack Obama. The White House ceremony was in celebration of the state teachers of the year. Due to rain, it was moved indoors. Therefore, we got to see the lavish decorations and the wonderful portraits of the presidents. We truly felt celebrated, especially when we got to shake hands with the President, take a photo with him and be congratulated for our work. I only wish that all teachers are celebrated on a daily basis and treated as professionals and that teacher mentoring and teacher support is valued at all levels. Only when we grow and nurture good teachers can we grow good students.

INDIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM HAS EVOLVED

In the US, each state has its own curriculum and all public schools are expected to follow that curriculum. With this kind of standardization, it is easier to maximize resources and exchange ideas. Many schools in the US are

abandoning rote-learning in favour of project-based learning, and are looking at incorporating creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking as everyday skills to be taught. Technology has also changed the

way we teach. Since I haven't taught in India, it is difficult to make a comparison, but I am sure that the Indian educational system has evolved to fit the diverse needs of Indian school children.