

School students left star-stricken

Astronomy lover Murlidhar Kabra set up a portable planetarium in his house for school children to learn visually rather than go through dull text books

Neelambari Bhoge

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Students can see various constellations projected onto the dome of the planetarium (L) and (R) Kabra operating the globe-shaped projector that uses pin-hole mechanism

If you have ever wished to listen to or impart lectures on astronomy within the comfort of your own house, then astronomy lover Murlidhar Kabra may just have beaten you to the idea.

Kabra, an ardent astronomy lover, has set up a portable planetarium inside his own house, having had set up planetariums in places like the Science City Space Theatre in Kolkata, AB Birla Planetarium in Hyderabad, Meghnad Saha Planetarium in Burdwan, and the Indira Gandhi planetarium in Patna before.

Kabra received technological help from a Japan based company, Goto, who sets up planetariums all over the world and decided to go in for an EX-3 mini planetarium of his own.

Speaking to Mirror, Kabra said, “my whole objective for this planetarium was to give astronomy lessons to students. Through this planetarium, students will be aware of star-gazing and will help them figure out the stars in the sky.” For Kabra, giving astronomy lectures on a blackboard is not only difficult, but also meaningless.

Resembling a globe, the machine uses the pin-hole method to project the hemisphere on a 3 meter diameter Vinyl dome. The projector shows stars, sunrise and sunset, phases of the moon, Solar systems and the 12 signs of the Zodiac.

Not only this, but it also explains the location of stars through the use of co-ordinates. It also shows the polar star and decides the duration of day and night on Earth. The most remarkable feature of this mini planetarium is that it can be installed in any standard 12 X 12 foot room.

About 20 students can be accommodated under the dome. There is also a teacher's handbook that is handed out with the instrument package, making it easy for a teacher to conduct interactive sessions.

Kabra set up the planetarium around the middle of June 2011 and received incredibly positive response from schools and educational institutions, who have shown an interest to install a planetarium within their premises as well.

Jyoti Mahajan, Science teacher of HHCP (Huzurpaga) high school said, "we have seen the planetarium and it is immensely feasible. The students can learn everything covered in Geography. We are still deciding on the particulars, but have truly liked the concept."

Medha Ujjainkar, Principal of Yashwant Vinayak Mandir Dhule said, "Sitting in Dhule itself, one can observe the sky in Singapore. Moreover, the unit is handy and portable. We look forward to having one installed in our school."

The planetarium has been appreciated by well known astronomy expert, Dr. Prakash Tupe, as well. Speaking to Mirror, he said, "the whole concept is very helpful for school students. Usually, we read about various astronomy concepts, but through this planetarium, students will get to observe it."

Tags: school students planetarium, Neelambari Bhoge, Mmurlidhar Kabra

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