

Education of Slum Children: An Analysis of the Case Study of Delhi's NGO-Run School

*Pankaj Das**

Abstract

The population living in urban slums is one of the most neglected groups of vulnerable children in India. The impoverished neighbourhoods of practically all megacities, including Delhi, have a severe problem. The lack of school attendance among 225,000 children residing in Delhi's slums or on the streets is a significant obstacle to accomplishing the objectives of Education for All. The importance of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) cannot be overstated. In a nation where public funding for slum children's education is frequently neglected, the importance of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) cannot be overstated. Many NGOs are stepping in to fill this gap, strengthening the nation by intellectually, socially, and economically developing impoverished communities. One of the best examples is the Delhi-based NGO Deepalaya, which runs schools for young people who have dropped out and supports efforts to get them back into the system. Against this intention, the present case study of Delhi's Deepalaya School, Gole Kuan, explores the schooling process of slum learners in Delhi.

Keywords: *slum children, schooling, non-governmental organisations, Delhi.*

Introduction

Slums are abandoned areas of cities with horrible housing and living conditions. Slums are congested, closely-knit neighbourhoods in urban regions devoid of essential services (Gogoi et al., 2016; Kumar & Aggrawal, 2003). Due to low literacy rates and high dropout rates at all educational levels, one of the biggest problems in slums is education. The condition of the facilities in schools in slums is one of the significant challenges, along with other issues in prominent urban neighbourhoods (Tsujiata, 2013; Chauhan, 2009). Slum teachers often lack the professional training or education to devise methodologically sound teaching techniques. Therefore, they fail to empower and educate the slum children effectively.

** Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Allahabad, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India.*

Consequently, many young children in slums lack access to quality education. A significant portion of India's urban poor reside in slums. According to the 2011 Census of India, 17.4 per cent of India's urban population reside in slums. Of these, 12 per cent of the slum population are young children aged 0–6. Moreover, 22.72 million children in the age group of 5–18 are not enrolled in school. Suppose education is an essential tool for uplifting any society's socioeconomic status. What kind of upliftment is going on for the significant chunk of the urban population that lives in slums when their children are deprived of fundamental rights to education? Why is the government not ensuring the schooling of slum children with proper schooling facilities? The answers to these questions may not be direct. However, they highlight a fundamental reality about India: the country emphasises its policy statements, which may not adequately address the needs of marginalised or deprived groups at the time of implementation (Sudarshan, 2000).

People living in urban slums in India are among the most marginalised groups of vulnerable children (Tsujita, 2009). The problem is acute in the slums of almost all mega urban centres, including Delhi. Slums are global issues present in almost every city on the planet. In Delhi alone, there are about 750 major and minor slums that house over 2 million people (Census, 2011).

According to data from a survey carried out in India's capital, around 250,000 youngsters who live in slums do not attend school. The results have also brought attention to the city's slum dwellers' issues with joblessness, illness, and a lack of municipal amenities (Delhi-NCTD, 2015). 56% of people in Delhi's slums are literate, compared to 46% of students who drop out of schools I–X and 45% of those who engage in higher education (ages 18–23) (Government Report, Delhi) According to reports, children are not learning at levels that correspond to their class, which raises serious concerns about the quality of education (ASER, 2013). Thus, a significant chunk of Delhi's children, living in the slums or on the streets, do not attend school, which is a severe obstacle to reaching the Sustainable Millennium Goals.

Amidst the failure of state formal mechanisms and responsibilities, the unwavering dedication of NGOs to educating the slum children is a beacon of hope. In a country where government funding for the schooling of slum children often takes a back seat, the contribution of these NGOs is significant. Many NGOs are not only educating slums but also empowering them socially and economically, thereby contributing to the nation's strength. Numerous non-

governmental organisations in India have conducted research to bring about significant changes in the education of deprived groups in our society. Deepalaya, a Delhi-based NGO, is a prime example of this; it has been operating schools for slum dropouts and supporting initiatives to reintegrate them into the educational system. Organisations like Deepalaya are crucial in addressing the challenges slum children face in accessing education.

Deepalaya educates the poor through formal and informal means, focussing on children living in slums. "Deepalaya School Gusbethi (DSG)," "Deepalaya School Sanjay Colony (DSSC)," "Ramditti J.R.N. Deepalaya School (RJRND)," "Deepalaya School Kalkaji Extension (DSKE)," and "Deepalaya School Gole Kuan (DSGK)" are the five schools operated by Deepalaya in the Delhi vicinity. Deepalaya is professionally and academically accredited by the NIOS. Given this, the following case study investigates the education children in West Delhi's Gole Kuan slum receive.

Objectives of the study:

The case study intends to:

- Explore the schooling of slum learners in NGO-run school in Delhi.
- Explore the pedagogical and innovative practices in NGO-run school.
- Explore the social context of slum learners in NGO-run school.
- Explore the influential role of NGO-run school in social intervention.

Profile of Deepalaya School, Gole Kuan

Out of these schools in Delhi, Deepalaya School Gole Kuan (DSGK) was chosen as a case study to explore the schooling of slum learners in India. Slums like Gole Kuan are located in Phase 1 of the Okhla Industrial Area. To improve the lives of slum dwellers, Deepalaya launched the Gole Kuan Project. The Gole Kuan Project is included in the official school curriculum. The school conducts classes from LKG to VIII, focusing on the girl child. It has strength of 329 students. Out of these, there are 154 girls and 175 boys.

The school has 310 pupils enrolled and 15 teachers working with them. Notably, the ratio of pupils to teachers of 20:1 at this school is an advantage not available at other private institutions. This ensures more scope for individual attention to the students. There are 310 students enrolled in the institution, and corporations or private persons support 177. Even girls

are sponsored more by corporations and individuals than boys in this school, and the learners' sponsorship selections are based on the criteria of the poorest economic background of the learners among the total learners.

Table 7.1 indicates the distribution of slum learners gender-wise as well as sponsorship-wise.

[Table-7.1 Distribution of Slum Learners in Gender Wise As Well As Sponsorship-Wise]

Total No. of Slum Learners in Sponsorship and Non-Sponsorship Wise						
SPONSORED				NON SPONSORED		
CLASSES	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
LKG	4	0	4	16	11	27
UKG	12	3	15	6	18	24
I	11	4	15	9	23	32
II	12	10	22	1	11	12
III	19	13	32	1	3	4
IV	15	9	24	5	8	13
V	16	7	23	0	5	5
VI	11	7	18	3	11	14
VII	3	7	10	0	10	10
VIII	5	9	14	0	11	11
Total	109	68	177	45	107	152

Unique features of the school

English Access class is a unique programme in collaboration with the American Library and forms an integral part of students who are 13 years of age. The students are shortlisted based on a written exam in English. The qualified students are sent every week (Monday et al. after the school gets over) to Deepalaya School-Kalkaji Extension, where they are taught using different aids to improve their language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing). In February, the learners were shown a movie. Based on watching the movie, they were asked to draw something. The teacher then discussed each drawing in detail. Also, they were asked to form a story of what

they drew. In another activity, the students were shown a collage. Opinions were gathered based on the collage they saw. These activities also stimulate the imagination of the learners. Currently, 13 students from this school are attending the English Access classes. The American Embassy School (AES) has enjoyed a fruitful partnership with Rock Jam Live at AES Deepalaya for many years. AES students and their guardians have taught English and math to a section of Deepalaya School pupils in Golekuan. The school has also played a part in Deepalaya's historic move to become the first non-government organisation to have its schools publish a fully-fledged school magazine, Deep Thoughts.

Many achievers are graduates of this school. One of the faculty teachers is an alumnus. Harender works in a computer firm. Another student, Pooja, has completed her B.Ed. Munna is doing a BCA and has a part-time job. Two project teachers work in the same school. A portion of the Muslim student body attends the school and travels to Madras on Fridays to study Arabic and learn about their faith.

Pedagogical Practices: Inside story from the classrooms

The medium of instruction is supposed to be English as per the objective of Deepalaya, which is to establish an English-medium school. However, it was found that the teachers were using both Hindi and English as a medium of instruction. When the researcher glanced through the notebooks of some students in grade 2, it was seen that more exercises and practices were in Hindi than in English. Also, when the researcher interacted with class 2 students, they could not answer the question in English but were comfortable answering it in Hindi.

The class 2 students recited the same Hindi poem they learned in grade 1. No English poem was recited. One of the students was asked to convert number 9390, which was written in his class notebook, into a word. However, the student could not do so even when the number was written by himself in the notebook, though in English. This speaks volumes to the present educational status of the slum learners in the school.

In one of the instances of the field study, many underlying factual matters were observed in the informal conversations with the class six students. The class had more boys than girls. Interestingly, three students had left the government school to study in this school on the pretext

of quality education. Also, many students paid tuition fees in the same class to study mathematics and English. They candidly discussed the advantages of going to tuition. Although they never undermined the importance of attending school, it is essential to investigate why they attended tuition classes. One of the reasons could be a lack of academic support from parents. However, they also mentioned the school's lack of exercise or practice questions. Also, the mathematics teacher was teaching through the conventional mode of learning. In English classes also, they were just reading the chapter and giving dictation. When asked about the chapters they had read, some students came up with the chapter's name as "A Pact with Mr. Smith". All the children in the class could not explain the meaning of the word "pact" when asked. They were asked to summarise the story of their choice, which was again a failed endeavour.

The researcher tried ways and means to put the students under the lens of language skills. The students wanted the learning to be supplemented by the teaching-learning materials. They were naming some foreign visitors who had taught them to use TLMs. The timetable on the wall was an example of the mundane routine of the class 6 students. Their day starts with the mathematics period, followed by the entire week. So is the case with the rest of the subjects. The last period is the Homework period, which is under the supervision of the class teacher. How far the students complete their homework under the teacher's supervision remains a mystery.

Innovative Practices

Parents provide little support for schoolchildren's academics. Teachers work to ensure the children learn everything they can in class, employing inventive teaching methods to make learning enjoyable.

(Picture-7.1)



[Source: Taken by the researcher himself in Class-III]

In one of the classes, the class teacher of grade 3 was teaching the students how to see the time on a clock. She even differentiated between the wall clock and the wristwatch. The students were responding to her questions but in Hindi. The teacher used TLM, a wooden clock with blocks (See pictures-7.1 & 7.2). The teachers divided the class into two groups and asked the group to arrange the blocks like on the clock. She then asked them to rotate the needles of the clock as per the instruction, such as quarter past six being told to one group of students and quarter past eleven being told to another group. The children were able to place the needles correctly. Also, the teacher asked to spell the word 'quarter'. Some of the students were able to spell it, while others could not. However, the clock activity sets an example of activity-based learning. The students worked collaboratively and cooperatively.

(Picture-7.2)



[Source: Taken by the researcher himself in Class-III]

The teacher mainly uses familiar materials. For example, in one mathematics class, the teacher used a dupatta to teach shapes and angles. The teacher asked about the animals they had seen nearby to teach the difference between wild and pet animals. The students responded correctly to the pet animals because, because of their locality, they had seen animals such as goats, dogs, cows, and buffaloes.

The teachers use locally available marble plastic toys (animals), which hardly cost Rs.2, and toys that come in a packet of edibles to explain modes of transportation.

Channelising the creativity of students through another set of innovative practices

Children are provided with practical training and theoretical learning to support their education. They take various educational field trips to improve their comprehension of the environment, our culture, and our legacy. They are taken on various educational trips to parks and places of historical importance. Their previous visits include Dolls Museum, Qutub Minar, and the Ajmer Dargha. Additionally, the school encourages the development of children's talents through extracurricular activities such as sports, arts and crafts, music, and theatre. More educational trips are being planned for the future.

The social context of the slum learners

Families of slum learners make between Rs. 2,500 and Rs. 4,500 a month on average. In addition, each family typically comprises three to four children and their parents. Also, most of the clusters have a joint family system—the low levels of income act as a deterrent to many parents from sending their children to school. Most parents are illiterate, while some are educated to their villages' second or fifth standard. They did not think it was necessary to send their sons and daughters to school (Gore, 2000). Amidst this family situation, which includes large family size, low family income and low literacy level of the parents, it is challenging to keep the spirit of educating their children alive for a longer time (Cameron, 2017). There is a need to promote awareness among the parents, literate or illiterate, to send their wards to the school.

The parents' professions vary, from domestic servants to factory workers to masons to petty shop owners. Some people even do not have jobs.

Most of those residing in Gole Kaun are immigrants seeking employment from different regions of northern India. They are working as labourers or workers. The ethnic communities these clusters represent - Muslim Basti, Nepali Basti, Balmiki Basti, Bhojpuri Basti and Rajasthani Basti- are referred to by their names. Since the slum dwellers are migrants, the families often move to their native place during the academic session of their wards, which jeopardises the whole education of the learners. Promoting and providing high-quality education to slum

children at a reasonable cost is one of the main goals of Deepalaya Gole Kuan School. The fee for girls is Rs. 100 and for boys Rs. 200.

The linkages between school and community in educating slum children

When Deepalaya first opened the school, certain members of the community strongly opposed it. Within the slum, there was not a single building that could be converted to a school. In 1999, the school was relocated to a single room with the community's help. Later, the school received additional room donations from the community. Today, the community's ten tiny, dispersed, empty building constructions house the formal school.

Since the school is in the community, this has advantages and disadvantages. Because the school is in the community, the people are aware of the various activities it promotes and consequently realise the importance of sending their wards to school. The people are often encouraged to see the school children participating in various activities like sports, campaigns, rallies, etc. As there is no playground in the school, teachers and volunteers take the students to the nearby playground (MCD playground situated at a distance of 700mts). Also, the morning assembly is held outside the building. This reinforces the community of people. It is one way to sensitise them about the importance of schooling their children.

On one of the days of the visit, there was a marriage celebration in the morning. Such events are a deterrent to the teachers who are burdened with additional responsibility to overcome such events. As it is, the school is grappling with the space crunch. The classrooms are tiny and adjacent, divided via bamboo sheets. The teacher has to overcome the problem of noise and disturbance that she experiences while teaching the students. Also, the houses are constructed in a congested manner. The learners can peep outside the windows and easily be distracted if there is any activity outside the school premises. The community has to complement the school to achieve the goal of educating slum children.

The majority of parents attend the monthly PTA meetings held at the school. During these meetings, parents and teachers discuss how children are doing to improve their academic achievement. In addition to these sessions, the instructors meet with the parents at school and conduct routine house visits to discuss any unique needs the child may have.

Administration and Management

Like any other school administration, this school has a head or Principal who looks after the school's efficient and effective workings. This school has an academic staff of 15 teachers, including the Principal. There are two male teachers in the school. The non-teaching staff includes two persons (One aaya and one cleaner). The teaching staff is called teachers, and no grade is allocated. However, the staff salary is credited to their accounts. The teachers get consolidated salaries. PF is also deducted from the teacher's salary. It shows that the organisation caters to the staff's benefits and welfare. However, communication across the organisation seems effective. The teachers are accountable for the classroom activities. A weekly report is prepared and collated by the school. It is sent to the supervisor of the Kalkaji school branch, where the report is thoroughly checked, and feedback is given immediately.

Interestingly, teachers' salaries vary depending on experience and qualifications. Few teachers have the basic qualifications to be teachers. They have only attended Deepalaya's training workshops. Teachers' salaries range from Rs.6590 to Rs. 13,025. The sweeper and the music teacher get a consolidated salary of Rs. 5000.

Based on interviews with the teachers and observations, it can be said that some teachers showed willingness to change to a better school, mainly because of the low pay scale despite fulfilling their qualifications. One of the studies by Govinda and Varghese (1993) on the social characteristics of teachers in Madhya Pradesh found that some of the teachers in the schools were not because of choice but out of no choice. This is applicable even today when teachers enter the profession without a proper degree because she/he has no choice. There is job dissatisfaction among some teachers. They aspire to teach in a better environment. Since this school is scattered in two buildings, the female teachers must cross a narrow lane while reporting to the main building. The security and safety of female teachers remain a pertinent issue. Some teachers who did not qualify with the norm showed different teaching styles (chalk and talk) than qualified teachers. Some of the teachers were enthusiastically participating in varied teaching activities.

It can be said that while looking for quality education, the socioeconomic strata of the teachers should not be sidelined. Job satisfaction among teachers is a significant component of effective learning. The motivation level of the teachers should be increased over time. Teachers working in such difficult situations may face low motivation due to the environment and low pay scale. Each day is challenging for teachers, particularly in slums.

Another feature of teaching staff is compulsory house visits. Instructors are also obligated to visit houses as part of ongoing advocacy efforts. If the parents fail to report to the PTA, the teachers visit the house to discuss the learners' performance and development.

Intervention of school

Based on conversations with teachers, it was discovered that the home visits had a significant impact on the life of a child living in the slums. Pseudonyms were used to recount the stories. Mohammed Alam, a 12-year-old boy from the Gole Kuan slum, was not studying anywhere. His father, Mr Mohammed Saddeem, and his mother, Ms Tanuja Khatoon, were not keen on their children's studies due to extreme poverty. It was found that Alam studied in his village in Bihar before the family migrated to Delhi, but he was diverted from education to earn a livelihood. After many visits and interactions, his parents finally agreed to send him to the centre. He stopped coming to school after some time because of his return to the native village (as told by his parents). One of the teachers verified the situation and was shocked to find Alam working in a nearby cycle repair shop. Deepalaya staff met the shopkeeper and explained to him that he was promoting child labour and that he could be punished for it. At the same time, parents were also counselled. As a result, Alam returned to the centre and is now a regular school student.

Similarly, other school alums have braved the odds and have set an example for other students studying there.

Shabnoor Kadri stays along with her family at Gole Kuan. Her family had migrated to Delhi from Madhya Pradesh a decade ago. She has five sisters, among whom Shabnoor is the fifth. Three of her sisters are married off. Her father and mother are involved with outsourcing to an export house. The total annual income of the family is Rs 10,000. Shabnoor's childhood was happy and normal, like any other child. However, due to an accident at the age of 10, her life was

shattered forever. Her right leg became permanently disabled, and she became dependent on callipers for her movements. The brave girl did not give up and continued her studies after some time. She completed her secondary education with a second division from GTV Inter College, Jhansi. Presently, she is pursuing her higher secondary education in the arts stream. She was admitted to the IOCL computer centre in May 2019. She was attentive in the classes and focused on learning new skills. She did well in all the evaluation tests conducted in the class. She was also active in other extracurricular activities organised through the centre. After completing the introductory computer course, she appeared for the certification examination conducted by JSS. She secured an 'A' grade in the examination. Currently, she is undergoing advanced computer training. Recently, she also got a job as a lab instructor with a computer training institute. Shabnoor is an example of how perseverance and hard work can translate hurdles in life into stepping stones of success.

Challenges of Educating the Slum Children

- **Dropouts** – The high student dropout rates at the school are one of its problems. This results from the fact that most pupils are immigrants who return to their hometowns during harvest. Not many people go back to their ghetto. Some returned after extended absences, which causes some children to fall behind academically by a year or more. On the other hand, Deepalaya makes every effort to encourage the parents to keep their children in school.
- **Expenses**— The annual cost of schooling for a youngster is comparatively considerable. Businessmen and private citizens sponsor a portion of students at this school. However, the sponsorship money only helps with the child's schooling. Deepalaya is contributing to the balance. In order to teach parents to value and take care of their children's education, Deepalaya urges parents to pay a small charge for their children. The costs also cover the costs of the child's medical examinations
- **Paucity of space** - The major drawback of the school is the paucity of space. Any physical activity depends on the class teacher's efforts to arrange the desks to play the activity. The arrangement of the desks is also congested, making it challenging to take rounds and supervise each child.

Conclusion:

Nearly a century ago, famous English novelist Charles Dickens began *A Tale of Two Cities* with the words: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us..." More people than ever before are wealthy now. However, in many remote rural settlements and the slum district of the city, poverty is at an all-time high. Suffering and poverty accompany comfortable prosperity almost everywhere. Both high school graduates and dropout rates are higher than ever. More people are educated, yet other people, especially the underprivileged children living in slums, do not receive any education at all. When creating rights like RTE 2009, policymakers are more successful than ever, but they are also more unsuccessful when putting those rights into practice. So, "It is the best of times, worst of times". A survey of slum dwellings in Delhi brings out a fascinating and vital social, economic and educational intricacy surrounding the slum children per se. There are still unanswered questions regarding the existence and implementation of the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution. These principles mandate that the state act as a guardian to protect the educational rights of all children, including those living in slums. The biggest challenge we face is ensuring that these principles are effectively implemented and meaningful for the poor and deprived children in our society, especially those living in slums.

References:

- Cameron, S. J. (2017). Urban Inequality social exclusion and schooling in Dhaka, Bangladesh". *A Journal of Comparative & International Education*, Vol.47 (4): 580-597.
- Census of India (2011). Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India. <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website>.
- Chauhan, C. (2009,15 January). No school for slum children in India's capital. *Hindustan Times*.
- Dickens, C. (1859). *A Tale of Two Cities. All the Year Round: A Weekly Journal*, Vol. 1.
- Delhi-NCTD. (2015). *Urban Slums in Delhi*. Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Govt. of Delhi: New Delhi.
- Gogoi, P., & Chetia, M.(2016). A socio-economic study of the slum dwellers of Assam. *The International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, Vol. 4 (2): 211–219.
- Govinda, R. and Varghese, N. V. (1993). *Quality of primary schooling in India Case study of Madhya Pradesh*, IIEP, UNESCO.
- Gore, M.S. (2000). *Third Survey of Research in Sociology and Social Anthropology*, Vol.1, Manak Publication.

- Kumar, N. & Agrawal, S. C. (2003). Patterns of consumption and Poverty in Delhi Slums. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 50, pp-5294-5300.
- Pratham. (2013). *Annual Status of Education Report 2012–2013*. Mumbai: Pratham Resource Centre.
- Sudarshan, R. M. (2000). 'Educational Status of Girls and Women: The Emerging Scenario' in Rekha Wazir (ed), *The Gender Gap in Basic Education: NGOs as Change Agents*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Tsujita, Y. (2009). Deprivation of Education in Urban Areas: A Basic Profile of Slum Children in Delhi, India. Institute of Developing Economies (IDE), Jetro, Japan
- Tsujita, Y. (2013). Factors that prevent children from gaining access to schooling: A study on Delhi slum households". *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 33 (4): 348 – 357.