

# **An overview of the educational system in Sangam Vihar**

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Unauthorized colonies are defined as such by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), and the main basis for their status as unauthorized is the fact that these housing colonies are built without permission on New Delhi farmland. It is in the past twenty years that Sangam Vihar has made itself a member of this list.

In existence since 1984, the slum has its entire population crammed into a small perimeter. There is no electricity, and the more needy families live deep inside where there are no access roads like those at the entrance built to accommodate rugged cars and wooden-wheeled carts pulled by animals. Looking for a better way of life, most of the slum dwellers inundate New Delhi from rural areas.

Because of the unauthorized status of these colonies, their development history cannot be read out of public documents such as the Delhi Master Plan. In order to map the educational setup of Sangam Vihar I have to a large extent depended upon in-depth interviews with men and women living there.

The educational scene in Sangam Vihar is primarily composed of three major constituents :

- 1) The government schools
- 2) The private recognized schools
- 3) The private unrecognized schools

The government schools are seven in number at the primary level. This small number diminishes down to a solitary one when begins to examine the educational opportunities in government schools at higher secondary level in Sangam Vihar. It is this school which ideally be able to cater to the educational needs of all the students passing out from the government schools at the primary level. However the reality is very different.

Children in Primary schools run buy the government in Sangam Vihar			
location	Morning session (attended by female children)	Evening session (attended by male children)	Total
J- block	1010	874	1884
F-2 block	1031	990	2021
G block	544	-	544
C block	1630	1937	3540
I block	1200	1193	2400
L block	990	914	1904
K-2 block	956	916	1872

Figures are for the year 2003-2004

As can be seen from the table above there are 7361 girls studying at the government schools in Sangam Vihar at the primary level. The solitary government school at the higher secondary level in Sangam Vihar can cater to only 3060 girls. It is this difference that allows for the presence of private players both recognized and unrecognized by the government. It is this difference that is also responsible for the people of Sangam Vihar looking outside for their educational needs.

The word of mouth insofar as government schools are concerned is not a sympathetic one either. The teachers of these schools have a reputation of shirking away from their duties. The residents say that the studies in these schools are minimal with maximum emphasis on destructive activities like fighting.

In such a dismal scenario where government schools are concerned it is easy to contemplate a dominant role being played by the private players. First let us look at the private recognized schools.

These schools are few in number. The schools like K.S.K., Hamdard Public School, Talimabad provide an education that would rival many good institutions in Delhi. Yet the fact remains that these are incapable of covering all the children who are not under the umbrella of government school education. Also added to the small number of seats within these schools is the fact that their fee structure is slightly higher as compared to the fee structure of the government schools and several of the private unrecognized schools. In a locality like Sangam Vihar the sum of ten rupees implies a major amount. This difference in the fee structure is then another reason for the parents to look to the private unrecognized schools as an option for providing education for their children. And small in number though they are, they are not without their own share of problems.

The primary problem faced by these schools is the fact that they have little choice in deciding which schools the students who pass out go to. Each school is allotted a number by the computer and it is the computer that decides the school to which students of a particular school recognized will go to on passing out of their alma mater. The primary regard in this sorting out of schools is not the intellectual compatibility of the two educational institutions but the physical proximity of the schools. And due to this

several wrong decisions have been made. There have been situations where the students who have been taught in an English medium school for the first few formative years are made to studying a Hindi medium school for the later part of their education. The difficulties faced by the children in such a situation can only be imagined. Also at times the teachers of the new schools are just not good enough when compared to the teachers of private recognized schools and this can be a dampener for the students of the of the private recognized schools. Another problem faced by the owners of the schools relates to the regulations of the education department. The education department had earlier asked the schools which had been operating on land provided at a subsidy by the Delhi Development Authority (D.D.A.), to admit underprivileged children as 5 to 10% of their total strength. As a regulation it was aimed at benefiting the masses but the government decide to enforce it upon everyone irrespective of the fact whether the school was operating on D.D.A subsidized land or not. It was here that the private players began to feel the pinch. As it is Sangam Vihar is not an area where a large profit is a possibility. In such a context this forceful enforcement of the regulation is a deterrent for the entry of private players. The students who have to pay a little extra in order to let the school soldier on also find it difficult to cope.

The private unrecognized schools are the ones that do not have any kind of accreditation from the government. They do not have a proper infrastructure, a fixed curriculum and able teachers to teachers to teach the cobbled together curriculum. What they do have is the ability to offer to the parents of children an assurance that their child would receive education at a low cost. A part of this assurance is the idea that the

education imparted to these children would pave their way in the future as well (i.e. would be acceptable in a recognized school).

There are several ways by which these unrecognized schools are able to make sure that the children passing out from their schools are absorbed into the mainstream of the education system. One way in which this can be done is by telling the parents to get an affidavit made from a court which then makes the child eligible to appear in an examination conducted by the recognized schools (whether Government or otherwise). After this examination the child is allotted the class for which he/she is found most suitable. This is the correct way of getting a child reabsorbed into the main education spectrum. But this is usually not followed. What happens on the contrary is an interesting arrangement between a recognized and an unrecognized school. The arrangement is in essence an understanding that the recognized school will admit the children of the unrecognized school once the children have passed out. Mutual benefit is the only possible reason behind such a development. The recognized school gets the children who add to its admission rolls while the unrecognized school gets the outlet for its students to be reabsorbed into the main education spectrum.

This system is the primary reason behind the success of the unrecognized schools, as it is this that allows for the normal operating of these schools without from the interference from the authorities on a regular basis.

There are two primary reasons why a school may remain unrecognized. Either the school is not able to afford the infrastructure as is set down as the bare minimum by the authorities or the owners do not want to spend money on getting the school recognized. In case of the former there is little that can be done but what is surprising is the lack of

effort made by the government to check on the latter. But that does not seem too surprising anymore when one considers the hopeless manner in which the government officials are outnumbered by the schools under their charge, especially the school inspectors.

Despite their unrecognized state these schools continue to sell dreams to the parents and children and till date there has been little done about it. The total lack of other options (due to the miniscule number of recognized schools) leaves parents with no choice but to let their children attend these money-spinning shops.

This is the present state of education system in Sangam Vihar, managing to cater to the educational demands of its residents but only by stretching itself to its limits and sometimes even beyond its limits. Changes need to be made in the system which allow it fully absorb the children looking for education. If the changes are made there is a chance for improvement. Otherwise a collapse of the education system as envisaged by the authorities is a distinct probability. This researcher hopes that the changes will take place.