

## Children Living In The Slums And Their Educational Journey

*Nitika Bose*

*Research Scholar*

*Department of Education, University of Delhi.*

### Abstract

*Rapid urbanization of cities has fueled the growth of urban slum population. Despite large number of studies on education in India, the challenges faced by children in urban slums remains a loosely researched area. As the urban poor remain at the peripheral areas of the society and lack the power to negotiate with government for their rights and privileges, the real issues concerning them remains largely ignored. The present study tries to look at the challenges faced in schools by children living in slum. The study explores the tensions emerging between ground realities in the face of poverty and illiteracy and aspirations for upward mobility through education. The study shows that attitude of teachers as well as methods of teaching in schools as significant factors influencing decisions related to continuation within schools. The study explores both macro and micro factors that influence the lives of slum children and highlights the importance of restructuring educational goals and aims for more meaningful inclusion.*

**Key words:** Slum-dwellers, Inclusion, Aspiration, Educational Challenges.

### Introduction

Rapid urbanization of cities has fueled the growth of urban slum population. One of the biggest challenges that face urban planners worldwide is the increase of slums in urban areas and the ever-increasing health hazards and educational deprivation that they bring along in their wake. While urban settlements are characterized by high income, affluent living standards, latest technologies, high educational accomplishments, the marginal groups continue to suffer from the lack of adequate living standards and access to health, education and meaningful employment opportunities. Living conditions for the vast majority of slum dwellers are deplorable, with high rates of malnutrition, communicable diseases, and exposure to violence.

Despite large number of studies on education in India, the challenges faced by children in urban slums remains a loosely researched area. As the urban poor remain at the peripheral areas of the society and lack the power to negotiate with government for their rights and privileges, the real issues concerning them remains largely ignored. High level of disparities continue to exist in urban areas related to housing, education, health, supply of clean water, reliable electricity and other basic amenities. These disparities confound in the educational sector and when they couple with problems such as inadequate infrastructure, irrelevant curriculum and low sensitivity of the teachers to address the challenges faced by the marginalized children, the situation worsens.

The country since independence is committed to the fulfillment of educational goals by providing universal access and a satisfactory quality of basic education. The recently enacted 86th Constitutional Amendment recognizes elementary education (6-14 years age group) as a fundamental right. The government aims to move towards UEE thereby reducing gender, regional and social inequalities in access and participation within education. Even though the government has launched many policies and projects, a lot more needs to be done for meaningful inclusion.

### **Educational Disparities And Slum-dwellers: A Review**

The Maharashtra Slum Areas Act, 1971, defines such pockets as ‘any area in the state which is unfit for human habitation’. A slum, as stated by Ganesh (2005), represents a habitat unit with defective physical, social, and economic living conditions. The slum dwellers belong to the section of society that cannot take the minimum required Caloric intake and they have also the minimum of clothing, shelter, medical and educational facilities that a person needs. This section is also politically weak in the sense that they are excluded from the political process of the country at all levels- village, block state or national. They do not have the legal and organizational resources to fight for their rights. The following studies reveal the educational deprivation of slum dwellers.

**Naik and Jogdand, (2013)** studied the ways in which the surroundings of the child and the people around him affects the physical and emotional development of children. In this context the authors studied the behavior problems emerging among slum children. The study found that parental illiteracy was directly related to behavioral problems. Mother’s illiteracy amounted to negligent, overprotective and strict parenting which often caused behavioral problems. Affection and warmth by family members were identified as common needs of children from the slums for emotional and physical well-being.

**Yuko, (2009)** states that total number of children from slums attending school between the age group of 5-14 years is much lower than children in Delhi. Parental perception about education and poverty were seen to be the major constraints. Lack of awareness related to educational provisions and incentives lead to high dropout rates. Parents were often unable to pay school fees and children in slums were more likely to attend government schools than low paying private schools. Delayed admission and repetition of classes remained a cause of alarm. Also requirements of certificates created further problems for already poor families.

**Aggarwal, and Chugh, Sunita (2003)** highlighted that basic education is a fundamental right and recently 86th Constitutional Amendment was enacted so that all children can receive good quality basic education. The study highlights the socio-economic, educational background of the children’s family, teacher’s academic and professional qualifications, school-infrastructure, teacher-pupil ratio and use of teaching aids in schools and its impact on the achievement level of the learners in slums. The study reveals that the schools provided for slum children had poor infrastructure, over-crowding, inefficiency of teachers in dealing with people who stay in temporary settlements and are socio-economically deprived. The performance of the slum children was much below the expected levels in both the subjects and in both the grades.

**Yadappanavar, (2002)** used a case study approach to study the poor access and retention of children in Deodurg Block, Raichur district, Karnataka. The study highlights inability of children to attend school in the face of poverty. As parents often migrated in the search for jobs, school absenteeism and dropout rates remained high. Within the school infrastructure facilities such as toilet, drinking water, and playground were inadequate. Casual parental attitude led to poor enrollment and it was found that education of girls was given the least priority in the face of lack of resources. The author points a spread of awareness regarding girl's education, improved roads and provision of transport and good infrastructure was recommended for better inclusion of poor children within the schools.

**Banerjee, Rukmini (2000)** conducted field studies in Mumbai and Delhi and highlights the challenges faced by slum children towards access to primary education. She points that more than family's economic circumstances the school system proves to be inadequate to attract children from socio-economically deprived sections. She points that although enrollment has increased, schools fail to retain children from economically weaker sections. The study shows that children who attended schools for some years remained educationally backward. In the absence of innovative action at the school level and lack of interaction between the school and the community, learning achievements of students remained low.

**Rajaram, (2000)** conducted a study in India where he states the adult male members in 1/3 of Indian families did not complete grade one and females received no formal education. This had a substantial impact on school attendance, level of education and continuation of children in school. The study recommended that formal education should be provided to all sections of the population to ensure educational continuity particularly of the vulnerable sections of society.

### **Objectives Of The Study**

1. To study the socio-economic condition of the slum dwellers.
2. To find out the challenges of the slum children in attaining elementary education.

### **Sample**

50 families from Shakurbasti slums located in north-west zone of the metropolitan city of Delhi were selected as sample out of which 28 families had enrolled their children in schools.

### **Methodology**

Survey and interviews were used to collect data from the respondents. The present study is exploratory and has been designed to collect information both quantitative and qualitative. Keeping in view the objectives of the present study group discussions were conducted and observation technique was utilized for interacting with residents of the slum.

### **Data Analysis**

### **Socio-Economic Status of Slum Dwellers**

While analyzing the socio-economic profiles of the respondents it was found that 28% of the families migrated from the adjoining states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. It was found that 75% of the families were nuclear families. 14% of the families were single-parent families due to death or separation in all cases of the father. Most of the families were engaged in contractual part-time work and finding employment throughout the year was a rare possibility. Mostly residents of the slums were daily wage earners employed as construction workers, hawkers, domestic helpers, cobblers, sweepers and rikshaw pullers.

Monthly income of the total number of households were classified into three groups (i) not more than Rs 2000 (ii) between Rs. 2001 and Rs. 4000 and (iii) more than Rs 4000 and it was found that 56% of the families belonged to the first group, 36% of the families belonged to the second group and only 8% of the families belonged to the third group. This shows that a large number of families in Shakurbasti live below poverty line.

Of the total of 130 children of 6-14 years age group it was found that 28.46% did not enroll in schools, 23.84% were dropouts while 47.49% attended school. Regarding parental education it was found that 56% of the mothers and 46.51% of the fathers were illiterate.

### **Educational Challenges Faced by Slum Children**

**Poverty** emerged as the most frequent themes during the interview. The inability to provide for basic necessities of survival made the parents feel disconnected to educational goals and pursuits. It was found that most of the children in the study were helping their families to earn money. Girls helped in domestic chores and looked after younger siblings when both parents went for work. In the face of resource crunch parents preferred sending their sons to school than daughters. Parents felt that education of their children would help them to break the shackles of poverty. Many of the parents however attributed destiny and luck as the cause of poverty. They therefore felt that education would not change much. Interviews with children revealed that most of them were disinterested in going to schools. They prioritized working over going to school. They stated that the sole reason to go to schools was to get better jobs in future. A few parents also complained about the distance between the slum area and the schools which created a hindrance for the girls to reach the school.

The second emergent theme in the interview was the **inability to understand** what was being taught in schools. Parents expressed helplessness over not being able to assist their children in studies.

They for the same reason had to send their children to tuitions which created added financial burdens. As children's performance still remained poor, parents felt further disillusioned. They also felt that the time they spend in schools gets wasted as children do not gain much. Children also felt that they had difficulties reading and comprehending lessons in class. Some stated that although they could read, they were not able to understand much. Parents were not aware of the challenges children faced in schools. As both the parents worked for long hours they hardly communicated with their children regarding school activities. However they felt that their children did not gain much from schools as their results were unsatisfactory. Parents pointed that

reaching for provision of free books and scholarships often consumed time and hence they did not depend much on the same. Children stated that they did not enjoy going to school due to the **attitude of their teachers**. Children pointed that teachers constantly attributed their inability to do well in studies to their family background. Some of the girls during the interview felt scared of the maths teacher and stated that they disliked the subject as they were incompetent to understand the same. They attributed their failure not to the teaching-method but to their own limitations. Some students stated that the impolite nature of their teachers made them hesitant to ask questions. Children stated that their constant failure to score good marks made them finally dropout of school. As their parents were already reeling under financial pressures they thought working and contributing to their family income would be more beneficial. Also they would not have to worry about their parents and teachers complaining about their dismal performance in school examinations. Moreover dropping out of school prevented them from the constant fear of failure.

The fourth theme that emerged during the interview was the **absence of school-community linkages** in case of children living in the slums. Parents stated that they never interacted with school teachers regarding their children. Mothers stated that they were hesitant to attend PTM meetings. Some parents stated that the school authorities did not speak to them in detail about the problems faced by their children. Communication was often of an indirect and formal nature. Children stated that they did not communicate with their parents about attitude of teachers and what they did in school. They also did not feel comfortable when their parents tried to interact with the authorities due to a lack of fit between their homes and schools.

Children stated that their worlds at their homes and in the school remained separate as the expectations of family members and school teachers remained distinct from each other.

Also what emerged during the interview was a **positive attitude towards governmental initiatives for education** of the poor. Parents stated that the mid-day meals, free textbooks and scholarships were significant contributions made by the state which facilitated entry and retention of poor children in schools. They also pointed that unless such steps are enhanced, there is very little scope for slum children to get meaningful education. They recommended that the government must take steps to eradicate poverty and provide better employment opportunities for the poor. Children felt that studying in schools would make one smarter and capable of getting a secured job. Although scoring well was considered difficult task but students felt that it was important as it would help them come out of poverty. Most of the students stated that they want to take up professions where they would help their community and were desirous of social change.

## Discussion

Rapid urbanization in the past decade has proliferated slums in Delhi. Many families move from villages to cities in search for better livelihood. They settle in slum clusters with poor civic amenities amidst socially well off parts of cities. With aspirations of social mobility, they admit their children in schools. However their aspiration soon starts contradicting the ground realities. In the face of poverty and illiteracy children often faced many challenges in schools. It was

observed in the study that despite poverty parents admitted their children to government schools and worked hard to facilitate them with their daily needs. However greater privileges were given to boys and girls were motivated to do household work. However it was found out that many children dropped out of school due to economic constraints. Apart from financial constraints many children faced challenges in understanding what was being taught and complained about the impersonal nature of teachers. The lack of sensitivity on the part of teachers towards children from marginalized backgrounds complicated the situation further. This made most of the parents feel that their children are not meant for education but for work as contributing to the family income would be beneficial for them.

Therefore the government should take immediate steps to spread awareness about education amongst the marginalized communities. Teacher training should be strengthened with special emphasis on methods and strategies adopted to deal with students belonging to marginalized communities. Parents should be sensitized regarding education of girls. Scholarships and incentives should be strengthened to motivate students belonging to marginalized sections. Adult education programmes should be strengthened for better school community interaction.

## References

- Aggarwal, and Chugh, Sunita. (2003), Learning achievement of slum children in Delhi. New Delhi National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, pg. 59.
- Banerji, Rukmini. (2000), Poverty and primary schooling: field studies from Mumbai and Delhi, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35(10), 795-802.
- Banerji, Rukmani, Why Don't Children Complete Primary School? A Case Study of a Low Income Neighborhood in Delhi, (1997), *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp 2053-2063.
- Ganesh, C. (2005), Emergence, Growth and Conditions of Slums in India. Article provided by ICFAI Press. The ICFAI University Journal of Public Administration. 2:8-19.
- Juneja, Nalini and Nandi, Nabanita., (2000), Metropolitan cities in India and education of the poor : the city of Indore : an educational profile, National Institute of Educational Planning.
- Naik, and Jogdand Sandip. (2013), Socio-Demographic Correlates of Behavior Problems Amongst The Urban Slum Dwellers Aged Between 6 to 18 Years, *National Journal of Medical Research*, pp 222-225.
- Rajaram, (2000), Educational level, school attendance and school continuation in India: evidence from the National Family Health Survey 1992-93., *Demography India*, , 29(2) , 223-42.

- Yadappanavar, (2002), Factors influencing elementary schools. , Social Welfare, 48(10), pg.10-14.
- Yuko, Tsujita (2009), Deprivation of Education: A Study of Slum Children in Delhi, India, UNESCO, New Delhi.