

# **Exploring the Unregulated**

## **School System:**

### **A case study of Private Unrecognised Schools in Sangam Vihar**

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## **Abstract**

This paper deals with the rising number of private unrecognised schools in the unauthorised colony of Sangam Vihar, located near the Delhi border. While exploring the schooling opportunities here, it was found that the number of unrecognised learning choices available to the people were far greater than the ones 'recognised' by the Government of Delhi. A total of 8 private unrecognised schools and 2 primary government schools were interviewed to understand their functioning under various categories. Two offices of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) were visited to find out what rules currently prevail regarding the existence of private unrecognised schools and the educational status of their students. A total of 40 parents were interviewed to understand their views regarding schooling in government and private unrecognised schools. These parents were sending their children to either unrecognised or government schools and most were studying in primary or middle classes. In light of the problems faced by parents regarding the need to transfer to a recognised school and the lack of adequate educational opportunities, suggestions have been made at the end of the paper to improve the colony's state of education.

## Introduction

Universal education for the children of India, during their formative years, still seems to be a distant dream. Education is perceived by many to be a mode of deliverance from misery, servility, and all other manifestations of indignity in humans. The underprivileged see education as a risk free path to a better future. Many believe that society and governments have an obligation to provide quality facilities to help the underprivileged pursue this urge for education. However, the government is not able to provide enough both in quality and quantity. This study aims to analyse the alternate institutions, specifically the private unrecognised schools that have sprung up in recent years and assesses their impact on the poorer sections of society.

While this vast unregulated school system offers a helping hand to society's poor, it may also act as a deterrent to the completion of a first-generation learner's education. This is because private unrecognised schools (PUSs) are unable to provide their students with a 'recognised' education. Parents have to be on a constant lookout for the most opportune time to transfer their child to a recognised school, whether it is government or private. Their decision is also contingent on a multitude of other factors: the existence of a recognised school close to home, ability to pay (affordability), availability of seats, passing admission tests, and intelligent handling of bribing officials. It is this dilemma that has given rise to a number of issues and has thrown up the need for a revaluation of certain presently existing education rules, so that it may benefit as many children as possible.

Sangam Vihar is an area with many schools, and even more children. This illegal settlement colony was created when factory workers, daily wage labourers, rickshaw drivers and the like migrated from other parts of the country in search of better job opportunities and began building their houses on what was previously agricultural land. Spread over 150 acres, this unauthorised colony has 30 blocks (Dasgupta and Puri 2005) with a minimum of 15 lanes with 20 houses on either side of each lane. These lanes are further divided into a number of by-lanes as well. Today, Sangam Vihar has more than 400,000 residents<sup>1</sup> who unanimously claim it to be the largest unauthorised colony in Asia. The income levels of people here are largely varied, however it can safely be said that the poorest of the poor can be found here in large numbers.

The present scenario of available 'recognised' schooling opportunities paints quite a bleak picture. There are seven primary school buildings set up by the MCD with two shifts in each except one, making a total of 13 primary schools. The number of students studying in these MCD schools put together is 15,000. Each school has about 1000-2000 students in each

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<sup>1</sup> Vedeld, Trond, and Abhay Siddham. 2002. *Livelihoods and collective action among city dwellers in a mega-city (New Delhi)* Accessed on 11 August 2005 at <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/archive/00000938/00/vedldt120402.pdf>

shift,<sup>2</sup> and there is an omnipresent dearth of infrastructural facilities and teachers everywhere. After Class V, students from these schools transfer to two Government Senior Secondary Schools: one in Tuglakabad Extension Area, and the other in Sangam Vihar. The Government Senior Secondary School in Sangam Vihar is for boys and girls, and stands on a hill at the edge of the colony; presently it has 3060 children,<sup>3</sup> a number far too large for its capacity. All parents interviewed shared the common complaint that schools were extremely overcrowded, or that schools were too far away from their homes. It is here that the role of private unrecognised schools becomes important. Stand in any lane and ask a resident where you can find the nearest unrecognised school. The most common response will be, "Oh, there's at least one school in every *gali*,<sup>4</sup> you're bound to find one if you keep walking ahead." And indeed, this is true. No government official or NGO has an estimate of the number of private unrecognised schools in Sangam Vihar. But the extent of their presence signifies that many children are being exposed to some form of teaching activity outside of the regulated school system. What does the future hold for such children? How do private schools function and what is the quality of teaching in these schools? These questions become pertinent when assessing the consequences of a large informal sector of education.

## Private Unrecognised Schools

Out of the eight schools surveyed, four schools were unrecognised and intended to remain so, while two schools had applied for recognition.. Three of the four unrecognised schools were being run by NGOs. Out of the remaining two, one planned to apply for recognition after meeting the minimum requirements, while the other was recognised till Class V, but not for Classes VI-VIII.

### ***Characteristics of Private Unrecognised Schools Surveyed<sup>5</sup>***

Type of school surveyed	Number of Schools	Years of existence
Unrecognised	School A	10
	School B	4
	School C	2
	School D	6 mo.
Quasi-recognised	School E	8
Applied and Awaiting recognitior	School F	4
Applied and refused recognition	School G	9
Planning to apply for recognition	School H	3
Total number of schools	8	

<sup>2</sup> Head Master, MCD Primary School J-2 block. 2005. Verbal Interview by author. J-2 block MCD Primary School premises, Sangam Vihar, 16 August.

<sup>3</sup> Mahajan, Kanika. 2005. Researching Reality Working Papers. New Delhi: Centre for Civil Society.s

<sup>4</sup> The Hindi word *gali* translates to lane or by-lane in the English language.

<sup>5</sup> As some schools preferred to remain anonymous, each school has been assigned a letter of the alphabet and will be referred to in the same manner throughout the paper.

The above schools were randomly selected and depending on the willingness of the staff, the principals or teachers of these schools were interviewed. Apart from School H that was started by a couple to provide their children with permanent jobs and a steady income, all other schools claimed to be running their institution to provide low-cost education to the poor as community service. While Schools A and E were till Grade 8 (middle school), all others were primary schools with classes from Nursery to Grade 5, with two sections at most in each class. Typically, enrolment figures for all primary schools centred around 200 students. Only School E had a total of 460 students.

The following parameters give a broad idea of the operational nature of private unrecognised schools in Sangam Vihar. More detailed information on specific schools can be found in Annexure A- Matrix of PUSs.

## Demographic Characteristics

Schools gave an average estimate of Rs 2000-5000 as parent earnings in a variety of occupations: daily wage labourers such as masons and factory workers; domestic helpers, rickshaw drivers, and those in the export business. Better job prospects cause people with such occupations to relocate quite often as well. **Most families have a minimum of three children, and to encourage enrolment, School E and School G followed a policy where the first two children had to pay fees, and the third child studied in the same school for free.** A common characteristic found in all schools was that their students came only from surrounding galis and did not travel large distances to attend school. This echoed parent's concerns of preferring to send their children to a school close to home. Even if two schools are in the same *gali*, as in the case of School A and School H, the children attending these schools come from the same areas. Location, as shall be seen when discussing parent's views on unrecognised schooling, was one of the prime factors in deciding where to send a child.

## School Funds

Interestingly, no school claimed to be making a profit while running their institution. Either they 'break even' or have been suffering a loss. School H, which plans to apply for recognition, has had a loss since its opening. While initial funding of these PUSs was from different sources, they now rely primarily upon tuition fees received from parents. The following table gives an indication of the source of initial funding for PUSs:

### ***Source of Initial Funding for PUSs***

Source of initial funding	School
Own Savings	F, G, H
Financed by NGO	B, C, D
School's Registered Society of Educationists	E
Own savings and support from religious institution	A

The dependence on fees, however, gives rise to another universal problem. Dealing with the parents who cannot pay, or worse still, those that promise to pay after a few months but pack their bags and leave instead. Many families live as tenants in Sangam Vihar, and the nature of their occupations keeps them on a constant move. Thus, no student has a permanent address and it becomes difficult to trace them. The Principal of School G cited an incident where a parent pleaded with the authorities to defer his fee payment, and upon receiving his child's textbooks and copies on the condition that he would pay later, transferred his child to another school. While such occurrences are not common, it is reason enough for the schools to refuse parents with genuine problems, thus aggravating their hardships.

## **Fee Structure**

Although schools do not follow a specific method to set their fee structure, parents' ability to pay plays an important part in determining this amount. Only School B, run by the NGO Nehru Bal Samiti, offers concessionary fees to 10% of its poorest students in every class. This means that the students either study for free, or pay a highly subsidised amount. Other benefits include free meals, or cheaper textbooks and uniforms. On an average, monthly tuition fees begin at the range of Rs 70-Rs 120 for Nursery class and there is an increment of Rs 10 for every class thereon. This amount is generally more than the fee in government schools, and lower than that charged in private recognised schools. The schools also take the responsibility of providing their students with textbooks and uniforms, which they claim to provide at market price. Since most parents are illiterate and work full time, it is easier for them to buy books and copies from the school rather than in the market. While they have the liberty of buying uniforms from elsewhere as well, the tie, belt and socks have to be bought from the school, the average cost of which is Rs 30. In addition, there is an exam fee to cover the cost of paper used in printing and photocopying. Some schools display charts in front of their 'Accounts Office' where parents come to pay fees, showing various expenditures required for the year. The following is a sample chart displayed at School H. At the time of admission, this school asks parents to pay the 'Total' amount as shown in the right most column below. This includes the monthly tuition fee for the first three months, in addition to the other charges.

### ***A Sample of the Fee Structure Break-up in a PUS***

<i>Class</i>	<i>Monthly Fee (X 3)</i>	<i>Books</i>	<i>Copies</i>	<i>Miscellaneous Charge</i>	<i>Exam Fee</i>	<i>Total</i>
Nursery	70	224	75	100	100	709
L.K.G	80	280	75	100	100	795
U.K.G	90	289	75	100	100	834
I	100	402	115	100	100	1017
II	110	433	115	100	100	1078
III	120	477	115	100	100	1152
IV	130	482	115	100	100	1187
V	140	542	115	100	100	1277

## **School Curriculum**

Most schools followed the NCERT syllabus to provide children with a standard level of schooling. Other textbooks used were by Delhi Book Trust (DBT) or the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). School A does not follow a particular curriculum strictly and makes use of books that it perceives to be helpful to first generation learners. It believes that it provides its students with a level of learning that is higher than neighbouring unrecognised schools, yet slightly lower than what is taught in private recognised schools. More experimentation is permitted in lower classes, however as school authorities realise that children need to transfer to other schools, schools stick to the prescribed curriculum in higher classes. Periodic tests and quarterly examinations were a regular feature present in all schools.

## **Teacher Profile**

Most school authorities believe that teaching the children of Sangam Vihar is a challenge in itself. Children come from extremely diverse backgrounds; they may be from broken families, discouraged from going to school by their family (especially girls), or extremely poor with many dependent members in the household. On the whole, they live in a deprived environment lacking any stimulation. The biggest challenge for these children compared to the typical middle-class student is that as first generation learners, there is no one to provide guidance or help outside of school. They require empathetic individuals who can serve as role models, and in turn make learning a fruitful endeavour.

### ***Selection Procedure***

When selecting teachers for their schools, the school management, NGO, or private individual looks to choose a teacher who has lived in Sangam Vihar and understands the socio-economic condition of the area. Prior teaching experience and qualification are equally important, and teachers are put on a one week trial for observation, before being hired as a permanent employee.

### ***Qualification and Remuneration***

The pre-primary classes (Nursery, LKG, UKG and I) are taught mostly by female teachers who have passed Class 10th or 12th and have one teacher per section. Classes II to V usually have subject teachers who teach all classes. For schools till Class VIII, this multi grade teaching begins after Class IV. Teachers with a BA are preferred after Class II; however, all schools expressed concern regarding the difficulty of finding this qualification in Sangam Vihar. Yet they duly acknowledge the benefit of paying lower salaries to teachers with lesser qualifications. While schools claimed to pay their teachers a minimum salary of Rs 1000, talking to teachers revealed that pay started at Rs 400-500 for pre-primary classes and BA qualified teachers receive a maximum of Rs 1000. School H said the primary reason that

teachers with a BA are available is that educated women marry into families that stay in Sangam Vihar. In spite of this, no school has a teacher who has completed a B. Ed. Apart from the schools run by NGOs where teachers attend workshops and receive training, the Principals of all schools teach higher classes themselves and assist teachers in day-to-day activities and matters related to teaching the curriculum.

### ***Teacher-student ratio***

Teacher-student ratios do not provide data that can be usefully interpreted as class sizes dramatically reduce after Class II. The number of students in higher classes progressively decreases as students begin to transfer out of the school to recognised institutions. However, the teacher-student ratio compared to government schools is much smaller, facilitating better individual attention to each student.

### **Parent Involvement and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA)**

Schools hold PTA meetings at least once every month; however parent attendance is quite minuscule. 10% of all parents interviewed claimed to be unaware of when meetings were held, and others said they were occupied with domestic work and thus unable to take time out from their busy schedules. According to schools, the main concern of parents who do attend centre around requests for deferring fee payment. Other concerns include complaints such as the child's inability to see the black board, or that the student's diary has not been checked by the class teacher. Parents are also called when teachers feel the child's academic performance is below average, and often suggest attending tuition classes as the solution.

Overall, parents have a vague idea of the education that their child is receiving. Furthermore, they are not in a position to judge its quality as they are illiterate themselves, and hence chiefly rely upon what school authorities say about their child's progress. The cost of education is their number one concern, and it is only when they begin thinking of transferring their child to a recognised school, do they get the first inkling of their child's academic standing.

## **Transfer Arrangements**

As PUSs know that children need to transfer to a recognised school, many of them take the responsibility of transferring their students after Class V or Class VIII; depending upon the grade till which the school functions.

According to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi,<sup>6</sup> admission to a recognised school requires the following:

- a) an Affidavit or Declaration Certificate stating the child's name, date of birth and the class till which the child has studied privately, in absence of valid Transfer Certificate
- b) Clearance of an admission test conducted by the recognised school where the child seeks admission

5 out of 8 PUSs interviewed ensure that all their senior most students are able to transfer.<sup>7</sup> This is done in myriad ways. Some schools follow the legal procedure and prepare their students for the admission test. Others have a tie-up or understanding with a government or private recognised school to reserve seats for their students after Class V or VIII. The following table illustrates the kind of arrangement each school follows:

### ***Transfer Arrangements Established by PUSs***

Arrangement	Description
Tie-up for Class VIII students with a private recognised school of similar religious affiliation	
Prepare Class V students for admission tests to transfer to government and private unrecognised schools	
Has an arrangement with a government school to accept Class V students	
Dual arrangement where transfer certificate is obtained from private recognised school and seats are reserved in government school	

The case of School G is particularly interesting. The Principal of this school is in constant contact with neighbouring private recognised primary schools till Class V. At the beginning of each academic year, the names of all those children enrolled in Class V of School G are noted in the records of a private recognised school, with whom the Principal has good relations. At the end of the year, these students are handed a valid transfer certificate and are given admission to a higher secondary government school close to Sangam Vihar. The Principal says, "All my children in Class V are very bright, and it is my duty to see that they are able to continue their education. I tell parents that transferring their child is my responsibility. I have

<sup>6</sup> Suresh Gupta, Head Clerk, MCD Office. 2005. Verbal Interview by author. MCD Office, Kashmere Gate, New Delhi, July 17.

<sup>7</sup> The remaining three schools were relatively new, and did not have more than 2-4 students in Class V at the time of this study. School authorities said they would set up arrangements in the future but had not planned anything yet.

good contacts and use them to ensure that my children transfer to the government school nearby."

In this way, the Principal of this school assures parents that they need not worry about the transfer issue.

Agreements of the above nature are useful to both parents and schools. Parents need not worry about recognition issues and schools can increase their enrolment if they can assure parents of protection from the hassles of legal traps. However, this helps only those students who study in a PUS till the highest class offered, which is usually Class V or VIII. **Many parents seek to transfer their child to a government school in earlier classes (such as Class II-IV), both to reduce their expenditure on education and ensure recognition; and hire tutors for each subject to combat the poor teaching offered in government schools.**

In fact, this category of parents seems to have a larger presence in Sangam Vihar. Each PUS studied showed a similar trend- where the class strength progressively decreases as the class becomes higher. School A currently has 30 students in Nursery, and 2 students in Class VIII. School H has 35 students in Classes Nursery to I, and 6 students in Class V. All PUSs surveyed have approximately 30-45 students in lower classes and from Class IV onwards, this number dramatically reduces to between 1-15 students in Classes V-VIII.

Thus, it is evident that private unrecognised schools and the parents who send their children here perceive recognition to be an important element in the path towards completion of a child's education. The complications that arise for both parties as a consequence of this government rule are many, and are discussed below.

## Recognition and its Rules

According to the Delhi School Act, 1973, a recognised school is one which "is recognised by the appropriate authority", the appropriate authority being the MCD or NDMC in the case of a primary school, and the Directorate of Education, if the school is extended to a middle, secondary, or higher secondary school (Shah and Mandava 2005). Most unrecognised schools in Sangam Vihar are primary schools that start from Nursery and go up to Class V, with a few going up to Class VIII.

### The Recognition Procedure

The process of making a school recognised begins with registering an association or group of individuals as a Society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 or as a Trust under the law in force.

For a primary school, the following conditions must be met to satisfy the grant of recognition:

1. Total land area of the school must be 1800 sq. ft.
  2. There must be a playground on 720 sq. ft. of open, non-constructed area.
  3. The school must have Classes 1 and 2, each with two sections, and at least one more section of another class.
  4. Each section must have at least 25 students.
  5. Maximum number of students allowed per section for:
    - (a) Classes 1 and 2: 53 students
    - (b) Classes 3, 4 and 5: 56 students.
  6. The total number of classrooms should be equal to the total number of sections in the school with space left for additional three rooms for Master, staff-room and a library for at least 1,000 books.
  7. Each classroom must be 150 sq. ft. in area.
  8. The school has to follow the books prescribed by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT).
- In addition to meeting these requirements, at the time of application a processing fee of Rs 1000 should be given to the MCD with the following documents:
- Building Safety Certificate- this certificate is granted when it is verified that the building structure of the school is safe and has no obstructions.
  - Health Certificate-this verifies the hygiene and drinking water facilities of the school.

The established society may need to obtain an "Essentiality Certificate" from the DoE if the school is till the middle, secondary or higher secondary level. This is an essential document that validates the need for setting up a school in the area. A processing fee of Rs 500 along with a set of 11 other documents is submitted as part of the application and the certificate should be received within a year's time. In total, there are 14 licenses to be acquired. Studies have shown that at each stage of licensing, manipulation by government authorities for their own benefit is prevalent (Shah and Mandava 2005: 61-78)

Fulfilling the necessary conditions (specified land area, classroom size, facilities et al) and obtaining the required licenses and certificates is unproductively tedious and expensive, especially on considering the bribes that have to be generously dropped into various pockets along the way. Some school authorities estimate the total cost of opening a school till Class V to be Rs 20 lakhs, while a school till Class VIII would cost between Rs 40-50 lakhs.<sup>8</sup> This excludes the cost of land upon which the school is built. 10 years is the average time taken to receive the stamp of recognition.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Wadhwa, Mayank. *Licenses to Open a School*. 2000. Accessed on 9 August 2005 at [http://www.ccsindia.org/RP01\\_1.html](http://www.ccsindia.org/RP01_1.html).

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed reading on recognition conditions, please see 'Opening a School in Delhi: A Learning Experience'. *Law, Liberty and Livelihood*. 2005.

## The Reasons for 'Un'recognition

### *Funds, Space & Cost*

Most private unrecognised schools in Sangam Vihar have been established by philanthropic individuals, NGOs, or other charitable societies, and are started with limited funds, or from an individual's own savings. Even those individual entrepreneurs who desire to open a school to earn their livelihood are unable to do so, because of the vast amounts of initial capital required to be invested. Most unrecognised schools simply cannot afford to purchase 1800 sq. ft. of land area, and such spaces are non-existent in small congested colonies, where potential students live. Neither are there enough resources to build a library or playground according to the prescribed rules. To attempt this, some schools such as School F and H, open first and apply for recognition later, when they are able to satisfy all prerequisites for recognition and have amassed enough collateral to speed up the legal process. Others like School G, start with the intention of getting their school recognised, but remain unsuccessful as low fee structures ranging from Rs 70- to Rs 200 ensure that the schools are unable to generate enough funds needed to meet the costs of recognition and comply with the requirements prescribed by law.

#### **MCD Speak**

Once the conditions of the application procedure for recognition have been satisfied, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) is vested with the power to grant a primary school the status of recognition. However, if a school continues to function after being refused recognition, or has never applied for it, the MCD does not have the authority to take any action against the school. Suresh Gupta, Head Clerk, MCD Office (Kashmere Gate) says, "Private unrecognised schools are treated as tuition centres, and not fined, as are other businesses that do not register themselves. Such schools could be registered by the name of a society, but since the transfer certificate from these institutions is not considered valid, nothing is being done about them."

The principal of School G opened his primary school with his own savings in Gali No.12 after many years of service in the private sector. Having started the school in 1996, he is still awaiting recognition after applying for it nine years ago. The MCD refused recognition on the grounds that there is no playground for the children. There is no scope for expansion as the school is already sandwiched between rows of *galis* with brick houses; the alternative is to have a playground on the terrace. However, this Principal is of the opinion that the cost of recognition depends upon the amount you are willing to pay, and not on the processing fee of the application or infact, even meeting all the conditions specified under law.

## **Teacher Salaries**

Apart from the fact that money and resources prove a limiting factor to being granted legal status, the payment scale of teacher's salaries is a crucial element in determining recognition as well. Provision 10 under Terms and Conditions of Service of Employees in the Delhi Education Act, 1973 says, '*The scales of pay and allowances, medical facilities, pension, gratuity, provident fund and other prescribed benefits of the employees of a recognised private school shall not be less than those of the employees of the corresponding status in school run by the appropriate authority.*'<sup>10</sup>

While salaries<sup>11</sup> in Government schools range from between Rs 9000 to Rs 13,000, teachers in unrecognised schools are paid salaries ranging from Rs 500 to Rs 1500, a far cry from the 'recognised' pay scales. Again, most unrecognised schools set up in low-income areas are subject to having a low fee structure. With parents mindful of the fact that their child is attending an unrecognised school, schools will lose students if they charge high fees. As the only financial input received by schools is the tuition fees of children, they do not have the resources to pay their teachers higher amounts.

While schools find themselves in a 'low fee-low funds' cycle due to remaining unrecognised, parents as a group also bear the brunt of the dilemma caused by the concept of recognition.

## **Parents' Choice...or the Lack of it**

If assured of good quality education, it is evident that every parent would gladly send their child to a government school. It is essential to realise that 'good quality education' apart, there are only 13 primary Government schools in Sangam Vihar and 2 Senior Secondary Government schools to absorb all children from these 13 primary schools. Each school is overcrowded, and put together they do not have the capacity to hold the entire child population of Sangam Vihar. Furthermore, being spread over 150 acres, there are many *galis* where no government school is in close proximity at all. Often, this is when parents turn to private unrecognised schools.

### **School Choice**

Parents' decision of a school (whether Government or Private) is governed by two factors:

- Distance from home
- Family income

The economic spread of Sangam Vihar is quite varied, and the difference between a person earning Rs 3000 and one earning Rs 3500 can be rather significant when considering their decisions regarding education choices. Available finances largely impinge upon the

<sup>10</sup> Chapter 4, Delhi Education Act, 1973.

<sup>11</sup> Wadhwa, Mayank. *Licenses to Open a School*. 2000. Accessed on 9 August 2005 at [http://www.ccsindia.org/RP01\\_1.html](http://www.ccsindia.org/RP01_1.html).

choices available to parents. On talking to a group of 40 parents that lived in different parts of Sangam Vihar, the following came up as the most vital factors in choosing a private unrecognised school over a government school:

- 1) Distance from home
- 2) Quality of education
- 3) Refusal of Admission by Government Authorities

In addition, **monetary ability** plays an important role in determining how long a child can study in a PUS, or whether he remains at home for the same reason.

## Distance Education

The *galis* of Sangam Vihar are like a maze of winding uneven narrow dirt paths with overflowing sewage and garbage. It is impossible for anyone to navigate his way to his destination, and get it right the first time. If it is a daily nuisance for adults to travel through these meandering lanes, parents certainly do not prefer to take the risk of sending young children to a school that is half an hour away, knowing that the possibility of their child getting lost or hurt is very high. Appointing a cycle rickshaw for Rs 10 per day to take their children is something most cannot afford. While a government school maybe hard to find, it is inevitable that a PUS will be down the lane.

## Money determines quality, Money decides/denies entry

Whether the child is sent to a PUS or not depends upon the parents' perception of what is best for his child, and more importantly, whether he is limited by financial constraints. Simply put, if a parent can afford the education of a PUS, and is strategically located so that he/she has a choice between a government and private school, the private school will be chosen for its superior quality of education without a doubt.

The other extreme case is of those parents who are in search for a good quality government school but are denied admission on the grounds that the school 'does not take children from Sangam Vihar'. An example is the Senior Secondary Government School in Tuglakabad Extn. Area, that acts as a feeder school to the primary schools in Sangam Vihar, but is not allowed to take children at the primary level. Paying money under the table, or having 'sources' is the other way to go. These parents then decide to send their children to neighbouring PUS as long as it is economically viable.

## Tackling Recognition

While it may be affordable and convenient to send a child to a PUS at the pre-primary level (Nursery to Class I), the importance of recognition increases as the child progresses to a higher class, and parents need to map their child's educational future accordingly. The following categories of parents were identified who tackle the issue of recognition on their own terms:

### ***PUS till Highest Class Offered, then Government School***

This group of parents believe that the quality of primary education in MCD schools is inferior to that of the PUSSs. They follow the formula of 'primary private unrecognized education + secondary government education' and have the finances required to do so. They have the belief that attending a private school in the early years helps children to develop enough understanding and skills to cope with government school teaching in higher classes. They also believe that the secondary school govt. teaching is better than at the primary level. By enrolling their child in a PUS till Class V, they leave it to the PUS authorities to transfer their child to a government school and avoid the transfer trauma themselves. This category of parents in Sangam Vihar is not as widespread as the others, and this is confirmed by the fact that the senior most classes in all PUS have a very small number as compared to the class strength in pre-primary classes.

### ***PUS till Class II-IV, then Government School***

Parents burdened by financial constraints may send their child to a PUS for a short period, but are keen to transfer to a government school once the child reaches Class II or III. The child is considered old enough to walk the distance to the government school and a transfer would reduce the expense on education, while tutors hired for each subject would solve the problem of poor teaching. However, obtaining admission to a government school is not easy. The formalities of obtaining an affidavit and appearing for the admission test to decide which class the child is suitable for, have potential for bribery. The man sitting under a peepal tree in front of the magistrate's office might charge Rs 100 instead of Rs 80 for typing an affidavit; the admission test may not matter if you can afford the price of the class in which you would like your child to get admission. The common phrases of 'we have closed admission' or 'the seats are full' are otherwise heard, that is, unless you have a source that can get your ward admitted.

### ***PUS + Government School***

One of the most enterprising groups of all, this group of parents have sought a fool-proof method of ensuring recognition. Beginning from Class I, their children attend a PUS in the morning from about 7:30am to 1:30pm, and then go to the evening shift of the government school nearby from 1:30pm to 6:30pm. An hour of tuition classes are also put in at the end of the day, in case the child is 'weak' in a particular subject. In this way, learning and recognition go hand in hand and parents can withdraw their child from the PUS when they deem it appropriate, without having to bother with recognition issues. The effect of attending 11 hours of school on a child's development and personality is anybody's guess.

It can be seen that the problems that exist in this illegal settlement colony are multi-faceted, and there is no single solution that would solve all its difficulties. The author has attempted to discuss some possible reforms after showcasing the most important dilemmas plaguing Sangam Vihar.

## Conclusions

The sparse availability of Government schooling opportunities in Sangam Vihar has left many pockets of the area with **no access to affordable schooling**. The questionnaires prepared by the author regarding parents' opinions on unrecognised and government schools prior to meeting with a group of 20 parents proved next to futile, as 40% of the group present said, "There is no government school close to home and an unrecognised school is very expensive, we can't afford it. So our children are currently sitting at home". In fact, the author was requested to set up a school in their vicinity instead. Apart from this troublesome issue, there is **dearth of information on the quality of education offered in unrecognised schools**. Parents base their decision of choosing a school on its distance from home and economic feasibility more than anything else. A few parents say they get an indication of what the school is like by observing whether their neighbour's children are "*hoshiyar*" or not.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, the PUSSs in Sangam Vihar remain till Class V or VIII because they cannot get affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Examination (CBSE), or a similar board that conducts the Class X and XII Board exams. It is not certain whether all schools would expand their schools till Class X or XII if given the chance, but one can confidently say that **the effect of remaining unrecognised is a larger problem for parents, rather than the schools**. The process of transferring is one that could be well avoided if certain reforms take place.

## Possible Solutions

### Affiliation of PUSSs to Accredited Agencies of National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)

The Open Basic Education Scheme (OBE) is an initiative of the Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) that aims at providing elementary education at three levels for school drop-outs, neo-literates and those children who are out of reach of formal education. This program is carried out in collaboration with agencies that have been accredited by the National Institute of Open Schooling, and its three different levels correspond to the formal school grades of Class I-III, Class IV-V and Class VI-VIII respectively; where the school curriculum is similar to the prescribed norms of NCERT and DIET. Once a child is enrolled in this program, he/she can appear for an examination conducted by the Accredited Agency (AA) at any level of his choice- Class III, V or VIII. Upon successful passing of the examination, the child will receive a certificate from the NIOS stating his achievement in various subjects taught under this scheme. This certificate and the child's academic performance becomes his passport for admission to a recognised school. No affidavit or admission test is required.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Hindi word *hoshiyar* used in the above context can be roughly translated to mean 'overall intelligence' in the English language.

<sup>13</sup> V.S. Sharma, In-charge of NIOS for the NGO Deepalaya. 2005. Verbal Interview with author. 46 Institutional Area, Janakpuri, New Delhi. 12 August.

<sup>14</sup> Norms and Procedures for Accreditation. National Institute of Open Schooling [Official Website]. Accessed on 14 August 2005 at <http://www.nios.ac.in/accnorms.htm#CRITERION>.

At present, the NIOS requires the following to be essential criterion to become an accredited agency:

- a) The Institution has to be a recognized Secondary/Senior Secondary School affiliated to a recognized State Education Board / CBSE / ICSE, or
- b) Other recognized institution of higher learning under the department of education/colleges of universities of the concerned state, or
- c) A NGO/ Registered Society of national repute engaged in education and philanthropic activities getting grant from the Government.<sup>14</sup>

It is the last category that would concern the private unrecognized schools of Sangam Vihar. If these PUSs were to affiliate themselves to accredited NGOs, their students would be able to appear for the OBE exam, and obtain a recognized education at Class III, V, or VIII; whichever class parents feel is appropriate to transfer their child. NGOs could select schools that they believe maintain a high standard of education, and this would also distinguish the 'good' PUSs from the bad ones; in turn providing information to parents. At present, no PUS has an incentive to compete or constantly improve its educational services; this is mainly due to the fact that there are enough children to go around all schools. For instance, School A and School H are located in the same lane, yet both say that they do not face competition from each other. In fact, neither school knew the other's fee structure, teacher qualification or student enrolment figures.

Having the stamp of offering recognition could induce competition among schools as well as give an indication of each school's performance; a parameter that is currently unavailable. Implementing such a policy could help bring many children into the arena of formal schooling, and help reduce the difficulties parents face in transferring their child. Sending their child to a PUS will not mean an invalid education, but rather a logical stepping stone towards completion of their entire schooling.

## **Education Vouchers**

The largest hurdle to obtaining a good quality education anywhere in India, and more so Sangam Vihar, is the lack of purchasing power of parents to access good schools of their choice. Financial assistance in the form of a voucher could be a possible solution. This would also make schools competitive as the best school would attract the most number of students. A voucher design specific to Sangam Vihar would have to include the cost of transportation, to accommodate parents' concerns regarding their child's safety when traveling to school.

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The plight of the residents of Sangam Vihar is far from envious. Lured by the hope of earning a steady income, these people leave their villages behind to work in any possible menial job they can find. They live in congested quarters, with limited access to water and electricity, plagued by deadly diseases such as dengue and malaria due to lack of a proper sewage system. The one thing that can get them out of the cycle of poverty- education, is still not accessible to all. The author hopes some amount of relief can be brought to those residing here at least in the field of schooling, so that future generations may have a better life to live.

## Annexure I

### Questions for Schools

#### **School Characteristics:**

- ⇒ Number of years the school has been in existence?
- Enrollment figures class wise?
- Reasons for setting up school?
- Where does the school get its funds from? Is there a profit or a loss for an academic year?

#### **Recognition Issues:**

- ⇒ Are their plans to make the school recognized?
- ⇒ What are the requirements for recognition?
- ⇒ Problems are faced by the school administration in having an unrecognized school? Does the Government interfere with its activities? How do they tackle problems?

#### **School Fees**

- Fee structure? Are there other miscellaneous charges besides monthly fees?
- How is the amount decided?
- How are fees paid-monthly, quarterly?
- Is there any concessionary fees given to poorer students?

#### **Teaching**

- Number of teachers for each grade?
- What is the teacher-student ratio?
- Selection process for all teachers and qualifications? Are they from Sangam Vihar?
- If there are comparatively lesser number of students in higher classes, how many teachers are hired specifically for these classes? What are their qualifications?
- Salary of teachers? How does it vary with qualifications?
- Who sets papers for exams? How many times are exams conducted?
- On what basis would they detain a child in a class?

#### **Syllabus, Textbooks & Uniforms**

- How is the curriculum and textbooks decided?
- Does the school provide textbooks and copies? How much does it charge?
- Does the school have a uniform? Are parents required to buy them from the school? At what cost? (Specific tie, belt, socks)

#### **School Performance**

- Average academic outcome of students? Pass percentages available? No. of transfers to recognized schools? (might not be indicative of school's success)
- Is there a tie-up with a private recognized school to transfer students? Do all students get transferred?

#### **Interaction with Parents**

- Does the school have a PTA? What happens at meetings and how often does it meet? What are parents main concerns?

#### **Parent/Area Characteristics**

- What is the approximate income level of families sending their children to the school?
- From where are children coming to attend the school?
- What are parents' occupations?

## Annexure II

### Questions for Parents

#### **Choice**

- How many schools are considered by parents before deciding where to send their child?
- Where and how do they get information on which school is best for their child?
- On what basis do they choose a school for their child?
- Why have they chosen a private unrecognized school over a government school?
- How far away from home are they willing to send their child/how far is the child's current school if distance is an issue?
- What is the highest fee they are willing to pay/how much do they pay now?

#### **Satisfaction**

- Are they happy with the quality of education in their child's school in terms of:
- Curriculum (level of English being taught, syllabus, extra-curricular etc)
- Teaching
- Attention to the child
- Homework

Ask parents to rate accordingly:

3-Very Good 3-Satisfactory 2-Poor

#### **Transfers**

- Do they have plans of transferring their child to a recognized school? Government or Private and why?
- What are the different ways in which a child can transfer? (affidavit + adm.test, contacts, school tie-up, bribe)
- Is an affidavit necessary? Where/who do they get it made from and how much does it cost?

#### **Expectations from Education**

- What are parent's expectations from the education their child is receiving?
- What level of educational attainment would they like their child to reach?

#### **Interaction with School**

- How often do parents attend PTA meetings held at school? What are their main concerns?
- How are monthly fees paid (cash/check etc) and for what period of time (quarterly/monthly)?

#### **Calculation of Cost to Education**

- To Calculate the Expenditure on Education I have asked for the following figures:  
-School Fees  
-Tuition Class fees  
-Textbooks & Uniforms  
-Other expenses (Stationery, transportation cost)  
-Proportion of Income spent on Education

Parameters	<b>Annexure III</b> <u>School Name</u>			
	(Quasi-recognised) Vijay Bharti Public School	(Unrecognised, NGO-run) Ravi Bal Vikas Vidyalaya	(Future plans to get recognised) H.K. Public School	(Unrecognised) Mount Hebron Mission School
<b>School Characteristics</b>	Till Class VII	Till Class V	Till Class V	Till Class VIII
Number of years school has been running	8 years	4 years	2 years	10 years
Enrollment figures	460	100	250	211
Reasons for establishing school	16 people formed a society of Professors, Educationists & Academicians who wanted to provide edn. at an affordable cost.	NGO runs similar schools in other parts of Delhi. Set up school in S.V when land was gifted for the purpose of catering to the educational needs of underprivileged sections of society	Parents who have set up school to provide their children with the assurance of a permanent job	Principal is a Father of the Church who is running the school to fulfil his duties towards society through social work.
School Funding	Funding by Society members initially, now runs on fees from parents	Runs on a budget of Rs. 12,000 allotted by the NGO	Started with own savings	Currently fees from parents, gets his personal salary from Church. School started with funds from church and his own savings
Profit or loss?	Break even	No profit	Set up for getting profit but for have been having a loss	Break Even
<b>Recognition Issues</b>				
Plans to make the school recognised	Is recognised till V, plan to make it till VII	Would like to make it recognised if it becomes feasible	Yes	No, due to lack of resources to meet Govt. requirements
Perceived Requirements for recognition	Building Safety Certificate, Health	Trained teachers, certified by NTT, Dpt. of	250 sq. yds of area and MA/B.Ed qualification	Playground area, library, teacher qualifications

<b>School Fees</b>	<b>Quasi-recognised</b>	<b>Unrecognised NGO-run</b>	<b>Future plans to get recognition</b>	<b>Unrecognised</b>
Fee structure(Monthly fees only)	Rs. 130 – Rs. 220	Rs. 50-Rs. 100	Rs. 70-Rs. 130	Rs. 100-Rs. 250
Miscellaneous Fees	Textbooks + copies, uniforms at market price, Rs. 35 for socks, belt, tie	Textbooks+copies (Rs. 300), uniforms (Rs. 300-Rs. 400), Rs. 30 for socks, belt, tie	Rs 100 as miscellaneous fees, and another Rs 100 as Exam fee, textbooks and copies sold at market price, Rs. 40 for socks, belt, tie	Textbooks, copies, uniforms sold at market price
Amount decided by	Looking at surrounding area income	Need of school to function, surveyed area to know average income	Self, in order to make profit.	Self, is doing social service so does not believe in making profit
Fees paid	Monthly by cash	Monthly by cash	Monthly by cash	Monthly by cash
Concessionary fees for poor students	No	Yes, about 10% in every class study for free, decided by looking at ability to pay. Also provide food to few children looking at need.	No	No
<b>Teaching</b>				
Number of teachers	17 with 6 subject teachers	6 teachers with 2 subject teachers	5 teachers	11 teachers with 4 subject teachers
Teacher-student ratio	1: 30 approximately	1: 20	1:35	1:25
Selection process for teachers (All teachers are residents of Sangam Vihar for all schools)	Announce by word of mouth, observe teachers for a week,	People interested in teaching approach them, are given training in workshops, are observed for some time before become	Look at qualifications and put them on trial.	Give them a trial week, look at how they interact with students and observe their

	Principal may give training if needed	permanent employees		teaching styles to see if they can handle students with different understanding levels
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<b>Teacher Qualifications</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> Pass, BA	12 <sup>th</sup> Pass, BA	12 <sup>th</sup> , BA, want B.Ed	10 <sup>th</sup> , 12 <sup>th</sup> , BA
<b>Salary of teachers</b>	Rs. 1200-Rs. 1800	Rs. 700-Rs. 1000	Refused to give figures	Rs.1000
<b>Who sets exams</b>	Principal oversees teacher's work, ultimately decides what paper will b		Principal contacts other recognised schools, gets their papers and uses in his own school	Principal sets papers himself for all classes
<b>Tests/exams conducted</b>	Weekly tests and half-yearly exams	Tests and Quarter basis for exams	Regular tests and exams	Regular tests and exams
<b>Syllabus Textbooks and Uniforms</b>				
<b>Curriculum followed</b>	NCERT, DBT, SCERT	NCERT	NCERT	NCERT and whatever material the principal perceives to be helpful to first-generation learners. Claims to have a level that is higher than most unrecog. Schools & slightly lower than private schools
<b>Provides textbooks and copies</b>	No, parents buy from outside, or will sell at market price	At market price	Sells at market price	Parents buy from outside
<b>Uniform</b>	Yes, parents buy at market price	Yes, parents buy at market price, approx. Rs. 300-400	Yes, parents buy from outside	Yes, parents buy from outside
<b>School Performance</b>				

Average Academic Outcome? Pass percentages?	After class 4 100% passing, 6-7% fail in Class I & II	Good performance	Did not say anything.	Overall average performance
Transfers to recognised schools	All children successfully transfer after class VII. (currently have 22 students in Class VII)	All children are able to transfer after Class V. (currently have 10 students in class V)	New school so no transfers have taken place yet after class V, right now only 1 child in class V and 12 in total in Class 3 & 4.	All children are able to transfer, most transfer after Class V. (Currently have 15 in Class V, and 2 in Class VIII who are assured of transfer.)
Tie-up with recognised school for transfer	No, but all Class VIII students transfer to neighbouring schools of their choice within Sangam Vihar, either govt. or private, did not give names.	No tie-up, but children get admission in govt. schools	No tie-up, are seeking to retain students themselves.	Yes, tie-up with Holy Mary Public School, and Father can write letters to boarding schools outside Delhi undertaking responsibility of children he would like to send there
<b>Interaction with Parents</b>				
PTA meetings	Held once every two months	Held once a month	Once a month	First Saturday of every month
Parent attendance	30%	20%	20%	25%
Main concerns	Parents cannot pay fees	Concerned about getting a good education, school being English-medium, NGO finds it hard to	Parents come to say they won't be able to pay fees.	Parents meet teachers as well as principal, complaints like 'child can't see the board, homework not

		convince parents to keep sending their children		written in child's diary etc.
Parent/Area Characteristics				
Income level of parents	Rs. 2000-3000	Rs. 2500-Rs. 5000	Did not know, but said it can't be much if they are unable to pay Rs. 70/month.	Rs. 3000-Rs. 4000
Children come from	The block in which the school is located	The galis surrounding the school area	Two galis behind the school	Galis around the school.
Parent's occupations	Laborers, Construction workers	Carpenters, plumbers, Daily wage workers, maids, factory workers, exporters who earn Rs. 5000	Work in the private sector	Tenants with similar occupations as first two schools

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