

# Sankalp School

## Sankalp Welfare Society (Gurgaon)

---

Amit Sharma

Nov 30, 2015

---

Sankalp Welfare Society is a long standing partner NGO of Asha for Education that runs a school for children of migratory workers of urban slums of Gurgaon, Haryana. The school started in 1996 with 30 odd children and has since expanded to provide quality educate to over 200 children. This site visit was conducted for Asha for Education (Dallas) to assess the work at Sankalp School. Sankalp operates and managed three primary schools in Gurgaon. (a) Its namesake, primary school in DLF Phase-IV that is joint venture with DCWC and supported by the State Government. (b) A Government primary school in DLF Phase-IV (right next to the first school, noted above), that is informally operated by Sankalp Welfare Society. (c) A Government school in C Block, Sushant Lok that is informally run by Sankalp Welfare Society with limited government investment. This site visit was conducted for Asha for Education (Dallas) and was limited to Saklap school and Government Primary school located at DLF Phase-IV.

I arrived at Sankalp School, situated in DLF Phase-IV, Gurgaon, around 9:58AM. the school is quite impressive sitting on a large parcel of land in affluent neighborhood. My visit was coordinated with Radhika Sethi a member of Sankap Welfare Society. I met her right outside the school, and we proceeded to a meeting room for our discussion where she gave me an overview of the school and a historical context of the organization.

After roughly 30 min of discussion over tea, Radhika took me for me a tour. We walked around the well maintained hallways of the school. The school building is owned by DCWC and has been leased to Sankalp Welfare Society by the state government. The school has an open courtyard with classrooms on both sides, administration area and principals' office are on the north end, and an open area on the south side leads into the Government primary school premise. There's a computer lab that children attend on a regular basis. Children get daily meals, supported through the Government's SSA mid-day meal program, contracted out to ISKON. The school seemed well staffed and there was at-least one teacher in every class. I met [name undisclosed] intern from American Express conducting math class in conjunction with a Sankalp

teacher for grade-IV children. The children seemed energetic, aware, and enthusiastic much like children in most primary schools. The Government primary school is a much smaller facility than Sankalp school. The Government school for all practical purposes is operated by Sankalp, albeit unofficially. All but one teachers are supported by Sankalp Welfare Society while the school receives books, stationary, and uniforms periodically. The walk around the school was reminiscence of my school days in Delhi, the maroon uniform sweaters, the unexplainable yet palpable winter morning smell, classroom full of children behind desks seemed all so familiar ...

I spent some time with children in an English language class-III. In a wonderful serendipity I discovered that the teacher [name undisclosed] was from Udaipur, my second home and to where I was headed in a few days for another site visit. The classroom seemed to overflow with children and I was told that there were two class sections placed together because one of the teachers was on a leave (this is not unexpected given it was Diwali season). Children were busy with english reading session, as I sat at the back of the classroom, observing. I interacted with a few students [names undisclosed] as they were reading their story book aloud, somewhat distracted by presence of a stranger and increasingly conscious of my friendly questioning. It didn't take long before the nervous trepidation gave way to giggles and spontaneous questions, rather a dialogue. I didn't want to bother the class too much with my presence and I subsequently left to continue my discussion with Radhika and the school principal.

Sankalp School has been on DCWC facility, leased by the stet government for ₹60,000/month. The lease was, however, raised to ₹1,00,000/month under the new DC, Gurgaon. Although the school as well as Sankalp Wekfare Socirty has been consistently lauded for their work, an argument of applying current market rate was used to raise the lease. It should also be noted that Sankalp school is actually filling a gaping hole in the Government education delivery system, making a big impact for community that is largely ignored by government schemes and programs. And yet, they are being forced to pay a hefty lease o run their school. This is quite unfortunate and equally disheartening is the fact that there is no means to petition the system to either maintain or reduce the lease rate instead of the increase.

Back at the meeting room, Radhika and I were joined by Zarine, another long time member/supporter of Sankalp Welfare Society. We discussed a wide range of issues related to the school, local community it serves, pass out rate as well as drop-offs amongst children, and vocational skill based training for children. Sakalp school faculty is drawn mostly from retired teachers and principals who either work pro-bono or with little financial assistance. I spent the

next 30 min in a discussion with the school principal discussing about specific challenges for the school, and sharing some of my experiences of working with urban and rural schools.

At this juncture I'd note that there is some motivation around vocational training and a sense of conscious awareness of the socio-economic background of the children. That presented an interesting juxtaposition between (arguably typified) perspectives of [some] career teachers and contemporary realities of the children in highly challenging environment. This is neither a critique of Sankalp school nor is this a phenomenon limited to them [Sankalp] per-se. There's a rather unique problem slowly brewing in our society, the one of demographic dividend turning into a loss - there is a genuine lack of institutional structures that are able to create high skilled workers that can participate in our ever expanding urban milieu. It is in this context that our processes and practices around education that is still deep rooted in academic performance perhaps need calibration. I also would posit that this is a collective challenge, not limited to certain socio-economic sections of the society, or certain types of schools [by their location or population it serves]. It just so happens that the poor migratory labor class is where this problem is most visible, although not sufficiently acknowledged.

During my discussion with the school principal, Zarine informed us about solar lamps they were able to procure from a manufacturer in the US. And they requested me to help them draft something in Hindi to introduce the device to the children - most of which are primarily Hindi speakers. Apparently the product manuals and instructions, including the online video manuals on YouTube are (unsurprisingly) in English and I was thought to be eligible of helping with drafting an Hindi introduction to solar lamps. Nonetheless, I agreed to help. I sensed there was a concern brewing about optimal use of a solar lamp, that children might mistake the lamp for a toy - which apparently was a bad thing. After some discussion I coined the phrase **दिन में सूरज खाता है। रात को सूरज लाता है।** - "*It eats the sun in daytime, it brings out the sun at nighttime.*" and suggested that we indeed introduce the solar lamps as a toy. We decided that along with this phrase as a tagline, every child will get an assignment along with their new toy- to write a one-pager about how the this new toy [the lamp] is useful to them or rather what they use it for. It was quite exciting to be a part of an impromptu brainstorming and I felt privileged to be able to participate. This in its own unique way was a reminder of the genuine openness of the environment at Sankalp really is. And that was a perfect note to end my brief meeting as well.

## Additional Notes

1. Overall school facility is excellent and has exhibits a healthy, positive environment for children.
2. Children seemed genuinely happy, and excited in the school. Most children were also confident in conversation. One child from grade-IV [name undisclosed] came to offer me flowers during our meeting and was oozing confidence - asked my name, told me about his family, and addressed me by name on my instance without inhibition. He might not be representative of the population but impressive nonetheless.
3. Students perform quite well in the High school and have a reasonable retention rate. However, the drop off still stands at 30% which is quite high. There are plausible reasons for the drop off but there didn't seem to be a targeted intervention to address the issue though.
4. There's a thriving private/corporate partnership model that provides interns and volunteers to work for Sankalp. The process of inducting, incubating, and monitoring interns in the school environment is unclear. I note this only in the limited context of internship in a formal school environment.