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## Beware! Danger Ahead

# Lok Shikshak Manch

We, on behalf of the Lok Shikshak Manch, want to draw the attention of the readers towards a very serious issue that is concerned with the 'identity' of our schools, teachers and students. For the past few years the intervention of NGOs in our schools is continuously increasing. Though permitted officially, their intervention is limited to certain activities such as teaching some children, giving books, , doing activities with children, etc. However this does not involve willing assent of all participants in the education process. Since the teachers have to complete non-teaching tasks, these organisations overshadow the teaching-learning process in schools. Teachers are being constantly burdened with non-teaching tasks so that the teaching- learning process could be taken over by the less-educated, untrained 'volunteers' of these NGOs, for salaries as low as Rs. 1000-2000. As far as we know, the teaching learning process in these extra classes not only falls out of line with the present curriculum and progressive agenda of education; rather it is completely opposite. The untrained teacher-volunteers cannot be blamed and should not be blamed for this.

In the current economic-political context the pressure of unemployment places them as merely the last links in the chain. The need of the hour is to question the structure which exploits their labour and marginalised conditions for its own interests. Many private organisations are now working very hard to prove that the teachers of government schools remain absent from the classrooms and are not interested in teaching. This same is emphasized in the report of Pratham (NGO) ([http://www.prathamdelhi.org/articles\\_reports/annual\\_reports.php](http://www.prathamdelhi.org/articles_reports/annual_reports.php)). It states that the main reasons for falling standards of education in MCD schools is the absence of teachers in classrooms and their lack of interest in teaching. Furthermore, these NGOs also claim that the result of the work done by their initiatives in schools is substantial. For this, one can look up the website of 'nanhi kali' project, which is being run with the help of Keshub Mahindra Trust and Naandi Foundation ([http://www.nanhikali.org/nanhikali/about\\_nanhi\\_kali.aspx](http://www.nanhikali.org/nanhikali/about_nanhi_kali.aspx)). It has been specifically posted on the website that the results of the children with whom they have worked has improved by 78%. Many NGOs claim that the retention and

enrolment of children in schools has improved during the period of their work in school. We need to ask a few questions- If untrained, less salaried teachers can work with 'weak' children with such great results, then how well would they do with 'talented' children? It also questions the worth of teacher training. And why is it so that the work of these 'teachers' is not being utilised for the children of 'haves' in central and prestigious private schools? It means that educated, professionally trained teachers are required for the children from a particular group and less educated, untrained teachers will suffice for the children of marginalised sections!

It is problematic that the responsibility of girl students of Nanhi Kali project is being handed to a 'third party' by the NGO. This third party, in lieu of a donation of Rs. 2400, is shown as the 'parent' of these girls. The permission for this is neither taken from the student nor from the parents. An important issue that arises here is that how these students could be given away in 'adoption' when the responsibility of their education lies with the state. This is an ugly example of the government outsourcing (shirking) its fundamental responsibilities. No doubt the regular, trained and educated teacher of any government school is more aware and accountable towards overall educational development of the students than any private organisation. As far as we got to know, under Nanhi Kali project the personal information of girl students (like photo, family, bio-data, etc.) are recorded. Organisations invite private donors to make available particular amounts of money for the care and 'development' of a Nanhi kali; and in return they send reports of the Nanhi Kali to the donors from time to time. Clearly, this practise is against the norms of privacy and transparency. It is an attack upon the self-respect of the girl students and their families. There is a high probability that most parents are not informed that their daughters have been 'adopted' with the help of donations. Secondly, if some parents do accept the 'adoption' of their daughter by somebody else, then why should be this whole unethical process mediated through government and its schools?

Let us think as to what will happen if the government schools cease to act as a medium to reach out to students

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and people for these organisations. Firstly, most of these organisations will have to wander around in streets and localities in order to gain the trust of the people. The result of which, if we anticipate, could be disappointing for them. The process in itself would cost a lot of money and energy. Secondly, if by any chance some people do agree to be involved with these organisations a place will be required to run their centres. And for running a centre in a costly city like Delhi one can fairly estimate the rent of required rooms. Likewise expenditure on electricity, water, sanitation, security & safety for the same cannot be avoided. The state schools provide a readymade structure - facilities and 'captive' children - to these organisations. Freeing them of all worries of infrastructural requirements, the government too pats their back.

Why has this situation arisen? The main reason for the present situation is our active passivity. We do not refuse the routine technical and non-teaching tasks. We are not challenging it at the level of our association either. We are not registering our protest against the intervention of such NGOs in our schools. However, if we continue to be mute spectators, the day is not far when the government would hand over the schools completely to these NGOs (the instance of Agha Khan Foundation in context of Nizamuddin School is significant). Through these interventions the organisations are striving to take the schools into their possession. Village Panchayats along with the community have been making consistent efforts to make land available to the government for the construction of schools so that their children get easy access to better education. In this way they have contributed significantly to the efforts of universalizing education. On the other hand, these NGOs in the name of improving standards of education and ensuring better facilities are heading towards taking possession of the school system. There is great possibility that one of their aims is to grab land worth crores of rupees to make education a profit making machine. This is one of

the ugly examples of the government shirking its responsibility towards the constitutional right of universal education. The sad and dangerous part is that government is working hand in hand with those in power, whose understanding about the concept of justice is not only weak but accompanied with doubtful intentions. The state is avoiding its constitutional responsibilities towards the citizens in two ways - first, by selling public mechanisms

directly and second by shrewdly letting private powers to encroach into public units. In a democracy people hold due status to exercise their rights with dignity. People want to exercise their constitutional rights without seeking charity or help from any of the profiteering private powers. The promise and beauty of democracy lies in ensuring respectable livelihood to people.

The solution of the above mentioned problem can be found in employing educated and trained regular teachers, freeing them from the regular burden of non-teaching tasks and simultaneously employing regular personnel for non-academic tasks in schools. Ironically what is happening now is the opposite; there is an increase in other forms of non-teaching tasks for teachers in schools, like making

arrangements for electricity and water. In such a situation where the untrained, less salaried personnel are 'teaching' the students and trained qualified teachers are caught up with other activities, the students are at the receiving end, especially the students of those sections who are befooled by the tokenism of right to education. Our appeal to you is to unite and protest against the intervention of NGOs in schools and subsequent possession of the same by these organisations. We also demand that educated, trained, regular teachers be employed in required numbers in schools along with the employment of regular personnel for non-teaching tasks so that the right to education does not remain a meaningless formality.

*e-mail : lokshikshakmanch@gmail.com*

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