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Children from low-income groups in urban areas receive education from Shakti Bidyalaya

Photo: courtesy

## Shakti Bidyalaya Giving Strength to Slum Children

**Audity Falguni**

It was the morning of March 26. Mim, the daughter of a rickshaw puller, was adjusting her chorus with her fellow singers: 'Ei Padma/ Ei Meghna/ Ei Jamuna Surma Nadi Tot e (Across the rivers Padma, Meghna, Jamuna, Surma and others).' Yes, we have reached Mohamma basti (slum) at the Jahuri mahalla. This slum, just like any other slum, cannot offer you any fresh air. Houses are dingy and densely populated. Overused toilets are left open and garbage is everywhere. The entire scenario is enough to remind one of the slum sketches penned by Bangladeshi novelist Akhtaruzzaman Ilias in his novel "Chilekotha ar Sepoy" against the backdrop of the 1969 uprising in the then East Pakistan.

"This is my school, the Mohammadpur Pora basti branch of my Shakti Bidyalaya," Ahmed Javed, a young man in his late twenties, laughs heartily. "We have four branches at four locations in Jahuri Mahalla, Mirpur, Korail and Dayaganj. Mostly children from low-income groups in urban areas come to our school. We began with only one school at Mirpur in 2008 and today the number of students has increased significantly."

increased to four," he adds.

Ronie and some of his friends contribute regularly from their monthly salaries to these four schools and they don't look for donors or any NGO support to run them. Monthly rent of the four rooms used as school rooms in four slums, electricity costs, monthly remuneration of the teachers and costs of educational materials are the things Ronie and his friends have to bear.

"Years ago, the son of our domestic worker died in a car accident. I was deeply moved by the accident and decided that I must open a school at the slum nearest to my house. When I first opened it, I found many of the slum children had no basic survival skills or training. Like how to cross the road in busy urban areas. I decided that some basic life skill training and preliminary level education like reading and writing in their mother language and doing some arithmetic is a must for these children," Ronie observes.

"The parent organisation of Shakti Bidyalaya is Banglar Pathshala which holds regular seminars, symposiums and study circles on a wide range of issues such as literature, society, imperialism, globalisation, capitalism vs. socialism and many more," says the young man with shining eyes full of dreams.



Slum children attending  
Photo: courtes

"Yesterday we arranged a drawing competition amongst all the students from the four branches of Shakti Bidyalaya and children of our branch won the awards," says Nabila Akter Shilpi and Ishrat Jahan Shikha, who are teachers of this school. E and Shikha are residents of this slum and they themselves are students of class eight Nurjahan Memorial High School. The teachers bring out a number of drawings by children depicting the Shahid Minar, the national flag of Bangladesh, guerrilla freedom fighters etc.



Mim, daughter of a blind former rickshaw puller (he lost his drinking unhealthy country liquor) and a mother who was a domestic worker, won the first prize. "I drew Shahid yesterday's competition. I have won cash worth about Tk 1,000 first prize," she says. The runners up got Tk 3,000 in cash and one got Tk 2,000.

"We don't wish to get married early like the other girls in the slum. We want to complete our education and get a dignified job as a teacher. Here we enjoy teaching our younger brothers and sisters in the slum three days a week," says Shilpi.

"What we enjoy most is that we learn to draw, sing songs and dance," says Shikha. "We get pencils and pencil boxes along with books and other educational materials."

We all know how difficult obstacles like poverty, unclean environment, early marriage etc. are overcome, more so in slums. It is moreover, a greater challenge to wage this war alone. Citizens of the country should come and stand beside and support all the small endeavours such as enterprising young men and women. Confucius, the great Chinese philosopher said that a candle is enough to commence the war against infinite darkness....

**(Visit the web-site for more info and photographs: <http://shaktibidyalaya.com/>)**