

## *A Glimpse into the Life of Slum Children*

— Ms Manya Singh, Intern- AIF

Walking through a slum of Delhi was like stepping into a whole new world. It felt nothing like the life I knew. Everywhere I looked, there were signs of struggle and hardship, especially among the children living there.

Meeting those kids, who didn't have any support from NGOs, really opened my eyes. They seemed lost, unlike kids from better-off areas. Some even talked about wanting to join the *mafia* just to feel brave. Even though they had talents like cycling and playing cricket, they lacked guidance and role models, which made them less ambitious. What shocked me the most was how easily they could get harmful stuff like alcohol from nearby shops for just a few rupees. They didn't enjoy school either; it didn't feel right for them. Instead, they preferred getting into fights and acting tough, like they were part of some gang, to feel a sense of belonging. Many of these kids had parents who were both working, so there was no one to look after them. This left them vulnerable to older kids who would pressure them into buying bad things or doing favors for them. These experiences made the kids bitter, and instead of wanting to learn and be good, they found comfort in violence.

But amidst all this toughness, I had a surprising encounter with a 14-year-old boy who called himself the leader of a gang of younger kids aka '*bhai*.' Surprisingly, he agreed to an interview with me, albeit on a simple exchange: chocolate biscuits for his time and attention. This interaction left a profound impression on me, highlighting a stark contrast between the tough exterior these children portray and the underlying innocence and purity that still resides

within them. Despite his bravado and assumed leadership role, the allure of something as simple as chocolate biscuits momentarily softened his demeanor, allowing him to engage with me in a polite and respectful manner. Reflecting on this encounter, I couldn't help but recognize the untapped potential present in these children. Like raw clay waiting to be shaped, they possess the capacity for growth and transformation.

We all have a responsibility to help these kids, to guide them and show them the right path. Every interaction we have with them, no matter how small, is a chance to teach them values like empathy, kindness, and resilience. By giving them support and opportunities, we can help them overcome their tough circumstances and become confident and responsible members of society. In the end, it's all about showing them compassion and understanding. That's how we can build a brighter future for them and for all of us. Let's not forget the importance of nurturing the next generation, for they hold the key to shaping tomorrow's world.

*\*Manya was part of the research team in the ICSSR-JNU project on child abuse in slums. This article is based on her fieldwork experiences.*

