THE HINDU

At GB Road, a chance to learn and live

A recently opened 'Pink Police Chowki' is imparting vocational skills to sex workers and their children

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On Swami Shradhanand Marg, famously known as GB Road, a newly renovated police chowki is currently the centre of attraction. Not because it has been freshly painted in pink but for its new identity as a makeshift training centre.

The enthusiasm of children and sex workers residing in the area must be seen to be believed, as they eagerly turn up at the chowki everyday to learn something new.

"Ye classes chalti rahengi na? Band to nahi ho jaengi? (The classes will continue, right? And not be discontinued?)," wondered the mother 13-year-old Rahul*. She came to drop off her son who attends computer classes at the chowki. She sounded sceptical given her experience with several such initiatives in the past.

"Jab tak main zinda hun, tab tak to zaroor chalengi (Till I am alive, they will certainly continue)," Sub-Inspector Kiran Sethi assured the concerned mother. The 50-year-old chowki in-charge is among the popular faces of Delhi police. She has often made headlines for her work towards women's safety and empowerment and training hundreds of women in the city in self-defence.



The multi-skill training centre at Pink Police Chowki on GB Road, New Delhi • SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Priyanka*, a sex worker, came from south India a decade ago looking for a job in Delhi. She was 18 when she met a man after reaching the city. He brought her to GB Road and forced her into sex work. Five years ago, she gave birth to a differently abled baby boy. With skill training at the police chowki, Priyanka now dreams of giving her son a better life.

Job offer

Wearing black boots and ripped jeans, paired with a matching top and black shrug, Priyanka glides in with confidence into the chowki in the afternoon for her training in computers. She began attending the classes on February 28 and SI Sethi has already found a job that she will join in a month or two. "She is getting trained in record keeping," Ms. Sethi said.

"Computer knowledge is required in everything now. My life will change if I learn and get a job. I'll be able to earn at least ₹20,000 a month. I will move out of this place then," said Priyanka, with a glint of hope in her eyes. *"Is kaam se behtar wahi hoga ek sukoon ki zindagi ke liye* (That job will be better for a peaceful life)," she said.

Rahul*, Anjali*, Akansha*, Chahat* and Rahil*, all residents of GB Road and aged between 10 years to 14 years, are a group of zealous kids who wouldn't mind spending hours sitting in the small room in the chowki and learning something that is beneficial for them.

All of them believe it is a blessing in disguise. "I will become smarter if I learn to use computer," said Anjali. "I want to become a dancer and I hope they teach that too here," said Chahat.

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>
> A SEX WORKER

These kids are either children of sex workers or their friends, Ms. Sethi said.

So far, six children have enrolled for computer classes and 10 sex workers have shown willingness to learn skills being taught at the chowki. The skills include healthcare training, sewing and basic knowledge of computers. Future training sessions may also include English speaking courses, abacus and creative classes.

SI Sethi said the healthcare training is aimed at producing medical attendants for people in need. "So many people today require the services of medical attendants for their ailing family members. These women can get trained in the job and earn money," she said.

A long road ahead

While the children are enthusiastic about attending the classes, Ms. Sethi and her colleagues are finding it difficult to convince the sex workers to join the training programmes. "When we go and talk to them, they tell us they don't want to get out of this work because they are apprehensive about people outside their world accepting their 'tag' of a sex worker," she said.

The SI added that she has taken multiple sessions with the sex workers and tried to convince them that this is a good opportunity to learn other skills and make money. "But it's a long road ahead," she said.

The chowki was inaugurated by Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Shweta Chauhan on February 18, with an objective to help the sex workers live a better life. For the last 10 days, SI Sethi has been working hard to execute the plan successfully by arranging teachers, coordinating classes and counselling the sex workers.

Staff crunch is another challenge she faces. When this reporter visited the chowki, there were only two constables besides SI Sethi who were managing the training centre and attending to complainants or those in need of police assistance.

A few more hands would help in running the place more efficiently. "But we are not complaining, we are working hard," they said.

*(*Names changed)*