

The Taxi Driver Who Runs Two Schools and an Orphanage by Manabi Katoch

He Had to Drop Out of School & Beg. Now, This Kolkata Taxi Driver Runs 2 Schools and an Orphanage

Seven-year-old Gazi Jalaluddin studied at the local school of his village. A studious kid, he was jumping with joy to tell his father that he had stood first in class 1. But his father had news of his own — he was unable to gather enough money to buy him books for class 2 so Gazi would have to stop going to school.

Gazi's father was a farmer in the Thakurchak village of Sundarbans, West Bengal. He just had a quarter acre of land, which did not give enough yield to return even the inputs, only to leave the family starving for days. Gazi's father was unwell and they came to Kolkata in search of some work, which might give them at least one meal everyday. Unfortunately no one would hire an ailing man, and Gazi ended up begging on the streets of Kolkata.

Once he was 12 or 13, Gazi started to work as a rickshaw-puller in the Entally market area of Kolkata. And in few more years, at 18, Gazi learnt to drive a taxi and became a taxi-driver in 1977.

Gazi Jalaluddin

But was always on his mind, the many young boys back in his village still trying to make ends meet. So he formed 'Sundarban Driving Samiti' and started giving driving lessons to the young boys of the Sundarbans so they could start living their lives with dignity.

"I taught 10 boys in my first class for free and asked them to donate just Rs. 5 every month once they start earning. I also asked each one of them to teach two more needy boys from the village. The chain still continues and today, there are 300 boys from the Sundarbans driving taxis and earning their living in Kolkata," informs Gazi.

Gazi also started asking his passengers if they wanted to donate some books or old clothes or medicines. Many people took interest and Gazi would collect books, clothes and medicines from them and distribute it among the destitute in his village. Many kids who had to leave studies due to lack of money to buy books just like Gazi were able to study again with his help.

He continued doing this until 1997, but there was something that still made him feel restless. Since he left studies, Gazi would often dream about a school where kids wouldn't

have to pay anything to study. And now he was determined to do that himself.

“I asked lot of people in my village if they can donate some land to build a school, but no one agreed, few even laughed at me,” says Gazi.

This did not discourage this young man and he started his school in one of the rooms of his two-room house. He would go announcing in the village on a mike urging parents to send their kids to school, offering to teach them for free. Initially no one was interested. The villagers asked him how it would make a difference as they wouldn't be able to make the kids study further, ruining all chances of them getting a job.

“They were not ready to send their kids, especially girls to school. I explained to them how they have to run back to the doctor or a literate person to read even simplest things like how to take medicines or how they have to wait for someone to read their letters and would later know that it was very urgent,” he explained.

Gazi's efforts paid off and he started his school, Ismail Israfil Free Primary School (named after his two sons), with 22 students and two teachers in 1998 in Uttar Thakuchak, Sundarbans.

Sundarban Sikshayatan Mission

He then kept building one room every year with some donations offered by his passengers and with his savings. By 2012, Gazi managed to build 12 classrooms, 2 washrooms and a mid-day meal room in his school. Without any help from the government, this school dropout was now giving free education and a meal to the underprivileged kids.

“Initially we struggled a lot. It used to be muddy in the rainy season and the polythenes that we used for our makeshift school for so many students would leak. But then thankfully with people's help there came a building. However, that too was inside our Muslim colony and there was no proper road to reach it. I wanted to build a bigger school beside a road. So I began to ask for help from my passengers to build a bigger school,” he says.

Two of Gazi's passenger helped him to buy land for the school, some took the responsibility to pay the teachers and some helped him to start the mid-day meal in his school. With the help pouring in, he was able to build his second school, Sundarban Sikshayatan Mission, in 2009 in Purv Thakurchak, Sundarban, 2 Km from his first school. Now, there are around 21 teachers, four non-teaching staff and nearly 425 students in these two schools.

Gazi did not stop here. Many of the students in his schools were orphans who were forced

to beg just like Gazi did. He wanted to provide shelter to these kids and began to collect funds for an orphanage. More people pitched in and Sundarban Orphanage Mission was built in 2016. He arranges all the residential requirements of these orphans by saving money from his earnings and help received by those who donate.

“I still struggle to give mid-day meal to all the kids. Sometimes, I can’t give the full salary at once to the teachers, but they are also very cooperative. My unknown passengers have helped me to fulfill my dream and I dream of a world where no Gazi has to stop going to school anymore,” he says.

Gazi especially thanked Arun Kumar Dubey who donated land for his orphanage, Dipankar Ghosh, Ajeet Kumar Saha, Deepa Dutta, Barnali Pai and many others who are helping him to sustain the schools and the orphanage.

You can click [here](#) to contact Gazi Jallaluddin.