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Research Article

A Study on Impact of Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg Programs on Mumbai's Vasti's Communities: An RSS Jankalyan Samiti Initiative

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Abstract

With a visit facilitated by RSS Janakalyan Samiti, we witnessed the Vasti Parivartan Yojna making an impact at various Mumbai Vastis. What we noticed at the time was two initiatives, specifically Balsanskaar Varg, which works with kids between the ages of 6 to 12 through the use of moral stories, activities, and value education; and the Kishori Varg, which works with teens between the ages of 13 to 18 through leadership, career, and life skills training. We interviewed children, parents, local facilitators (affectionately referred to as Tai), and volunteers, along with direct observation, in eight Vasti communities. What you saw was nothing short of inspiring children becoming more self-assured, disciplined, and socially conscious. Parents reported improved behaviour at home, and renewed interest at school. Although the issues of limited access to resources remain, the effect of the programs is undeniably transformative. With greater community support, along with institutional support, these programs can positively change many more lives in Mumbai's Vastis.

Keywords: Community, Transformation, Education, Youth, Empowerment.

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Introduction:

Mumbai, the financial capital of India, is home to a vast population living in vasti's (informal settlements or slums). According to the (Kulkarni, 2023) nearly 52.5% of Mumbai's population resides in slums, with areas like Dharavi, Govandi, and Shivaji Nagar facing overcrowding, poor sanitation, and limited educational opportunities. In such an environment, children and adolescents struggle with socio-economic challenges that hinder their development and prospects.

RSS Janakalyan Samiti is a social service organization committed to community development, particularly in marginalized urban and rural areas. The organization undertakes various welfare initiatives focused on education, healthcare, skill development, and social reform. Jankalyan samiti has organized Vasti's Parivartan Yojna which aims towards bringing a change in the lives of the resident of these vasti's. Through initiatives like Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg, it aims to empower underprivileged children and adolescents by providing them with moral education, leadership training, and career guidance.

A critical issue in these settlements is the lack of structured education and value-based learning. Children in impoverished neighborhoods face a higher risk of dropping out of school and struggling with employment (Sen, 2015). To address these challenges, RSS Janakalyan Samiti has launched initiatives promoting education, discipline, and moral values. Among these, the Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs play a key role in shaping youth in Mumbai's vasti's.

The Balsanskaar Varg program, for children aged 6-12, emphasizes character development, moral values, and cultural heritage through storytelling, interactive learning, and group activities. It aims to instill discipline, respect for elders, and a sense of responsibility (Sharma, 2018)

For adolescents aged 13-18, the Kishori Varg program develops leadership skills, self-confidence, and social responsibility through mentorship, career counseling, and physical activities such as yoga and self-defense. It provides guidance and skill-building to help youth make informed life choices (Verma, 2020).

While these programs offer significant benefits, challenges remain. Socio-economic barriers such as financial instability and domestic responsibilities prevent some children from fully participating. Additionally, cultural skepticism and resource limitations hinder expansion. Addressing these issues requires collaboration between government bodies, NGOs, and local communities to sustain and expand these educational efforts (Patil, 1995).

This research examines the structure, impact, and challenges of Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs in Mumbai's vasti's. Through qualitative analysis based on field interviews, observations, and participant experiences, it highlights how value-based education and structured mentorship can empower underprivileged youth and foster long-term community development.

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RSS Janakalyan Samiti's Mission and Vision:

Guided by the principle of “Seva hi Param Dharma” (Service is the Highest Duty), RSS Janakalyan Samiti aims to uplift marginalized communities through education, healthcare, and social reform. Its vision is to build a self-reliant, value-driven society that nurtures responsible, morally upright citizens.

Objective:

- To assess the impact of the Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs on the moral, educational, and personal development of children and adolescents in Mumbai's Vasti communities.
- To evaluate the role of structured mentorship and value-based education in promoting positive behavioral changes and civic engagement among youth.
- To identify the key challenges and limitations faced in the implementation and scalability of these programs and suggest strategies for sustainable community empowerment.

Review of Literature:

Educational and community-driven initiatives play a crucial role in the development of children and adolescents in marginalized urban settlements. Various studies have examined the effectiveness of structured intervention programs in slum areas, highlighting the importance of moral education, skill development, and community engagement. This review explores existing literature on similar educational models and social interventions, placing the efforts of RSS Janakalyan Samiti in a comparative context.

A study by (Banerjee, 2011) in their work *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty* emphasizes that informal education, particularly in developing nations, plays a crucial role in shaping long-term behavioural and academic outcomes. Their research suggests that non-formal educational programs supplement formal schooling by instilling discipline and fostering curiosity among children. These findings align with the objectives of the Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs, which emphasize structured mentorship and value-based education.

Similarly, a study conducted by the (Foundation, 2021) on educational interventions in Indian slums found that structured after-school programs significantly enhanced learning outcomes among underprivileged children. Their findings indicate that children who participated in structured, community-led learning initiatives demonstrated greater cognitive and emotional development compared to their peers who lacked such support. This supports the argument that moral and community-based educational initiatives, such as those run by RSS Janakalyan Samiti, can serve as a catalyst for long-term societal development.

(Sen, 2015), in *The Country of First Boys*, argues that cultural education plays a crucial role in shaping the identity of young individuals and reducing delinquency in urban slums. He contends that children growing up in informal settlements often lack access to cultural and

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ethical education, leading to disassociation from societal norms and increased susceptibility to anti-social activities. Programs such as Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg, which focus on moral and cultural education, align with Sen's findings by offering an alternative form of education that integrates both academic and value-based learning.

Internationally, youth development initiatives such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and UNICEF's community learning programs provide insights into effective community-led educational models. Research by (Gootman, 2002) in *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* highlights the impact of mentorship, skill-building activities, and structured programs in shaping adolescent behaviour and academic progress. These international models offer a framework for understanding the potential long-term benefits of similar interventions within Indian slums, particularly those implemented by RSS Janakalyan Samiti.

While numerous studies highlight the positive impact of structured youth programs, there remains a gap in longitudinal research on the long-term effects of such interventions in Indian urban slums. Existing literature provides substantial evidence that community-driven programs enhance education and personal development, but further studies are needed to measure their sustainability and long-term influence on employment and social mobility.

By reviewing these scholarly contributions, it becomes evident that initiatives such as the Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs align with global best practices in youth development. This literature review highlights the need for further empirical research to measure the long-term impact of such interventions and explore ways to enhance their effectiveness and scalability in Mumbai's vasti's and beyond.

Methodology:

This research adopts a **qualitative approach** to analyse the impact of the Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs implemented by RSS Janakalyan Samiti in Mumbai's vasti's communities. The study emphasizes experiential insights gathered through field interactions, interviews, and observations to evaluate the programs' effectiveness.

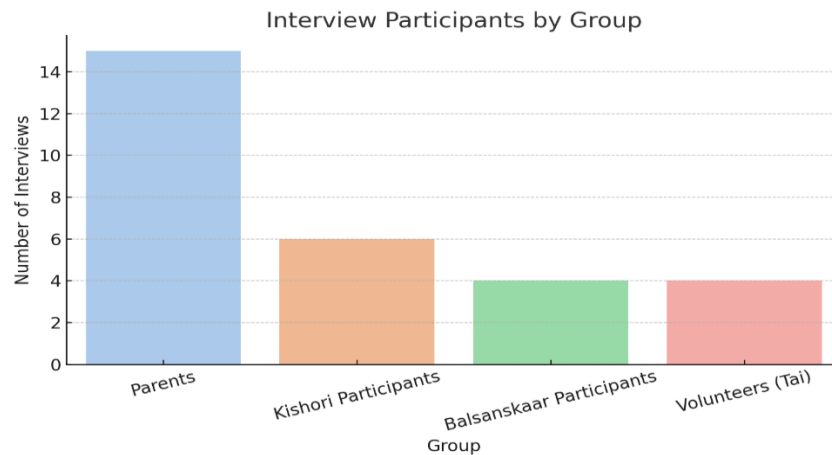
Data Collection:

1. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with children, adolescents, parents, tai's (program facilitators), community leaders, and RSS Janakalyan Samiti volunteers. These interviews explored participants' personal experiences, behavioural changes, academic progress, and community engagement.
2. Field Observations: Direct observations of program sessions were carried out across eight vasti'ss—Nancy Muncy Chawl (Andheri), Ketkipada (Dahisar), Vijay Nagar Vasti's (Wadala), Vatsalya Vasti's (Kurla), Prabhat Nagar Vasti's (Ghatkopar), Baptist Church Vasti's (Kurla), Raipada (Malad), and Ambedkar Nagar (Vile Parle). The focus was on analysing engagement levels, participation patterns, and program structure.

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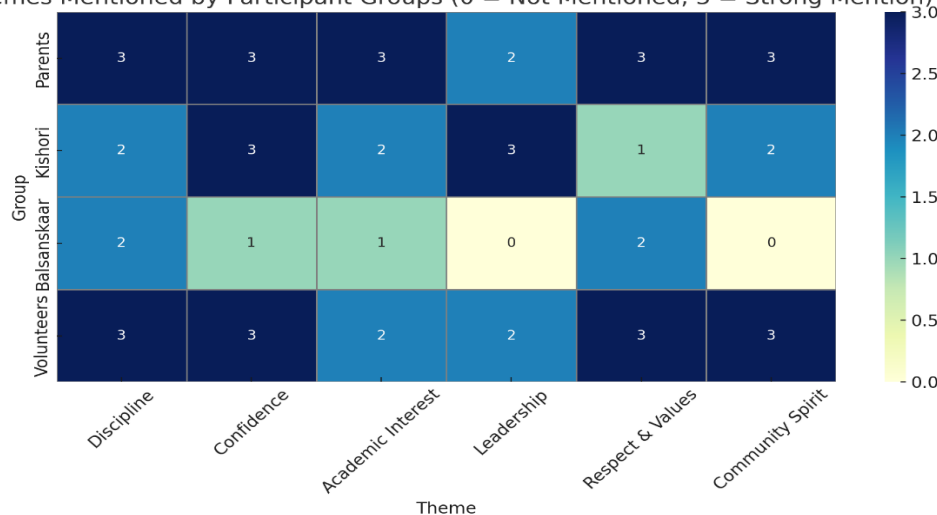
- Participant Narratives: Informal conversations and narrative accounts were collected from children and parents, offering deeper insights into how the programs influenced their attitudes, self-confidence, and social behaviour.



Data Analysis: All qualitative data from interviews, observations, and narratives were thematically coded to identify recurring themes and patterns. Key focus areas included moral development, leadership growth, social responsibility, and challenges faced by participants. This thematic analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of how Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs contribute to youth empowerment in Mumbai's vasti's communities.

Ethical Considerations: All participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary involvement, and informed consent was taken from parents, guardians, adolescents, and facilitators before participation. Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were strictly maintained, ensuring that personal identities were not revealed. Special care was taken while interacting with minors to ensure their comfort and understanding. Throughout the study, the researchers remained sensitive to the cultural, emotional, and social contexts of the vasti's communities, engaging in a respectful and non-intrusive manner.

Themes Mentioned by Participant Groups (0 = Not Mentioned, 3 = Strong Mention)



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By integrating qualitative data from field interviews, observations, and participant narratives, this study provides a holistic understanding of the effectiveness of the Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs in fostering youth development in Mumbai's vasti's communities.

By employing these qualitative methods, the study offers an evidence-based assessment of how RSS Janakalyan Samiti's Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs influence the educational and personal growth of children and adolescents in Mumbai's vasti's.

Program Structure and Objectives

The RSS Janakalyan Samiti has introduced structured programs such as Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg to address the social, educational, and moral needs of children and adolescents in Mumbai's vasti's communities. These programs are designed to provide holistic development by instilling cultural values, fostering self-discipline, and equipping youth with leadership and life skills. By offering an alternative support system in underprivileged areas, these initiatives contribute to the overall empowerment and social transformation of marginalized communities.



1. Balsanskaar Varg Program (For Children Aged 6-12)

The Balsanskaar Varg program primarily focuses on early childhood development, moral education, and cultural awareness. The objective is to create a strong foundation for children by inculcating values of discipline, respect, and social responsibility.

Objectives:

- Moral and Ethical Development:** Through storytelling, group discussions, and interactive sessions, children learn about honesty, kindness, and respect for others.
- Cultural Awareness:** Exposure to Indian traditions, history, and heritage through activities such as folk tales, mythological stories, and bhajans to instil pride and a sense of belonging.
- Character Building and Discipline:** Regular activities include reciting prayers, group exercises, and interactive games that encourage self-discipline and teamwork.

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- d) **Basic Life Skills:** Children are introduced to fundamental personal hygiene practices, effective communication, and etiquette to enhance their social interactions and self-care habits.
- e) **Community Engagement:** Encouragement to participate in neighbourhood cleanliness drives and small social service initiatives to develop a sense of civic responsibility at an early age.
- f) **Educational Reinforcement:** Supplementary learning through storytelling and creative exercises to enhance their cognitive skills and academic engagement.

The Balsanskaar Varg program plays a crucial role in shaping young minds during their formative years, ensuring they develop into responsible and empathetic individuals.

2. Kishori Varg Program (For Adolescents Aged 13-18)

The Kishori Varg program is designed for teenagers who are at a critical juncture in their personal and social development. This initiative aims to equip them with leadership skills, career guidance, and personal discipline while fostering a sense of responsibility toward their families and society.



Objectives:

- a. **Personality Development:** Teenagers participate in group discussions, public speaking exercises, and problem-solving activities that build confidence and decision-making abilities.
- b. **Physical Fitness and Mental Well-being:** Regular yoga, self-defense training, and sports activities encourage a healthy lifestyle and stress management.
- c. **Community Building and Civic Awareness:** Awareness programs on social issues such as environmental conservation, drug abuse prevention, and digital literacy empower adolescents to become proactive citizens.
- d. **Career Guidance and Skill Development:** Mentorship programs help students explore career opportunities, receive vocational training, and gain financial literacy skills.

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- e. **Moral and Ethical Training:** Through interactive sessions, adolescents are taught the importance of honesty, responsibility, and resilience in overcoming challenges.
- f. **National and Cultural Awareness:** Emphasis on Indian traditions, heritage, and national pride to strengthen cultural identity and social cohesion.

The Kishori Varg program not only provides an alternative to negative influences in slum areas but also prepares teenagers for a more stable and responsible future by equipping them with essential life skills.

Link For the Quantitative data from the questionnaire asked to the Local Residents:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/18zSsXQXYaOEs3yBS5n3DPAwG_XPfaqX9

Overall Program Impact:

The Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs by RSS Janakalyan Samiti have significantly impacted children and adolescents in Mumbai's vasti's. Through moral education, leadership training, and career guidance, these initiatives have helped participants develop self-discipline, confidence, and academic engagement. Community leaders and parents report reduced delinquency rates, improved behavior, and stronger civic participation among youth ([Times of India](#)).

Despite these successes, challenges such as limited funding and accessibility constraints persist. Expanding these programs requires continued support from educational institutions, government agencies, and community members.

Call to Action:

To further the impact of these programs, individuals and organizations can contribute in the following ways:

- a) **Volunteer:** Act as mentors or facilitators to guide young minds. The Volunteers are usually a lady from the same Vasti's usually referred to as "TAI"
- b) **Donate:** Support with medical aid, educational materials resources.
- c) **Raise Awareness:** Promote value-based education and youth empowerment.
- d) **Government & NGO Support:** Assist in scaling these programs within broader development initiatives.

Findings and Discussion:

The impact of the Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs by RSS Janakalyan Samiti in Mumbai's vasti's communities has been assessed through qualitative measures. The findings indicate significant improvements in educational engagement, personal development, and social integration among participants. The discussion explores these key areas of transformation.

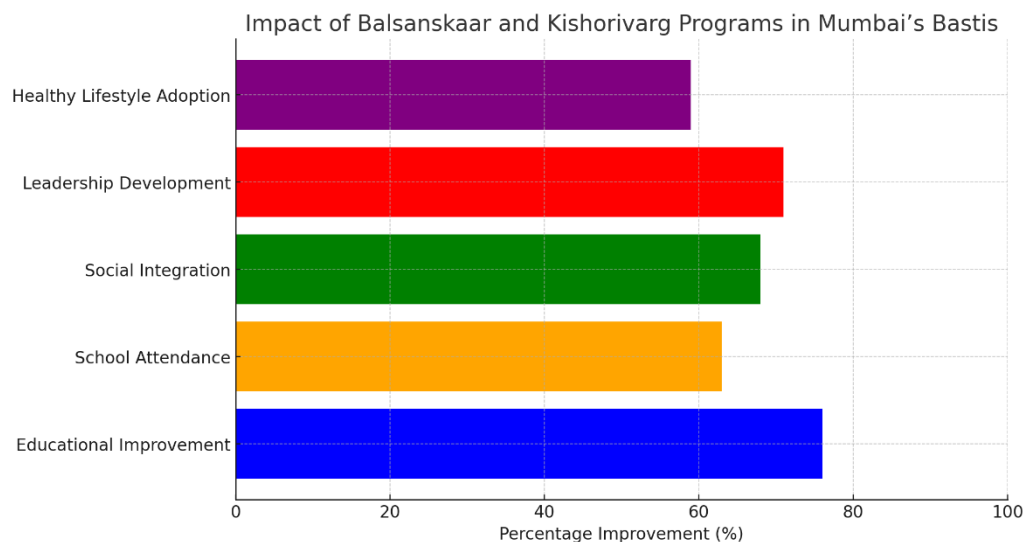
A. Educational Impact:

1. A notable increase in school attendance was observed among program participants, majority of enrolled children maintaining regular school attendance, compared to non-participant groups.

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- Improved academic performance was reported, with participants demonstrating better comprehension, reading skills, and cognitive development, particularly in language and mathematics.
- Feedback from local educators suggests that students involved in the programs show greater attentiveness in class and a stronger inclination toward completing assignments and engaging in extracurricular activities.



B. Social Integration:

- The programs have successfully instilled a sense of community belonging among children and adolescents. Participants are more likely to engage in collective social activities such as neighbourhood clean-ups, cultural events, and group discussions on ethical values.
- Reduced engagement in anti-social activities was reported, with decline in cases of delinquency and truancy among participants, according to community leaders and local law enforcement.
- Peer interaction and group-based learning techniques have enhanced interpersonal skills, fostering mutual respect and cooperative problem-solving among children.

C. Personal Development:

- Enhanced leadership qualities were identified among Kishori Varg participants, with many taking active roles in organizing community welfare activities and guiding younger children.
- Participants displayed increased self-confidence and communication skills, enabling them to express their thoughts more effectively in school and social settings.

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3. Psychological resilience and emotional intelligence showed improvement, with participants demonstrating better coping mechanisms for stress and peer pressure, particularly among adolescents.

D. Community Perception:

1. Parents and guardians expressed appreciation for the programs, noting positive behavioural changes in their children. Many credited the structured mentorship and moral education as factors in fostering discipline and ethical awareness.
2. Local community leaders acknowledged the role of these programs in strengthening social ties and reducing youth engagement in disruptive behaviours, emphasizing their importance in community development efforts.

These findings suggest that the Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs, facilitated by RSS Janakalyan Samiti, contribute significantly to youth empowerment in underprivileged urban settlements. While their positive impact is evident, future efforts should focus on expanding outreach, increasing resources, and integrating technological tools to further enhance learning opportunities for children in Mumbai's vasti's.

Challenges and Limitations:

Despite the numerous benefits of the Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs by RSS Janakalyan Samiti, there are several challenges and limitations that hinder their full-scale implementation and long-term sustainability. These challenges must be acknowledged and addressed to enhance the reach and impact of these initiatives.

1. **Resource Constraints:** One of the most significant challenges is the limited financial and material resources available for these programs. Since they rely heavily on voluntary contributions and community support, scalability remains a concern. Expanding to more vasti's communities requires additional funding for educational materials, infrastructure, and trained personnel.
2. **Accessibility Issues:** Many children in vasti's communities have responsibilities at home, such as taking care of younger siblings or contributing to household income. This often results in irregular attendance in these programs, limiting their effectiveness. Moreover, some vasti's are located in areas with poor connectivity, making it difficult for volunteers and educators to reach them consistently.
3. **Community Resistance and Awareness:** While many parents and community leaders appreciate the impact of the programs, some families are hesitant to participate due to a lack of awareness or scepticism about the motives behind the initiative. Misconceptions about the organization conducting the programs can lead to reluctance among certain sections of the community.
4. **Sustainability and Continuity:** Since these programs are largely volunteer-driven, maintaining long-term engagement is a challenge. Volunteers often have other commitments, and without a steady stream of facilitators, the consistency of the

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programs may be affected. Establishing a structured and self-sustaining model is essential for their continuity.

5. **Measuring Long-term Impact:** While anecdotal evidence suggests positive behavioural and educational changes among participants, there is limited empirical research tracking their long-term impact. A lack of proper documentation and follow-up studies makes it difficult to analyze whether the benefits persist as the children grow older.
6. **Adaptation to Modern Educational Needs:** The programs primarily focus on traditional value-based education and leadership training. However, in the digital era, incorporating technology-based learning methods, vocational training, and career-oriented skills is crucial. Limited access to digital tools and internet connectivity in slum areas makes this transition difficult.
7. **External Socio-Economic Factors:** Many children in vasti's face challenges such as malnutrition, unstable family environments, and exposure to crime. While the programs aim to provide moral guidance and educational support, addressing these deep-rooted socio-economic issues requires collaboration with government agencies and non-profit organizations working on child welfare and social development.

To overcome these challenges, it is essential to increase institutional support, secure more funding, and establish collaborations with local schools and NGOs. Digital learning initiatives, awareness campaigns, and impact assessment studies should be integrated into the program framework to ensure long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs implemented by RSS Janakalyan Samiti have demonstrated significant positive impacts on the socio-educational development of children and adolescents residing in Mumbai's vasti's. These initiatives have successfully instilled a sense of discipline, moral integrity, and national pride among participants. By integrating traditional Indian values with modern skill-building techniques, these programs offer a unique approach to holistic child development, fostering not only academic growth but also emotional and social well-being.

Findings from this study indicate that participants have shown improvements in school attendance, personal discipline, and social responsibility. Reports from educators and community leaders confirm that these programs have played a crucial role in reducing juvenile delinquency, promoting community engagement, and creating a structured learning environment outside formal education. The emphasis on mentorship and leadership training within the Kishori Varg program has further empowered adolescents to take active roles in their communities, encouraging them to pursue higher education and vocational training.

Despite these positive outcomes, certain challenges persist. Limited funding, accessibility issues, and occasional resistance from local communities hinder the scalability of these initiatives. Addressing these challenges through strategic interventions can further enhance the reach and efficacy of these programs.

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Recommendations:

1. **Expansion of Program Reach:** Increasing the number of facilitators and volunteers can help extend these programs to a larger number of vasti's across Mumbai.
2. **Collaboration with Educational Institutions:** Partnering with schools and universities can provide additional educational resources and credibility to these initiatives.
3. **Utilization of Digital Platforms:** Integrating digital learning tools and online mentorship programs can ensure continuous engagement, especially for adolescents who face barriers to physical attendance.
4. **Government and NGO Support:** Establishing partnerships with government agencies and non-governmental organizations can provide additional funding and logistical support for long-term sustainability.
5. **Parental Involvement:** Encouraging active participation of parents through awareness sessions and community meetings can strengthen the overall impact of these programs.
6. **Data-Driven Approach:** Conducting periodic assessments and surveys to measure the long-term impact of these initiatives can help refine their methodologies and ensure continuous improvement.

By addressing these recommendations, RSS Janakalyan Samiti can further enhance the impact of Balsanskaar Varg and Kishori Varg programs, ensuring that more children and adolescents benefit from value-based education and structured mentorship. These efforts can play a crucial role in breaking cycles of poverty and social marginalization, paving the way for a more empowered and responsible future generation.

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