

*“This is something we can do on our own”*

# Empowerment-based mentoring model for adolescent children

Action-Research in Bihar

Centre for Budget and Policy Studies  
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## Executive Summary

In India, many adolescent children, especially girls, have significant difficulties in terms of their access to quality education, health care services, and safe transportation (Morton, Bhattacharya and Kumar, 2018). This is true especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. The prolonged period of school closures during this time has led to an unprecedented rise in learning losses, school drop-outs, early marriages, and paid or care work done by children. Given that children already have very limited power in terms of decision-making, mobility, choice of education or livelihoods, it is very critical to create spaces of learning that enable children to become independent, thinking and engaged citizens-in-making.

Our project titled *Empowerment-based Mentoring Model for Adolescent Girls: Action Research in Bihar*, was conceptualised to do just that. Hereby referred to as the **Bihar Mentorship Project (BMP)**, this project was developed an empowerment-based mentoring model that can easily be integrated into regular public-school curricula and pedagogical approaches at the secondary level. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit and schools were shut down for more than two years, we conceptualised, developed and implemented a distance-learning intervention called **Learning through Letters**, based on the same principles as the in-class mentoring module. In the process of doing so, we also realised that teachers were not always equipped to work with children from vulnerable communities, especially in the context of emergencies. Therefore, we also conceptualised an **Education in Emergency toolkit** that would help teachers or teacher-trainers to create spaces of learning and critical thinking even in emergency situations.

The primary purpose of the BMP was to provide adolescent children the tools and resources necessary to develop critical thinking skills, especially related to their own identities, their belief systems and prevailing social norms. Learning from our experiences working in education and empowerment initiatives, we wanted to develop a flexible and responsive model and pedagogical tools that would organically evolve in response to the ground realities of the socio-cultural and economic contexts within which it was functioning. In essence, we wanted to plan, develop and undertake an **action research** project that focuses on mentoring adolescent girls and boys that raises self-confidence, individual aspirations, leadership and negotiation skills, aimed at enabling political participation and action at the community level. We deliberately decided to work with boys and girls for two reasons: (1) boys also face exclusion and discrimination and (2) both boys and girls benefit from developing critical thinking skills that help them to question and change existing gender relations and norms.

The BMP started on 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2018. We identified five schools in Patna and Muzaffarpur based on the input of Department of Education officials and our analysis of secondary school-wise data. We started working with over 700 students in 9 government schools and one NGO-run school in Muzaffarpur and Patna in Bihar after completing an initial baseline. We started our work with them when they started

studying in Class 6 and 7 and followed them through their transitions to 8 and 9. Mentors were identified for each of the sites, and mentors started implementing the programme, once a week in each of the schools (one school a day per week) starting June of 2018. We refer to this period as the first phase of the BMP.

However, these regular activities were disrupted when the Covid-19 pandemic hit in March of 2020. With the complete closure of schools, the programme could not be continued as is. We understood based on our telephonic surveys with the children that children faced enormous social and educational challenges. In order to mitigate these challenges, we designed the Learning through Letters (LtL) initiative with the goals of continuing to work, mentor and deepen the teaching-learning process with almost all of the 700 children with whom we had been in touch through the first phase of the BMP. We consider this our second phase of the BMP. The letters in LtL contained learning materials, poems, stories, and activities that were delivered twice a week to all the children. Once the lockdown was lifted, we then used the materials developed for LtL to create community-based classes in each of the areas that we were working with.

The methodology that we were using – that of action-research – was able to help us to navigate the unpredictable changes in the social landscape, and our mentorship model evolved from an in-person, in-class mentoring module to a remote learning engagement. Throughout this process, we kept detailed documentation, not only about the ways in which children were learning, but also the challenges encountered during the process, the resistance that we faced with communities, teachers, and even children, understanding the logistics of delivering critical thinking frameworks through a distance-learning mode, and the implications of all of these aspects on the larger enterprise of educating children from marginalised communities.

If we examine the institutional framework of education, which is our first point of entry, we could see that the schools that the children study in are woefully inadequate for the enterprise of education, however narrowly it is defined. All children are not even provided basic infrastructure such as benches, toilets, water, fans, electricity, etc. At the same time, we can also see that the administration of the schools were also experiencing the same resource-constraints. For children who have survived the pandemic, the prospects of further education are severely hampered by the spectre of care work and paid work.

Despite these resources constraints, based on the results of telephonic and in-person surveys in addition to interviews, focus group discussion and informal interactions, it is clear that within a short period of time, the mentoring model did shift children's attitudes on various aspects of gender, including gender roles, attitudes, capabilities and violence. While there is a clear shift that can be captured through the quantitative surveys, even the qualitative data indicates that the conversations within the classroom acted as breakage points into neatly constructed narratives, whether they were of knowledge production, caste, gender, and climate change.

The impact of the project was not only felt by the children, but the teachers as well. During this process, we realised that when teachers were interested and participative in the classrooms, the children benefited immensely. So, prior and after the Covid-19 pandemic, a series of teaching workshops were conducted. After the workshops, teachers felt one of the biggest lessons that they are trying to incorporate is the joy, fun and happiness that comes from learning. They felt that this was essential for children as they had gone through so many troubles in the lockdown.

We strongly believe that the convergence of localisation, flexibility and scalability and broad-based applicability is the only way to bridge the divide that we see in the current schooling objectives and results (Batra, 2005). The potential of the mentoring modules is that they can provide children a safe space to explore their own abilities, their imagination, and their identities, it can bolster critical thinking abilities and allow them to expand their knowledge horizons. This way, children are able to sift through information and knowledge bases to question socially entrenched ideas and attitudes about social identities, roles or capabilities.

These small shifts in attitude are especially important given the stability of structural factors that define children's lives. While the mentoring model can create safe spaces for critical thinking, they also require reinforcing elements. While we can implement the same module in every school and still get some results, it requires the active cooperation of the entire schooling system to truly transform children into active, thinking citizens. From our understanding, it is important that we take the following learnings from our study seriously in order to build a better learning environment for all children:

1. Integrate critical thinking and critical pedagogical practices in regular teaching learning exercising
2. Revamp teacher training and school accountability.
3. Focus on diverse communication and learning materials to build resilient schools.
4. Develop independent strategies for deep engagement with communities.
5. Support social and child protection measures

The need to adopt these models is quite urgent precisely because of the resource constraints already present. It is vital that children learn to embrace hope and optimism and develop resiliency and confidence in their own abilities in making up their own understanding of the world. We require, more than ever, thinking citizens who are able to create and sustain accountability structures, and are able to understand complexity and diversity in our social fabric. We feel that the BMP and the LtL models are a small step towards building that vision.

## Acknowledgements

This report is the culmination of a long, in-depth and enriching action-research study to build a critical thinking mentoring model for schools in Bihar. It could not have been conducted without the active and extensive support of our funder – the Malala Fund. They provided us encouragement, understanding, and autonomy to make our way through difficult times and put faith in our abilities to deal and cope with unexpected hurdles and evolving challenges.

Our special thanks to the Government of Bihar, especially the Department of Education and the Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC). The action-research, the mentoring models, and the Learning through Letters (LtL) initiative could not have been conducted without their active support in every step of the way – especially through the first and the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The teacher training workshops were successful because of their continuous encouragement. We especially like to thank Dr. Binodanand Jha (Director, Research and Training, Department of Education, Bihar), Shri Sanjay Kumar (former State Programme Officer for Teacher Training and in-charge for Quality of Learning, BEPC) and Shri Vyasji (Vice Chairman, Bihar State Disaster Management of Authority, Government of Bihar) for their words of advice and useful insights. We would also like to thank Smt. Kiran Kumari (State Programme Officer, Quality, BEPC) who helped us plan and execute the teacher trainings that we conducted. Mr. Syed Moin (UNICEF consultant and former faculty of State Council of Educational Research and Training and former principal of District Institute of Education and Training) and Mr. GVSR Prasad (UNICEF consultant and former principal of District Institute of Education and Training) were immensely supportive of our work and welcomed every opportunity to work with us in training resource persons and teachers. We also like to thank Sumbul for her efforts in helping us gain access to Madrassa schools.

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This research was also completed with the help of Sunai Consultancy. They dealt with inclement weather, hard-to-trace-children, changing dynamics in the field, and the

threat of the impending pandemic with remarkable alacrity and provided us clean and usable data from which we could design mentoring models and understand its impact. We especially like to thank Pranav ji, Ajit ji and Amit ji for their remarkable commitment to getting the work done, regardless of the constraints. Their faith and confidence bolstered our own.

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Lastly, we'd like to thank the children who very enthusiastically participated and contributed to every aspect of this research project. Even in the dark hours of the pandemic, their vivacity and energetic response to our activities and postcards buoyed our spirits. We learnt many things from them: their ability to find joy at the smallest of things, their faculty to see the world in its realities *and* its possibilities, and their fearlessness in taking on things unknown to them. Perhaps, the most important thing that we learnt from them is the ability to dream in impossible circumstances. This report owes much to their spirit and determination.

## List of Abbreviations

ACP	Assistant Commissioner of Police
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Mid-wife
BC	Backward Castes
BEO	Block Education Office
BEPC	Bihar Education Project Council
BMP	Bihar Mentorship Project
CBPS	Centre for Budget and Policy Studies
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
DIET	District Institute of Education and Training
DISE	District Information System for Education
ERAC	Experience, Reflection, Application, Consolidation
EiE	Education in Emergency
EVS	Environmental Science
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HM	Head Master
IHDS	Indian Human Development Survey
IPS	Indian Police Service
LtL	Learning through Letters
MDM	Mid-Day Meals
MS	Madyamik School
MV	Madyamik Vidyalay
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OBC	Other Backward Castes
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
PDS	Public Distribution System
RMS	Rajkiya Madyamik School
RMV	Rajkiya Madyamik Vidyalay
RO	Reverse Osmosis
RTE	Right to Education
RUMS	Rajkiya Utchatar Madyamik School
RUMV	Rajkiya Utchatar Madyamik Vidyalay
SC	Schedule Castes
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
SICA	Skills, Information, Concepts and Attitudes
SMC	School Management Committee
ST	Schedule Tribes
TLM	Teacher Learning Material
UMS	Utchathar Madyamik School
UMV	Utchathar Madyamik Vidyalay
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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## 1 Introduction

In India, many adolescent children, especially girls, have significant difficulties in terms of their access to quality education, health care services, and safe transportation (Morton, Bhattacharya and Kumar, 2018). Despite the interventions made by state and national governments, non-government organisations and community-based organisations, prospects for social and economic mobility as well as a modicum of self-determination of adolescent children from marginalised communities appear to be dim. This is true especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. The prolonged period of school closures during this time has led to an unprecedented rise in learning losses, school drop-outs, early marriages, and paid or care work done by children. Given that children already have very limited power in terms of decision-making, mobility, choice of education or livelihoods, it is very critical to create spaces of learning (whether they are in school or not) that enable children to become independent, thinking and engaged citizens-in-making.

Our project titled *Empowerment-based Mentoring Model for Adolescent Girls: Action Research in Bihar*, was conceptualised to do just that. Hereby referred to as the [Bihar Mentorship Project \(BMP\)](#), this project was developed [an empowerment-based mentoring model](#) that can easily be integrated into regular public-school curricula and pedagogical approaches at the secondary level. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit and schools were shut down for more than two years, we conceptualised, developed and implemented a distance-learning intervention called [Learning through Letters](#), based on the same principles as the in-class mentoring module. In the process of doing so, we also realised that teachers were not always equipped to work with children from vulnerable communities, especially in the context of emergencies. Therefore, we also conceptualised an **Education in Emergency toolkit** that would help teachers or teacher-trainers to create spaces of learning and critical thinking even in emergency situations.

### 1.1 Rationale and objectives

The primary purpose with which the mentoring model was designed was to provide adolescent children the tools and resources necessary to develop critical thinking skills, especially related to their own identities, their belief systems and prevailing social norms. We wanted to create spaces within government schools that would allow children to examine, analyse, and potentially change their perception and knowledge of themselves, and the world around them. The main goal of our project, therefore, was to empower children to become a visible and vocal part of their families and communities.

Learning from our experiences working in education and empowerment initiatives, we wanted to develop a flexible and responsive model and pedagogical tools that would organically evolve in response to the ground realities of the socio-cultural and economic contexts within which it was functioning. Through a process of continuous documentation, reflection and improvement, we wanted to strengthen pedagogical processes within government schools, by exploring new methods of learning within the

traditional classrooms in government schools as well as building the capacities of teachers who could, in turn, incorporate these processes into their own teaching practices.

In fact, the primary objectives of the BMP project, when originally conceptualised only as an in-school mentoring module, were:

- To plan, develop and undertake an **action research** project that focuses on mentoring adolescent girls and boys that raises self-confidence, individual aspirations, leadership and negotiation skills, aimed at enabling political participation and action at the community level.
- To consolidate the action research project into a **scalable and sustainable approach** that can be integrated into regular school curricula and pedagogy.
- To develop and engage with a **policy advocacy** plan for integration of the learnings from the action research into the secondary school curricular and pedagogical approaches.
- To help CBPS evolve into an organisation that has **a group of young champions for policy advocacy on girls' education and empowerment**, who will play an active role in hand holding different public institutions to help them integrate the mentoring approach in the post-project phase, and therefore sustaining the impact of the mentoring model.

The primary impetus of the BMP was to engage with education, not merely as a tool to increase literacy and numeracy skills, but centrally as the ability to critically think, reflect, empathise, question and act. The underlying philosophy of the BMP was to ensure that children, especially girls, who face hardships and exclusion for a variety of reasons, structural or otherwise, are entitled to an empowerment-based holistic education. Centrally, we wanted to ensure that the BMP was able to take into consideration the diversity of social forces and institutions that the children function within, appreciate the fluid realities of impoverished environments, and understand the importance of failures as learning experiences. We deliberately decided to work with boys and girls for two reasons: (1) boys also face exclusion and discrimination and (2) both boys and girls benefit from developing critical thinking skills that help them to question and change existing gender relations and norms.

The BMP started on 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2018, and we started working with education experts and senior education administrators in Bihar to identify the areas in Patna and Muzaffarpur that were economically poor. Based on their input as well as our analysis of school-wise secondary data, we identified five schools in each of the two districts.

Within these schools, we focused on girls and boys from the age group of 11 to 14 (from class 6 to class 8) in schools. All-in-all, we worked with over 700 students in 9 government schools and one NGO-run school in Muzaffarpur and Patna in Bihar. Starting in 2018 and working all the way through the Covid-19 pandemic to 2021, we worked with the same set of adolescent children.

*Table 1.1: List of school and strength of students*

<b>District</b>	<b>Name of School</b>	<b>Total No. of Girls</b>	<b>Total No. of Boys</b>
Patna	UMS HIMMATPUR	205	158
	RMS IMAMPUR	283	193
	SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	426	
	UMS NADIYAPUR	115	74
	UMS NATWARIYA	175	142
Muzaffarpur	RUMS BIRPUR	101	104
	RUMS MOHANPUR	170	176
	UMS SHANTIPUR	97	95
	UMS SHAKTIPUR	189	189

**Source:** School Resources Data as collected by CBPS in 2018.

We started our work with them when they started studying in Class 6 and 7 and followed them through their transitions to 8 and 9. The rationale for targeting this age group is to introduce conversations of agency, body, self-efficacy, and empowerment at a critical stage in the life cycle of girls and boys. Mentors were identified for each of the sites, and mentors started implementing the programme, once a week in each of the schools (one school a day per week) starting June of 2018. We refer to this period as the first phase of the BMP.

However, these regular activities were disrupted when the Covid-19 pandemic hit in March of 2020. With the complete closure of schools, the programme could not be continued as is. We understood based on our telephonic surveys with the children (details in later section) that children faced enormous social and educational challenges. In order to mitigate these challenges, we planned a multi-pronged approach that took into consideration the challenges of factors such as the spread of infection, the continued closure of schools and the limited access to children. We designed the Learning through Letters (LtL) initiative with the goals of continuing to work, mentor and deepen the teaching-learning process with almost all of the 700 children with whom we had been in touch through the first phase of the BMP. Because we already knew that online methods were not going to reach a majority of the children with whom we were working with, we used letters as a way of maintaining connections, distributing learning materials and creating alternate spaces for learning for students. We consider this our second phase of the BMP. The letters in LtL contained learning materials, poems, stories, and activities that were delivered twice a week to all the children. In short, the objectives of LtL were:

- To reach the maximum possible children because they couldn't be reached through online methods or medium, with the express purpose of continuing our work on critical thinking
- To continue creating space for reading and comprehending with the ancillary objective of mitigating learning losses and to keep up curiosity in learning
- To continue engagement with children and their parents so as to prevent any dropout when schools eventually opened

- To deepen our relationship with students, parents and teachers to create a support system and encourage girls to get in touch in case of any emergency.
- To understand the issues that children are facing with respect to education

While the material that was developed for LtL followed the same guiding principles as the mentoring module, we were also clear that these were self-learning materials with no mentor present. Therefore, we also followed principles that applied to Open and Distance Learning (ODL) to ensure that children were still able to engage with the materials independent of the mentors.

Once the lockdown was lifted, we found that schools were still closed for a long time. To ensure that children were able to benefit from a continuous period of learning, we then used the materials developed for LtL to create community-based classes in each of the areas that we were working with. We followed this all the way through to the end of the project period. We also created a toolkit for educators to engage with children in times of emergencies. We will describe the development of each of these modules in subsequent chapters.

## **1.2 Importance of the study**

Our primary objective was to develop a dynamic mentoring model that would have the capacity to respond to the changing articulated needs of adolescent youth and take into consideration the diverse and changing contexts in which adolescents function under. Given our focus was already on engaging with regressive push-back from social institutions and the barriers that children face with education, we found ourselves in a unique position to test and understand these barriers during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. The methodology that we were using – that of action-research – was able to help us to navigate the unpredictable changes in the social landscape, and our mentorship model evolved from an in-person, in-class mentoring module to a remote learning engagement. Throughout this process, we kept detailed documentation, not only about the ways in which children were learning, but also the challenges encountered during the process, the resistance that we faced with communities, teachers, and even children, understanding the logistics of delivering critical thinking frameworks through a distance-learning mode, and the implications of all of these aspects on the larger enterprise of educating children from marginalised communities.

Because we had adopted this action-research framework, we were able to gain deep insight into the specific contexts of any situation that we were working with. More importantly, the framework foregrounded the barriers and challenges that exist, and forces us to examine critically not just our intention and motivation, but also the possibility of failure. Given that we were able to document almost all aspects of failure, resistance as well as success, we were able to understand the dynamics that determined these movements and shifts. This helped us unpack the layers that provided us an understanding of the social phenomena underpinning these movements. All of these

aspects helped us address the heart of what we wanted to engage with: empowerment through education, through any form of emergency.

We understand that the term itself – empowerment - and what it represents is full of contradictions (Sharma, 2008). It can mean anywhere between individual actualisation to collective mobilisation for social change, or an open-ended, ongoing struggle to tackle continual and intersecting oppressions or transgressing of social barriers to create alternate discourses of equality and justice. So, our focus in this project has not been to posit that our mentoring modules ‘created empowerment’ or that ‘they work’. We are well aware that the process of empowerment requires a complex confluence of actors, circumstances and sheer luck. However, what we have been very successful in doing is to make visible the patterns and observations of the complex factors that affect children’s access to education *so that* we can develop specific modules, toolkits, or policies that can address these issues.

Therefore, this report documents not just the theoretical knowledge of the complexities of education within marginalised contexts, but also the specific mechanisms by which these complexities interact and the tools that can potentially address them. The research accompanying the implementation of the modules helped us look deeper into the specificities of the context and *use* this knowledge to building new systems that will help children understand, negotiate, and engage with the world, on their own terms.

To understand how this was done, we first describe the theoretical frameworks from which we derived the BMP model, after which we provide a description of the different phases of BMP. We then provide a glimpse of the complexities of marginalisation that children have to engage with in order to access education. We also describe the various implications of these forms of marginalisation during an emergency (such as pandemic). Next, we focus on the impact of these interventions on children’s attitudes, behaviour and understanding of the world around them. We specifically focus on the influence on teachers, as we feel this is vital to creating sustainability of these concepts within the schools that we worked with. Lastly, we focus on the major learnings of the project in addition to the tools and material we have developed during the course of this project.

## 2 Empowerment, education and critical thinking

### 2.1 Defining empowerment

Empowerment is not easily defined, and there are several ways in which the term has evolved and has been used (Jha et al, 2018). When we embarked on this project, we felt it was necessary to understand empowerment as a continuous process by which members of a marginalised community (or even the entire community as a whole) have access to and utilise the necessary resources and tools to participate and take action in social spaces that they have traditionally not been a part of. Empowerment defined in this manner implies that improvements in social outcomes such as education, labour force participation, gender violence, or political participation are not outcomes, but are a means to a constantly evolving end. It is a continual process of engagement with powerful and rigid social structures and a continual pushing back and negotiating with regressive, stable, and institutional structures (Rowlands, 1995).

Integral to this definition of empowerment is the collective and individual journey where members of the marginalised group develop a sense of self, explore and engage with new relationships and ideas, and are able to build social networks so as to achieve a collective goal. It is also important to define this form of empowerment as inherently diverse and context-specific as the exploitation of marginalised groups is influenced by the geographical and social location of people, including their educational status, their identity markers (caste, gender, class, religion and age), and their access to public services and utilities. In fact, empowerment necessarily has to engage with the consequences of the asymmetries of class, caste, region and religion and as such are not easily divided into neat boundaries. For example, all of our previous work with schools and educations indicated that while we might aspire towards 'castelessness' in our notions of classrooms, they functioned very much within the rules of caste and class systems (Paranjape, 2007).

The methods that have been highly influential with respect to empowerment have involved concepts of 'collective conscientisation', advocated by Paul Freire. Collective conscientisation is a process by which members of the marginalised communities are provided the tools and information to engage with self-reflexivity techniques that allow them to connect larger systems of oppression with their own subjective experience. The utility of using this framework is tied to two central ideas: (1) that any form of empowerment goal or outcome is inherently negotiated by social actors engaged in the struggle and (2) the material manifestation of this process is never neat and easy to identify.

This methodology of engaging with empowerment also foregrounds the importance of recognising the diversity within seemingly similar homogenous groups. For example, if we are talking about empowerment of adolescent boys and girls, the concept of reflexive or critical thinking allows us to recognise that they are not always functioning in the social world *only* as 'boys' and 'girls'. Instead, it allows us to trace the ways in

which particular knowledge- systems have the potential to create specific vulnerabilities in boys and girls, through dominant rules, norms, and role definitions. It also helps us recognise that girls and boys use whatever social, economic, or cultural power that they are able to harness to navigate these vulnerabilities (Hartstock, 1989).

## 2.2 Transformative appeal of education

Although there are different ways to engage with empowerment of communities or children, a primary method involves education. When education is administered as an ongoing process by which children learn to question, to think, and to act, it naturally aligns with empowerment in that it has the potential to be truly transformative. However, the current state of education is barely empowering for children. Whether we look at caste, class or gender, those in the marginalised communities have fundamentally different experiences with schooling systems as compared to those who are more privileged. In fact, the educational system, as a whole, has been quite instrumental in institutionalising patriarchal and oppressive values (Latta, 1989). Paul Freire was very vocal about the ways in which education systems help individuals in any society start to acquire specific cultural and ethnic norms that then are internalised into characteristics that are typified of their cultural, ethnic, religious, gender, and class norms.

As an example, with regards to gender, the natural result of socialisation (both outside and inside of schools) is girls and boys are socialised into particular feminine and masculine identities that are then used to socialise them into gender-appropriate behaviour. Girls are groomed towards passivity, dependence, and emotional care-giving whereas resistance and anger are seen to be more acceptable for boys than for girls (Slater, Gutherie & Boyd, 2001). Girls are also socialised within the family and inside the classroom to engage in 'conventional female behaviour' (Slater, Gutherie & Boyd, 2001), and a critical part of that is losing their voice. For example, teachers tend to reinforce gender norms by attributing different emotions for girls (fearful) and boys (angry) for the same action (crying) (Rosser, 2003). These cultural norms sometimes are independent of educational outcomes (Kuruville & Nisha, 2005). For example, despite high rates of educational outcomes, girls tend to have very entrenched views on femininity, womanhood, and the role definition of how a woman should be (Kuruville & Nisha, 2015). Thus, education as an institution or as a process is not value-free (Rosser, 2003) and the development trajectories of both boys and girls within educational systems are tinged with the power differences that are present in the communities. This also means that unequal power dynamics are not necessarily erased by the gaining of knowledge; instead, they can be exacerbated by it and create new dilemmas for any form of emancipatory imagination.

Another danger with focusing on education as a method for empowerment is also that it can often shift the burden on those disenfranchised by the system. Any form of subordination cannot be transformed only by those who are marginalised. Institutions, norms, and practices do require change in order for space and accountability systems to

work. So, while children can be empowered not to be passive consumers of information around them, and can be trained to actively engage and transform their own lives, they cannot do so if the educational systems around them continue to produce the same caste, class and gender dynamics prevalent in society (Latta, 1989).

Therefore, it is important to engage the entire schooling system – the administrators, the teachers, the parents, the community and the children – in order to ensure that spaces are created within educational institutions for marginalised and invisible voices to participate. In order to pave the way for educational systems to incorporate safe spaces that allow for children to learn, to question and to explore (Sidorkin, 2002), we felt that the school (as a whole) has to be our site of intervention, and the focus has to be on adolescent children.

### **2.3 Dynamics of adolescence**

One of the reasons we decided on engaging with adolescent children is because of the unique period in their lives, where they are developing social identities along with social cognition, problem-solving skills and visual and spatial skills. During this particular period of time, adolescents especially start to develop a greater sense of the abstract thinking abilities, and are able to understand and form a particular identity that is different from that of their peers and their parents and family. They also have greater mental abilities to pick up nuances of language. So, problems of complexity and difficulty is easier for adolescents to deal with, as compared to younger children.

Another reason for choosing adolescence is also because of the social and interpersonal ramifications for boys and girls at this time. During this particular period in their lives, girls are typically socialised into their families, taking up social roles that promote dependency, and care-giving. In sharp contrast, boys are socialised away towards independence, autonomy and aggression (Rosser, 2003). This also has implications on what they learn within the classroom where masculine subjects such as maths and science are seen as ‘too tough’ for girls and appear to have natural affinity to boys. Similarly, technology is seen as a domain of the boys, and characteristics are attached to boys in a way that is not seen for girls.

Moreover, girls are not provided any guidance or role-models with regards to success and often confronted with role conflicts that are barriers with respect to their own aspirations and ambitions (Kuruvilla & Nisha, 2015). Moreover, they are also likely to have had experienced violence, either through interpersonal violence, or through violence experienced within their families (Lee-Rife et.al, 2012). In fact, about 27% of all married adolescent girls have experienced violence of some nature from their spouse, and 7% of all women in the country have experienced sexual violence of some kind before they reached the age of 18 (Singh & Gururaj, 2014). In fact, in the same study, the authors reported that about 20% of adolescents between the ages of 14 and 19 experienced some form of physical, sexual, or psychological violence (Singh & Gururaj,

2014). Taken together, we can see that the world view, particularly for girls, is alarming and bleak.

Other health indicators for all adolescent children, especially in India, are also not positive. Apart from malnutrition among youth in marginalised communities (Singh & Gururaj, 2014), substance abuse also happens to show up very early among adolescents, especially when we examine smoking, drinking, and drug-abuse issues (Slater, Gutherie & Boyd, 2001). These behaviours especially are linked to the kind of support networks that adolescents cultivate and have access to. During this time, adolescents are also seeking to define themselves, either with or against their parents, and associate more and more closely with their peers. This is not necessarily negative, as peer groups can provide good socialisation skills and more diverse world views, if the peer group is heterogenous in nature. Moreover, social isolation is a harder problem to deal with in adolescence, and it is healthy for adolescent to rely on social networks and groups to create a sense of self and identity (Christie & Viner, 2005). This, along with the accompanying physical, sexual, and psychological changes, that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood, can be alleviated if they are allowed to expand their world views and expand their choices.

This is also important because peer groups and families can enable the construction of an ideal type, within which an exaggerated sense of a masculine and feminine ideal is created. When girls and boys start to impose certain gendered attitudes and roles on themselves and their peer groups, on what boys and girls cannot do, they start to draw from the cultural and social discourse, often without conceptualising, questioning, or understanding the import of these underlying narratives. It is precisely because of this reason that it is important to provide diverse avenues of being a particular man or woman. These diverse (instead of idealised) identities are essential in establishing mechanisms by which adolescents can be more engaged, articulate, and independent individuals. This is also the mechanisms by which children can express their own individualities and construct these larger discourses to suit their worlds, instead of the other way around.

These are some of the reasons that we felt that focusing on adolescent youth would help us understand the relationship between critical thinking, education and empowerment better. However, because adolescence is such a vulnerable time in the life course of an individual, the approach that we wanted to take – holistic, individual- and context-specific – had to also have a different pedagogical approach. This is one of the reasons why we decided on ‘mentoring’ as the major lens through which we approached our engagement with empowerment and education.

## **2.4 The pedagogical framework of mentorship**

One of the primary reasons that we decided to use mentorship as a primary pedagogical framework is because we wanted to approach the delicate triangle of empowerment-education-adolescence not as ‘knowers’ or ‘teachers’, but as ‘co-learners’. Given that we

wanted to evolve a responsive model that catered to the diversity of adolescent boys and girls coming from marginalised backgrounds, we felt strongly that this could only be achieved by co-creation (Latta, 1989). Therefore, the use of a mentorship model, instead of an implementation programme, would be more useful to facilitate a change in the pedagogical structure of educational systems. We already know from the literature that promoting competence and strengthening social resources in adolescent children cultivates resilience and protects them from severe physical and psychological stress. By emphasising the framework of mentorship, we wanted to ensure that a different form of pedagogy could be used that could simultaneously address the differing and changing needs of adolescents. By harkening back to the original Greek definition of the term (Quarles, Maldonado & Lacey, 2005), we want to use mentoring as a way to provide the space and time to create positive relationships. ensure learning that extends beyond academic achievement, and build a collective and individual identity not tied to normative and dominant social norms. We also felt that because mentoring is a process by which the mentor and the student start to create a space where they are able to talk to each other, on an equal footing (or as close as it can get), it would be an ideal tool by which we could create pathways to empowerment within the classroom (Polikoff, Desimone, Porter & Hochberg, 2015).

We wanted to ensure that the authoritative line between the mentor and the student are blurred in such a way that they are free to openly raise questions, debate, disagree, and argue within the classroom. While open communication is the medium for this approach, the key to making it successful is to consciously adopt an active imagination (so that one could extend empathy for the student's point of view) as well as build a strong sense of trust and camaraderie among the students. This also implies that the mentors must not only know the children well and pay attention to detail, they must also be invested in values of equity, participation, and exploration, values not often associated with today's classrooms. The use of a mentorship model (rather than teaching or implementation of activities) meant that we could facilitate a different pedagogical structure with core values: promoting competence, cultivating resilience and independence, and making the process of education free of physical and psychological stress.

Through the idea of mentorship, we also wanted to

- provide the space and time to create positive relationships
- ensure learning that extends beyond academic achievement
- build an individual identity that is not tied to traditional social norms or identities.

While we used mentorship as a framework for our model, we also wanted to showcase the manner in which incorporating mentoring could enhance learning outcomes of children. The idea, therefore, was not to distinguish between teaching and mentoring, but to showcase how mentoring can be an integral aspect of any teaching pedagogy that can be included into any schooling systems to beneficial results.

### 3 The evolution of the BMP model

The primary purpose of the BMP was to evolve a critical thinking model that prioritises critical thinking skills within boys and girls within the government schooling system. Apart from integrating our pedagogical tools into the existing curricula of the state, we also prioritised localisation and the articulated needs and responses of children. Because of this, we constantly evolved the model that was closely attuned to the ground realities of implementation, especially with regards to the socio-cultural and economic contexts of the children. We were able to do this only because our project was conceptualised as an action-research project. Both of those aspects – action and research – were critical for the evolution of the model. For instance, the action aspects of the project were related to the mentor’s interaction with the students once a week for about three hours in each of the schools. Enabled by a critical thinking and mentoring framework and continuous training processes, mentors conducted these activities within these classrooms.

At the same time, they were also documenting the responses of the children, recording the challenges encountered, and providing extensive feedback on the activities conducted through weekly calls and monthly reports. The research team, in turn, documented these patterns extensively in their call notes, and developed the next set of modules or activities based on these reports or call notes. The final model, therefore, is a product of this constantly iterative process. Both the implementation and the research were in a continuous feedback loop so that the diversity of student needs, the challenges that students faced, and the issues that they were dealing with could be addressed systematically and comprehensively. The methodology of action-research, therefore, was crucial for the development of the BMP model.

#### 3.1 The centrality of action-research

In order to create a mentorship model that evolves to respond to the diverse and changing needs of the adolescents that we are working with, we decided to adopt the analytical framework of action-research. Given the stability, rigidity and resistance of social institutions, the delicate transitional nature of adolescence, and the need for empowering forces within educational institutions, we felt that the method of action-research was best to develop a mentoring model.

Action research is essentially the process by which a group of individuals (in a community or in an organization) identify a problem, create a solution to address it, and evaluate how the solution resolves the problem, and recreate or remodify the solution. The characterizing features of the framework is that it creates a ‘dual commitment’ to study a social problem, and act *with* the social actors (engaged with the social problem) to address it. Understandably, this breaks down the traditional relationship that a researcher typically has with their respondent / subject. The interaction between the studier and the studied becomes more fluid – and there is a space for co-learning.

The typical process by which this interaction occurred in our work was cyclic. As with any research process, it started with diagnosing or defining the problem at hand, considering the various courses of action, selecting and implementing the most feasible course of action (by dialogue or through participation with the main stakeholders, often children or teachers), evaluating the consequences of the chosen course of action, as regards the problem, and the identifying the problem areas as well as the outcome of the action on the problem. The second cyclic process commences at this point, with identifying the problems that might have arisen with the chosen course of action.

Although this process is also present in other research and interventionist methodologies, the characteristic feature of this framework was its adherence to reflexive and dialectic critique, by both researchers and participants of the research. Put more simply, the stakeholders started to become a collaborative resource rather than a passive receptive audience. This, in turn, allows for a plurality of structure and viewpoints, incorporating contradictions, differences, and resistance in the research process. This allows space for addressing emancipation and the overcoming of power imbalances, so that the research methodology itself can be a process through which social transformation of the peripheral groups of society can take place, firstly through their inclusion, and ultimately, through their active participation. Therefore, the framework of action-research was able to inform theory, practice, and policy in a transformative cycle.

Essentially, the methodology of action-research allowed us to engage with the community of adolescent children and helped us document this engagement. The simultaneous process of implementation and documentation provided us a blueprint not necessarily of 'right' or 'wrong' approaches, but of highly contextualised engagement gave us insight into the ways in which the model can be replicated and duplicated in other social contexts. The methods that we followed were diverse and were used extensively to provide us a richer picture of the situation on the ground, as described below.

### 3.1.1 Quantitative surveys

We conducted two types of surveys during the course of the project. One form of survey that we conducted was to understand the impact of the programme. So, we conducted a Baseline survey before we started the programme. We also conducted a Midline survey just prior to the pandemic. The original plan was to conduct an Endline of all of the students at the end of the programme period. However, given the pandemic situation, we were unable to reach the students given the restrictive movement. Therefore, we have used the data for our Midline as an Endline for our interventions in the classroom, as we completed the Midline just prior to the Pandemic. Apart from this Baseline-Endline survey, we also conducted three rounds of telephonic surveys that were primarily to gauge children's access to technology during the pandemic period. These telephonic surveys not only helped us understand the access to technology, but also provided us insight into children's responses to LtL (that we implemented during the

pandemic). In fact, the first telephonic survey allowed us to conceptualise LTL, the second helped us modify our interventions, and the third allowed us to assess the impact of the LTL interventions.

### *3.1.1.1 Baseline-endline surveys*

The [baseline survey](#) was conducted in July 2018 for about 700 students in classes 6 and 7. The main purpose of the survey was to understand the socio-economic profile of the households in terms of caste, occupations, educational profile, living conditions, asset ownership and migration status. In addition to this, we wanted to understand the lives of these children in terms of their daily activities, time use, their social life and attitudes towards gender and caste. This understanding enabled us to cater to the intervention design to suit the current levels of skills and learning. The [endline survey](#) (originally, the midline) was conducted in the month of February 2020 just before the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Although the baseline survey was conducted in the schools, we had to slightly change this strategy for the endline due to the on-going teachers strike at that time.

While the survey for the students in Patna could be conducted in the schools itself, for Muzaffarpur, we had to conduct the interviews in the villages. The strategy used was simple - the mentors helped the survey team to familiarise themselves with the location of the villages and also helped the survey team to identify the children who were part of our intervention. Once the children were identified, a fixed time schedule was given to them as per their convenience, when they had to meet the survey team for the interview. The location of the survey was a spot that was comfortable and familiar to the child, like under a tree near her/his house, or the premises of the common playground and so on. One child was interviewed by one surveyor. Apart from organising the logistics of the interviews, the mentors strictly stayed away from the interview process, so that children do not feel any pressure from the presence of the mentors to answer in particular ways. Consent of the child and the parents/guardians was taken before every interview.

For the baseline survey, we had information related to around 700 children, but not all of these children could be reached during the endline. We reached about 704 children during the baseline survey and about 468 children during the endline survey. This was due to many factors. During the baseline survey, we had surveyed the children in the schools and hence, they were easier to reach. During the endline, the surveys were conducted in the households; hence, we were unable to reach a lot of them. The girls from Krantipur (which was closed at the time of the survey) were left out for the endline because they came from multiple villages and it was not possible for the teams to locate all the households spread across many villages and blocks. The plan was to visit the girls in the Krantipur after the schools reopened after the teachers' strike. However, the Covid-19 pandemic hit at this time, and because of the national lockdown imposed shortly thereafter, we had to abandon the idea of including the Krantipur to our endline sample. Among the 468 students interviewed for the endline, 363 of them

had been surveyed during the baseline and about 105 were new children surveyed during the endline. Please note that the 'new' children surveyed were not new to the mentorship model. The 'new' children in this context only implies that they are new to the endline and were unavailable for survey during the baseline period.

*Table 3.1: Description of sample by school and gender*

School Name	Surveyed only during Endline period		Surveyed during both Baseline and Endline period	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
RMS IMAMPUR	12	14	14	49
RUMS BIRPUR	1	7	7	12
RUMS MOHANPUR	10	10	11	33
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL		5		36
UMS HIMMATPUR	4	10	16	29
UMS NADIYAPUR	2	2	15	25
UMS NATWARIYA	7	6	19	28
UMS SHANTIPUR	3	3	13	23
UMS SHIVRAHA VASUDEV	6	3	14	19
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>254</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 3.2: Description of sample by school and class*

School Name	Class 7		Class 8	
	Surveyed only during Endline period	Surveyed during both Baseline and Endline period	Surveyed only during Endline period	Surveyed during both Baseline and Endline period
RMS IMAMPUR	15	23	11	40
RUMS BIRPUR	2	7	6	12
RUMS MOHANPUR	9	27	11	17
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	5	36		
UMS HIMMATPUR	7	34	7	11
UMS NADIYAPUR	1	20	3	20
UMS NATWARIYA	9	25	4	22
UMS SHANTIPUR	5	20	1	16
UMS SHAKTIPUR	6	15	3	18
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>156</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

Both the baseline and the endline surveys were conducted with the help of the survey team from Sunai Consultancy (Patna). During both of the surveys, there were approximately eight people who were interviewing children. Since the subject matter of the survey was sensitive and involved posing questions to adolescent girls, special care was taken that there were more women in the survey than men. One of the members was also nominated as the field supervisor (by the end of the training session) who managed the team and monitored the survey process.

For both baseline and endline, we conducted a three-day training programme with the Sunai team before beginning the survey on the field. The team was extensively trained on asking each of the questions clearly and sensitively. We also discussed the ethics of working with children, did extensive role-plays and conducted a local pilot to ensure that the investigators were able to understand the intention of each question, understand children's responses or discomfort, and the importance of maintaining confidentiality throughout the process. The surveys were first conducted in one district before moving into the other. All of the interviews were conducted with the full knowledge and consent of the schools involved, as well as the parents of the minor children.

The field entry followed a particular procedure: the mentor in each of the schools would contact the headmaster of each of the schools before the commencement of the survey whether it was within the school or within the community. On the first day of the survey, the field supervisor along with a few other surveyors would make a list of all the students in our roster and contact them. Students would then be interviewed by the surveyors in batches of seven. It was emphasised that all the interviews be conducted in an area where the students felt comfortable. Moreover, surveyors were also instructed to discontinue any interview if the children were uncomfortable or did not want to answer any questions. Once all the students were surveyed from the supervisor's list, the team would move to the next school. At the end of each day, the Sunai team would collate and verify the data sheets, and at the end of the data collected, they processed and shared the data in Excel formats. The CBPS team, in turn, cleaned the data further, processed it, and analysed it in Excel as well.

#### *3.1.1.2 Telephonic surveys*

As mentioned earlier, we were able to interact with the children regularly in their schools prior to the pandemic, but when the first lockdown was announced and the schools closed in March 2020, we had no way of contacting children. As soon as the lockdown commenced, we tried contacting them through their phone numbers – either by calling them or through social media. Because we had information about the children from our Baseline-Endline surveys, we created a list of children whose phone numbers were functional and the mentors started contacting all of them. We followed up with the students in two more intervals, each survey adding layers of information to what we had already collected from the Baseline-Endline study.

The first round of survey was conducted from April to May 2020, and this was immediately after the lockdown was announced. The primary objective of this survey was to understand children's access to phones, and to figure out whether telephonic or online systems were feasible for children to continue their education. The mentors called up the parents and the children listed in our data base, and went through a short questionnaire with them. Based on the results of this survey (discussed in subsequent sections), we found out that we would not be able to contact more than half of the students (42%), and this was the impetus for creating LtL which would help us reach more children in a more interactive fashion. We conducted the second round of survey around July and August of 2020, right after the first wave of the pandemic. This was part of a [larger study](#) that was undertaken in partnership with the Education Champions Network of the Malala Fund. This survey was done in partnership with other organisations, and assessed the impact of the first wave of Covid-19 on the lives of adolescent boys and girls. While other organisations were able to conduct in-person interviews, for our schools, our mentors continued with the telephonic surveys, as the access to the communities was still heavily restricted.

The third and last round of the survey was conducted almost a year later in June-September 2021, right after the second wave of the pandemic had receded. We wanted to understand the impact of the two waves of the pandemic on children's education and to gauge the impact of the letters on children's continued education. We used a combination of in-person interviews and telephonic interviews for the third round. This was primarily driven by two factors: (1) we were unable to access children via the telephone as schools or tuitions or paid work had started, and (2) access to communities had opened up. Therefore, our third round of telephonic surveys were augmented by in-person interviews, especially for those who remained unreachable through telephones. All of the data was collected by our mentors or by the CBPS research team, and were collated into a database in Excel. As with the Baseline-Endline surveys, we cleaned and analysed the data using Excel.

### 3.1.2 Interviews, interactions, and informal discussions

Apart from the quantitative surveys, we also collated a lot of qualitative material fairly systematically throughout the entire project period. To ensure that we were constantly in touch with the evolving situation on the ground, the Bangalore team would have regular once-a-week calls with each of the mentors (separately) to discuss the progress made during the week, the problems that they encountered, and the dynamics that were developing in the field. Based on these conversations, the team would write detail call notes. In addition, the mentors would also write weekly and monthly reports related to specific instances that they witnessed and the evolving dynamics within the classrooms. The notes, taken together, provided a detailed accounting of almost every day spent in the classroom and gave us a lot of insight into the lives of individual children. Although the nature and depth of this interaction changed significantly in the post-Pandemic era because of limited physical contact with the children, the engagement that the mentors continued to have with children continued to be recorded systematically over the years.

In addition to these weekly reports, the team also conducted in-person interviews with teachers, students, parents and other community members during their regular field visits to the field. We would interact and observe the activities done in the field in addition to informally interviewing children either individually or in a group. All of these were also recorded systematically through field notes. Towards the end of the project period, the mentors also identified a set of 20 children whom they felt was emblematic of the BMP in some form. Based on discussions with the Bangalore team, they interviewed the parents, the teachers and the children themselves to create a set of 22 case studies that highlighted issues related to child marriage, effects of paid work and care work, and gendered understanding of the world, among others.

Taken together, all of this rich qualitative data, built considerable understanding of the systemic and individual challenges in the field. While this was primarily used during the research project as the foundation upon which modules were developed, it was also used to assess the impact of the programme on the lives of children.

### 3.1.3 Resource and community mapping

When we first entered the field, we did a community mapping of all the areas around the schools where the children were residing to understand the community and family backgrounds (Call note with mentors, 18 Dec 2020; Call note with mentors, 9 April 2021). We also asked our mentors to create a school resource list through which we could understand the various aspects of the school infrastructure that were available to the students (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 21 Sept 2018). For example, in the initial visits to the Krantipur, we were able to discern that they had access to cleaning drinking water through an Reverse Osmosis filtration system and they felt the need to have a CCTV installed in all of the public areas within the schools. Both the community and resource mapping allowed us to design our activities in a way that corresponded to the available infrastructure and facilities available to the children.

The resource and community mapping came in very handy when we were designing the LtL as well, as we had an understanding of the needs of the community, in addition to the ways in which physical mobility would impact certain communities more than others (Call note with mentors, 18 Dec 2020; Call note with mentors, 9 April 2021). We were also able to quickly establish close connections with the children and the parents because we had already an understanding and relationship with the children, their parents, and communities, through these processes.

In addition to the resource and community mapping, we also completed a thorough review of the Bihar Board Curriculum of Class 6, 7, and 8 (all subjects) that had direct linkages with our module. We created this [curricular resource](#) for teachers, administrators and educators alike to showcase the convergence between our classroom practices / objectives.

#### 3.1.4 Attendance monitoring

When we first started conducting the activities in the BMP, we realised that children were missing out on the accumulative knowledge that could be gained from the activities because of frequent absences. Because children were often irregular in their attendance, we started monitoring quite closely the attendance of students. We used this data to redesign our modules. For instance, we started to adopt spiralling in our modules, so that activities could have lasting impact on children. Another reason we used this attendance data was to understand the specific systemic reasons for the irregularity. For example, several children told us that they were unable to come as they had to take care of their homes or their sick relatives. This gave us an understanding of the work burden that children had at their own homes, and this, in turn, impacted our design of the module accordingly.

#### 3.1.5 Continuous training and support on content and pedagogy

For each of the activities that we conducted, we trained the mentors extensively. In addition to two-three days continuous training at the beginning of each stage of the module, we also trained them during the weekly calls. The trainings for the mentors were not just related to the content of the pedagogical tools. It was also on various other matters such as field notes, visual documentation, time sheets, daily and monthly reports. For example, we extensively discussed with them the rationale, the nature and the importance of quality of field notes as well as the proper ways to take photographs and videos (both ethically and technically). We also explained the nature of the daily and the monthly reports and the manner in which the orientation has to be changed from reporting of activities to insights gained from the activities (Fieldnotes, 12 Sept 2018). With the mentorship model itself, we also went over all the details required including the supplies required, the intention of the activities, the questions that can be raised by the activities and variations that they might be able to adopt.

Based on our understanding of the field and the critical role that teachers played in the implementation of the model, we also build the capacities of teachers. While the mentors would often loop the nodal teachers (identified with the cooperation of the Department of Education) into the activities, we also felt that it would be useful to orient teachers to the pedagogies that we were using in the classrooms. We also wanted to ensure that teachers were able to adopt these pedagogical practices within their own teaching practices. In the post-Pandemic period, we were continuously in touch with the teachers, and they were closely involved in the LtL initiative. Based on our understanding of the situation and ongoing conversations with the Department of Education, we also created and executed a training programme on Education in Emergency that would help teachers prepare to teach through innovative methodologies during periods of emergency. These training programmes provided us an understanding of the systems of education that the teachers had to deal with and gave us additional insight into planning our critical thinking modules taking these systemic barriers into consideration.

In addition to the mentors and teachers, the research team (along with mentors) also underwent an intensive 5-day training on the ERAC approach that provided us the basis for the various methods, tools, and approaches that we used in the BMP models as well as the LtL initiative. As the ERAC approach was a significant portion of the manner in which we articulated 'critical thinking' within our modules, we will describe this briefly in the subsequent section.

### **3.2 The framework of critical thinking**

One of the major considerations that we had while designing the BMP modules as well as the LtL was diversity of students. Because of the information that we gleaned from our baseline surveys and our community mapping exercises, and subsequently from our classroom interactions, we knew that we were dealing with a tremendous variation of capabilities, interests and resources (Call note with mentor, Patna, 23 Nov 2018; Call note with mentor, Patna, 19 Jan 2019). Therefore, we wanted to ensure that our module was flexible enough that we could change the mode of engagement of the activity, while retaining the objective of the activity. Therefore, each of the activities that we designed moved from different styles of engagement and different classroom arrangements. For example, we moved from individual-level activities to group-level activities within the session so that children had opportunities to work together in groups as well as by themselves. This ensured that students with different learning abilities, interests and personalities are accommodated within the same session using different approaches by the mentors. For instance, a student who cannot write well can express his/her ideas during an oral session or a student who is usually very shy can express his/her thoughts freely in a smaller group rather than a classroom.

For instance, we often used oral forms of engagement to help children to engage in a free-flowing format that required more demonstration or illustration such as storytelling, poem recitation, debate or discussion. Instead of merely reading out a story, we would provide an unusual picture (such as a spoon on the roof of a house) and ask the students to create a story around the image. Other methods were integrated into this method. To ensure that children were also practicing their reading-writing skills, we could ask the children to also write the story down. We also used other creative methods to help children create their own connections between verbal and written concepts through activities. For example, in one of our activities, we asked children to use objects to depict emotions and then asked them to create a story around that artifact or emotion. These kinds of methodologies not only allowed to use locally available materials as teacher-learning materials (TLM), but we were also able to deepen children's understanding of themselves and the world around them.

In addition to all of these techniques and tools, we also followed a specific framework titled Experience, Reflection, Application and Consolidation (ERAC) in almost all of our activities. Facilitated through Subir Shukla, we were able to use the framework of ERAC to create a specific structure around the activities so that it was easier to create variations around the activities based on the specificities of the context. The ERAC

framework usually starts with a primer. A **primer** serves as an introduction to the session that help the mentors create interest in the activities amongst the children and builds a level of curiosity. Primers help to engage the attention of the students, so that they are ready for the activity. Next comes the experience. The **experience** is essentially any activity or discussion that help students engage with the major objective of the session. If the objective of the session is to help children understand caste dynamics, the experience allows them to first 'experience' the implications of a caste-based system and its resulting inequalities.

After the experience, it is vital that children are allowed to reflect on the experience and find out the underlying mechanisms by which they themselves have understood the experience. For example, if children have played a memory game as an experience, the reflection allows them to reflect on the principles by which they were able to win or lose the game. The **reflection**, therefore, allows children to engage with the principles underlining the activity and pushes them to think beyond the obvious. Often, facilitation is required for this activity, and we encouraged mentors to not 'lecture', but ask them questions of 'what', 'how', 'why', 'if...then' etc. For example, we would try to get children to observe or reflect their own observations or verify their own knowledge. The push was to move the children from 'what', 'when', and 'where' to 'what types', 'why', or 'how' questions so that children are thinking more critically about the material that they are encountering. The next step is to apply this knowledge. The **application** exercises often helped the student to grasp the knowledge provided and gave the space and time to rearticulate the knowledge gained during the previous two activities in their own way. Essentially, application allows the students in using the knowledge that they already have.

The last and perhaps the most important part is the **consolidation**. Consolidation of knowledge is critical to complete the learning process as it helps in both deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge. It must be noted that consolidation is not to conclude – it is not the summarisation of information as much as it is the process by which children are able to understand the information that they received into concrete ideas. Consolidation is about children 'knowing' something, but about children knowing how and why they know something. Essentially, consolidation helps children to decode the logic behind a particular chain of thought and this enhances their abilities to apply these same principles to different contexts.

While designing the BMP modules as well as the LtL materials, we were also cognizant of the various types of knowledge – Skills, Information, Concepts and Attitudes (SICA) – and the various methods, activities and exercises that could build each of these over the course of our project. For example, if particular skills were being built – such as writing – we ensured that there was an element of unpredictability and difficulty. It was important for us to get children to move past the traditional boxes of what writing or story-telling was, so that they could explore for themselves the different forms of articulation.

Similarly, if we were providing information, we often connected it to a larger macro idea. If we were engaged in a discussion about healthy diet, we often connected it to gendered distribution of food, or the science behind cooking or the knowledge of estimation required to cook. This helped us to move children to thinking more conceptually. We taught children to engage with mathematics as a language rather than a subject, and used music as a means to illustrate this. This helped children to see the ways in which their own knowledge of music required a knowledge of mathematics. It helped change attitudes towards knowledge and themselves. Although attitudes are hardest to change, the mentoring modules incorporated practices that helped reinforce certain forms of value systems.

We were very clear that children could not develop inclusive attitudes within the classroom unless the mentors adopted non-discriminatory practices. For example, if children were not interested in the classrooms, mentors would engage with the reasons for their disinterest, instead of dismissing it or ignoring it. This also helped children to be freer in the classroom and we found that they were much more participative in the classroom when their viewpoints were taken into consideration. Informed by the research that was the basis of our understanding of the social context as well as by the critical thinking pedagogies that we had explored, we evolved three modules of the BMP model and about 50 letters for the LtL initiative, the progression of which is briefly described below.

### **3.3 Progression of the BMP**

The first three months of the BMP module was focused on understanding the pedagogical preferences of children, their capabilities, and their interests. Therefore, the first three months of the module focused heavily on activities that enhanced information procession and communication skills. This concentration for activity-based first module is conceptualised for three reasons: (1) for the mentors get a better sense of the children, (2) for the teachers to get a sense of the activities and a way for them to get invested in the mentorship model, and (3) to ensure that we are able to overcome any initial resistance that is very natural in the beginning, especially around caste and other structural norms.

We used a lot of activities to build language and communication skills, used spiralling methods to create a consolidated understanding about basic concepts related to communication and information processing, and projects that helped children use the skills that they were learning. We also incorporated various activities such as Jam Sessions or Quizzes to help children build confidence. Based on the documented experiences of the first module, we decided to focus on caste and knowledge as the main themes of the second module. We felt that children had a clear understanding of the caste dynamics within the classroom and within their communities, but did not have the language or the space to address it openly. So, we wanted to engage with it in a manner that related directly to their lives. We also realise that children felt that they were not 'knowledgeable' or that only 'educated' people were knowledgeable. Therefore, we

decided to focus the next module on various themes: What is knowledge? Who can produce knowledge? How is knowledge created? What are the foundations of scientific principles? What is the relationship between caste and knowledge? What are the structural problems of knowledge that are related to inequality (whether it is of gender and caste)? Based on these foundational questions, we designed the next three months of intervention.

We had completed this module and were planning to conduct two science fairs – one in Muzaffarpur and one in Patna – when the pandemic hit. We had already prepared a transitional module (focused on gender) and were planning to administer it as a precursor to our Gender and Inequality module. We had planning to administer this transition module in April and May of 2020 that would help us evolve the final Gender and Inequality module for the new academic year. Unfortunately, the pandemic changed all of our plans, and we then conceptualised the LtL initiative.

### 3.4 The LtL initiative

As mentioned earlier, the LtL initiative came directly as a result of the first telephonic survey that we conducted to understand children's access to mobile phones. Based on the findings of [this research](#), we realised that due to the structural poverty experienced by students as well as the gendered inequalities inherent in the access to technologies, providing educational material through the smart phone would not be useful for the majority of children in our schools. Instead, we focused on creating an intervention that would be universally accessible and is responsive to the socio-economic contexts of children. We had two primary goals while conceptualising LtL: (1) continued focus on learning, especially with a focus on critical thinking, (2) continued engagement with children so that there are no learning losses. We, therefore, developed a multi-layered delivery model that included low-tech (print and post) means of communication supplemented by high-tech resources (audio and video) for those who could access them.

Our main mode of communication was a printed card written from the mentors that was delivered to all of the students twice a week. We also created school-segregated WhatsApp groups of children who could access their families' phones. We provided supplementary information such as audio and video materials that complimented the material we were sending via postcards. We reinforced this connection by individual phone calls that mentors made once a month or every few weeks to children. We also provided pre-addressed and stamped postcards to children so that they could correspond with us. All of these materials were also sent to the teachers, so that those who were in touch with their teachers could use them as support mechanisms. We also sent all the children reading and writing materials, in the form of books, stationery and story books.

The pedagogical frameworks and the content creation of the LtL was very similar to the ones used in the BMP. The only exception was that we had to keep in mind that the

children utilising LtL did not have a mediator who could facilitate their engagement with the learning materials, and therefore, the materials had to be organised and conceptualised keeping in mind a self-learner. Accordingly, we followed a few principles that were useful in developing the cards.

- Building relationships: We focused on ensuring that the cards were conversational and personal so that children could continue the relationship with the mentors (from whom they were receiving the postcards)
- Simple and precise: Given that the letter did not have a lot of space, we focused on ensuring that the language was simple and more visual so as to make it easier to comprehend. We also used the spiralling approach extensively to reinforce difficult concepts such as stereotypes
- Different activities: Even within the LtL, we used a diversity of activities to suit the interests of the children including interviews with their family members, story-telling or painting
- Contextual and conceptual: We took the children's contexts into consideration in order to develop content that engaged with science, social science, issues of equity, diversity and gender in an integrated fashion.

We used the postcards extensively during successive lockdowns in the first and second wave of the pandemic. Whenever the lockdowns were lifted whether between the first and the second wave, or after the second wave, we tried to use the LtL to engage with the children in-person. We also hosted the community-based learning after finding out that the use of the letters had been uneven, primarily because of the irregularity of its arrival, time available to the children, and reading and comprehension abilities.

In order to ensure that the children from the most marginalised groups were addressed, the mentors made a geographical mapping of the areas and identified through detailed maps the number of households in each of the tolas. Then, they identified the number of children in each of these geographically spread areas who were part of the programme and had not necessarily received all the cards (Call note with mentors, 4 Sept 2020). Based on the concentration of the children and the exclusion of the children from any mainstream education processes, we decided to create groups in the most remote of tolas as well as in the main areas, so as to cover both the areas. This was done especially for the benefit of those (both boys and girls) who were working as they had the least amount of time. Girls, for example, could not travel to the main areas as they had to handle the high levels of care work during the lockdown period. So, it was deemed prudent to make these classes closer to their homes, so that the time and effort was minimal to participate, and we could convince the parents to spare their children for a few hours (Call note with mentors, 4 Sept 2020).

Finding spaces that were not in the school areas was a challenge that we faced. A lot of parents had trepidations about girls being in public spaces, and it was difficult to find public spaces that would be amenable to the ethical practices – social distances, shade,

clean etc. that was required to conduct these classes (Call note with mentors, 4 Sept 2020). But despite these challenges, the blended approach helped us to use the postcard materials to enable continued learning of children in critical thinking skills and fostered peer-learning. Although initially reluctant to let children participate in community classes, parents agreed to send their children for a short time to a nearby location.

We had also originally planned to have two big community events in selected areas in Patna and Muzaffarpur. The sites had been selected, and in some of the places, we had also made enquiries related to the setting up of food and other seating arrangements (Call note with mentors, 9 April 2021). However, the second and more deadly wave of the Covid hit and while there was no nation-wide lockdown this time, there was a significant local level lockdown and all activities had to go back to being online or through postcards again. When the second wave passed, the community, teachers, and even tuition-centres, again supported our community-based short-duration learning engagement. These interactions allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the repercussions of the lockdown and shutting down of the schools on children and communities. In order for us to truly understand the impact of the BMP model and the LtL initiatives, it is extremely important to understand the contexts of children in our communities.

## 4 Contexts of the children

While designing any form of intervention, it is very important to understand the socio-cultural and economic contexts in which children are coming from. We need to understand the world views in which children are situated, whether that is related to the value or belief systems or gendered discourses that they are surrounded by. Only after understanding these social norms and discourses, can we hope to start working with children on building critical thinking skills. We tried to understand the contexts of children through various means: the baseline study, our community and school resource mapping exercises, our observations in the classroom, and secondary data available about the districts.

We primarily chose two districts in Bihar: Patna and Muzaffarpur. Based on extensive discussions with the Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC), we selected the semi-urban block of Phulwarisharif and within Muzaffarpur, we selected the block of Bochaha. The five schools that were selected within these blocks are the following:

- Patna: RMV Imampur, UMV Himmatpur, UMV Natwariya, UMV Nadiyapur and Jashpur School.
- Muzaffarpur: RUMS Birpur, RUMS Shaktipur, RUMS Mohanpur, RUMS Shantipur, and Krantipur.

Within Patna, Jashpur School is an all-girls school which is located in the urban block of Kurjee. Unlike all the other schools, it is an NGO-run school and caters to children coming from slum communities in and around the Kurjee area. In Muzaffarpur, we also had an all-girls context – Krantipur – which catered to girls located in various parts of the Bochaha block. We strongly felt that inclusion of these two all-girls contexts provided us greater insight into the specific marginalisations faced by girls.

Additionally, we had initially included two Wakh Board Madrassa schools, one located in Muzaffarpur and Patna. They had been part of the Baseline study as well. Starting in 2018, we would go regularly to the madrassas to conduct the activities, but we would often find that children were not in attendance. However, over the course of a few weeks, it became very apparent that the madrassas were not invested in the process and attendance was very irregular. Even after spending the whole day in the school, we would not find any students in the classes. Finally, after months of trying to do the activities in the schools, and upon consultation with other advisory members, we decided to stop our work with the madrassas (Fieldnotes, 22 Oct 2018). So, for the sake of this report, we will only take into consideration the 9 government schools in Patna and Muzaffarpur and the NGO school located in Patna.

### 4.1 Geographic and demographic profile

Bihar is one of the largest states in the country (10.4 crore people) and has very low urbanised populations (11.3%) (Govt. of India, 2011; Govt. of Bihar, 2017). It also has low gender ratio (916 women per 1000 men) and has had a poor record with regards to

women’s literacy (53.3%). It doesn’t necessarily have a high percentage of tribal populations (1.28%), but does have a significant population identified as SC (15.9%). The religious background primarily consists of Hindus (82.7%) or Muslims (16.9%) (Census 2011, 2022). In general, the state is primarily agricultural with most of the population identifying as farmers (20.72%) or agricultural labourers (52.83%) (Census 2011, 2022). In terms of the educational profile of the state, according to the data collected by the District Information System for Education (DISE, 2015-2016), it has over 80,166 primary and upper primary schools, but has a very high teacher-pupil ratio (1 teacher: 50 students). It has also historically recorded high rates of drop-outs at the transitional stages of class 5 and 8 (14.49% and 15.06%).

Patna, being the state capital of Bihar, is the second-most densely populated district of the state, and in correspondence with the state averages, has a very poor sex ratio (897 women for 1000 men). While it has a higher percentage of literate women (as compared to the state average) at 61.96% (NFHS 15-16, 2017), it continues to have issues related to access to education. The drop-out rates are high at 25.5% in class 5 and 22.02% in class 8 (DISE, 2016-2017). As it is one of the most urbanised areas in the state, the occupational profile is more tilted towards urban professions with agricultural farmers and labourers comprising 14.41% and 34.98% of the population respectively.

In some contrast, the rural district of Muzaffarpur, with a population of 48.01 lakhs has about 20% farmers and 52% of the population engaging in agricultural labour. There are very few ST populations (0.12%) although the SC population is comparable to the state average (15.66%). The student ratios are also quite high here and the drop-out rates at the transition phases of class 5 and 8 are also quite high (13.64% and 19.79% respectively), although not as high as Patna. The block that we selected in Bochaha is primarily an agricultural area with a literacy rate of about 44.6%. The Muslim population is relatively low (as compared to Patna) at 49.7% (Muslim Census, 2022).

*Table 4.1: Block, District and State Profiles*

<b>Variables</b>		<b>Units</b>	<b>Patna District</b>	<b>Phulwarisharif Block</b>	<b>Muzzafarpur District</b>	<b>Bochaha Block</b>	<b>Bihar</b>
Population		Lakhs	58.40	1.91	48.00	2.45	100.40
SC Population		%	15.70	23.00	15.66	19.10	15.90
ST Population		%	0.16	0.11	0.12	0.10	1.28
Hindus Population		%	91.70	42.96	84.00		82.70
Muslims Population		%	7.54	56.50	15.50	4.97*	16.90
Sex Ratio		No. of Females per 1000 Males	897	NA	900	NA	918

Variables		Units	Patna District	Phulwarisharif Block	Muzzafarpur District	Bochaha Block	Bihar
Literacy Rate	All	%	70.68	59.70	63.43	44.60	63.80
	Women	%	NA	NA	NA	NA	53.30
	Men	%	NA	NA	NA	NA	73.40
Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER)	Primary level		NA	NA	NA	NA	93.50
	Upper Primary level		NA	NA	NA	NA	79.20
Gender Parity Index (GPI)	Primary level		NA	NA	NA	NA	1.04
	Upper Primary level		NA	NA	NA	NA	1.09
Occupation Status	Cultivators	%	14.41	3.70	20.72	3.00	20.72
	Agricultural laborers	%	34.98	5.90	52.83	8.50	52.83
	Workers in Household Industry	%	4.54	0.60	4.06	0.50	4.06
	Other Kinds of Work	%	46.08	9.60	22.38	3.08	22.38

**Source:** Census 2011 (for Population, Sex Ratio, Literacy Rate); UDISE+, 2019-2020 (for GER & GPI); \* Muslim Census 2022

## 4.2 Community profile

While the communities that we selected were marginalised, there was some diversity within the blocks. For example, the block that we chose in Patna – Phulwarisharif – was largely a peri-urban area with a tremendous diversity in the communities. For example, Nadiyapur was a semi-rural colony with some features of rurality in the interiors and more urban dwelling towards the peripheries, Himmatpur was an area which was largely agriculture-based. The other two areas - Natwariya and Imampur - were more urban in nature, with both low-income neighbourhoods and slums. These areas are slowly being urbanised with new apartments coming up in its peripheries. In Muzaffarpur, the areas are much more homogenous. They are an hour's away from the main town of Muzaffarpur and are mostly rural in nature with agriculture and livestock as the primary means of livelihood for the residents.

There was also tremendous diversity with mobility and access to public utilities. In Patna, for example, some areas were more traversable through shared autos, cars and other vehicles as compared to others. Even within a specific geographical region such as Nadiyapur or Himmatpur, the state of the roads, access to sanitation and other facilities was diverse. We found that in certain caste-concentrated areas, or areas that were designated as slums, the access to public transport and other public utilities (such as

toilets) were sparse, and especially during the rainy season, walking through these areas was quite difficult. This diversity was also present in rural areas wherein geographical caste distribution was much more visible. Schools and other facilities such as banks and post offices were often concentrated along caste lines. In some areas, caste hamlets were often kilometres apart and that often meant that children from those localities rarely attended school. Sanitation facilities were absent and in some communities, there were no regular access to water or electricity.

### 4.3 Household and family profile

The overall development of the child is influenced by multiple factors including environmental, biological, familial, geographic, social, economic and others. The families and the households in which the children grow can have tremendous influence on the way children look at the world, how they think about themselves, what they hold dear, culturally and socially, as well as their willingness to learn and understand the world around them. In fact, family acts as the first sphere of building social connections for the child and has a bearing in forming ideas and beliefs with which they grow and learn and hence shaping their value systems. More instrumentally, it has a tremendous influence on the learning abilities of the child and their performance at school.

#### 4.3.1 Household facilities

The caste profile of our sample indicates that most of our children belong to the most marginalised communities with 47% belonging to the OBC community, 19% being SC/STs and one fourth of them being Muslims. About half of the children were living in pucca houses (53%), and this percentage was greater for children living in Patna (69%). With respect to access to toilets, we found that 70% of the children surveyed belonged to households which had a private toilet within or outside the house premises and 25% of them still practiced open defecation. Although 59% of children belonging to SC/ST castes lived in pucca houses where 46% of them said they go for open defecation, indicating that while their houses might be pucca, there were no toilets in them. While 28% of the children from OBC households went for open defecation, comparatively, only 3% of the Muslims said they had to go out for defecation.

*Table 4.2: Caste Distribution by School*

School Name	General Category	Muslim	OBC	SC/ST
RMS IMAMPUR	2%	61%	30%	3%
RUMS BIRPUR	4%	67%	15%	11%
RUMS MOHANPUR	5%	0%	64%	27%
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	15%	7%	51%	17%
UMS HIMMATPUR	2%	0%	54%	37%
UMS NADIYAPUR	11%	0%	32%	55%
UMS NATWARIYA	3%	70%	13%	10%
UMS SHANTIPUR	7%	0%	79%	10%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	7%	0%	90%	2%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>19%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 4.3: Type of house distribution by caste*

Caste	Pucca House	Semi-pucca house	Kutcha house
General Category	54%	19%	27%
Muslim	63%	20%	17%
OBC	48%	25%	26%
SC/ST	59%	28%	14%

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 4.4: Number of rooms in household by caste*

Caste	1 room	2 rooms	3 rooms	4 rooms	5 rooms	6 and more
General Category	15%	15%	19%	23%	19%	8%
Muslim	11%	33%	27%	13%	6%	9%
OBC	4%	28%	19%	19%	13%	17%
SC/ST	14%	34%	18%	15%	8%	10%

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 4.5: Type of toilets in household by caste*

Household Caste	Toilet within the house premises	Private toilet outside the house	Private Pit	Public/community toilet (any type)	No toilet - open defecation
General Category	77%	15%	0%	0%	8%
Muslim	86%	8%	2%	0%	3%
OBC	54%	15%	1%	1%	28%
SC/ST	41%	9%	1%	1%	46%

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

Access to electricity was fairly universal with 95% of the children having an electricity connection within their households. Urban households appear to be faring better in terms of access to electricity (100%) as opposed to rural areas (90%) where children are still deprived of electricity connections within their households.

We also wanted to gain an understanding of the physical space that was accessible to children. While not necessarily used as a measure of poverty or marginalisation, it can point to the density of the household and lack of resources. We also looked at this to understand the measure of privacy afforded to children within the household. We found that about 9.2% of the children lived in households with just one room in the household. Households with two, three, and four rooms were 28%, 22% and 19% respectively – indicating that while there are some children who have access to space, more than 50% do not have space of their own. In fact, when we asked about sharing space within the household, a little more than half of the students belonged to households where two people or less shared a room in the household. In general, we found that 41% of the

students in Patna lived in pucca houses and just two or less people sharing a room whereas in Muzaffarpur, such conditions were available for just 22%. This is slightly indicative of the luxury of the private spaces, and hence students in Patna seemed to be slightly better off than students in Muzaffarpur.

What is housed within the household is also critical to understand the material and social conditions of the family. Therefore, household assets are, to some extent, reflective of the economic status of the household and also, the quality of life (IHDS, 2004-05). When we examine our data, we find that the number of household assets possessed by households in Patna was higher than in Muzaffarpur with an average of 5.9 assets as against Muzaffarpur with an average of 4.8 assets. Around 52% of the households had some livestock, and this was higher in Muzaffarpur, with 87% of them reporting one livestock asset. The asset ownership did not vary by caste.

*Table 4.6: Asset ownership by caste*

Caste	Average of Total number of items	Average of Number of vehicles	Average of Number of household use items assets	Average of Number of animal husbandry related assets
General Category	7.2	1.3	5.5	0.3
Muslim	7.5	1.2	5.9	0.3
OBC	7.4	1.5	5.3	0.6
SC/ST	7.4	1.3	5.5	0.6
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>0.5</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

The most commonly available assets in the household were mobile phone (100%), cot/bed (98%), Electric Fan (91%), LPG (84%) and gas stove (82%). The high availability of LPG and gas stove could be attributed to the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana which is a scheme run by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. The least available household assets were motorcycle (36%), refrigerator (22%) and car (3%).

We also examined ownership of the slightly luxury assets like refrigerator which require high usage of electricity and found that 32.6% of the total households in Patna possessed a refrigerator as against just 9% of the total households in Muzaffarpur. Eighty percent of the households in Patna possessed a television as against just 33% of the households in Muzaffarpur and 98% households in Patna possessed an electric fan in comparison to 82% households in Muzaffarpur. In general, it appears that children in Patna are coming from slightly wealthier families as compared to those in Muzaffarpur and have slightly higher quality of living as compared with Muzaffarpur.

#### 4.3.2 Family characteristics

To explore children's lives in greater depth, we asked about various family characteristics including parents' occupation, education and migration status. Part of

the reason is because all of these characteristics can have a significant impact on the education, mobility and occupational choices of children. The kind of occupations that parents have, for example, can greatly impact the income levels for the family and hence, influence the ability of the parents to provide basic necessities, nutrition, health care, conducive environment at home and requisite resources for educational support. Moreover, children from low-income households are more likely to take up more household responsibilities and paid work as compared to those with high-income households.

Additionally, occupational mobility tends to be very difficult among the lower castes, and they are often confined to low skill jobs like cleaning, manual scavenging, casual wage labourers, rickshaw pullers, and street vendors. These kinds of occupational differences create lifestyle inequalities and also inequality of opportunities (Despande, 2008). Moreover, these caste differences are exacerbated within specific geographical settings (such as urban-rural) and this difference (instead of decreasing) has increased over the last decade (Mukherjee et al, 2011).

In our sample, we have a total of 4,324 family members reported among the 704 students that were interviewed. When we look at the occupational distribution of family members, 39% of the sample consisted of students. These were mostly the siblings of the students in our sample. The next category of livelihoods was unpaid domestic work (16%), which were primarily women (95%). About 10% reported to be doing some business, 6% said they were doing some factory work, 3% said they were doing construction work and 3% were farmers who tilled their own land, 2% of them were rickshaw drivers, 2% tailors and 2% casual labourers. These people formed 78% of the entire population of family members reported. 6% reported being unemployed. When we looked at the gendered distribution of these professions, we found that mostly men were engaged in occupations such as factory workers (97%), construction workers (96%) and rickshaw drivers (99%).

Among all the fathers who reported that they were farmers of their own land, 74% of them belonged to OBC caste. We find that in our sample, some of the OBC castes were relatively well-off, such as the Yadavs, who form a sizeable number of our sample. Interestingly, 95% of the fathers who were engaged as tailors belonged to Muslims caste. This was not surprising because traditionally Muslims in different parts of North India have been engaged in tailoring and embroidery and this has been inter-generational with the skill work being carried forward by the next generation. From the data, it is clear that apart from a few members, the professions that the parents are involved in are a mix of skilled, unskilled, formal and informal jobs.

Another way to understand the access to social capital, social and economic resources as well as social networks is to examine the migration status of family members. Because of the uncertainties in agricultural income, small sizes of land, low wages, unpredictable climatic factors, lack of infrastructure development, poverty,

indebtedness, people in rural areas often migrate to urban areas in search of better employment opportunities and availability of job. It is assumed that with better income and livelihoods, it leads to better educational options, higher education, better health care, and better access to civic amenities (De Haan, 2011). Whether this actually takes place, it is due to the real and believed opportunities in urban areas that draws this form of migration.

However, migration can have both positive and negative implications for children. On the positive side, it brings in additional income due to increased employment opportunities, better housing facilities, and increase in affordability for better food and health care and reduces poverty. On the other side, migration can pose several challenges to the families left behind. For people belonging to the lower socio-economic groups, as it usually the men who tend to migrate in hope for better prospects, the burden of the household falls entirely on the women. Consequently, this can have an impact on the child. Studies have shown how children from families with a member migrating are more likely to drop out from school. The primary reason for this is often the increased workload in terms of care work that older children often have to bear. This is usually harder for girls (Vutha et al, 2014), as they are considered the natural ‘care-takers’ of the family (as will be described in section 6.2.4). Hence, there is merit in looking at the migration details of family members of students belonging to our sample.

Among all the students surveyed for our analyses, 27% of the students reported at least one migration in the family. Among these, people belonging to the better economic groups reported fewer migrations, with the top three income groups having 23% of the family members migrating as against 38% of the family members of people belonging to the bottom two economic groups. Among the people migrating, 98% of them were men, with 44% being the father of the student and 48% being some other men in the family. The destination of migratory efforts happened to be to the bigger cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and states like Punjab with about 53% of the migrants going to these cities. The most common reasons for migration was for work with 82% of them stating that as the reason and about 10% reported migration for education. Out of this, 91% of all the migrants from Muzaffarpur migrate for work and just 4% migrate for education unlike Patna where about 61% said they migrated for work whereas 22% of them migrated for education. This clearly highlights the socio-economic conditions of the geographical space that propel the nature and purpose of migration.

*Table 4.7: Migration status by caste*

<b>Caste</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
General Category	31%	69%
Muslim	28%	70%
OBC	26%	73%
SC/ST	29%	71%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>72%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 4.8: Migrating member of household by caste*

<b>Caste</b>	<b>Father</b>	<b>Other Male Members</b>	<b>Others</b>
General Category	50%	50%	0%
Muslim	27%	70%	3%
OBC	57%	39%	4%
SC/ST	44%	44%	12%

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

We also looked at the educational levels of the parents. When parents have achieved higher standards in education, the aspirations held by such parents in the academic interest of the children is higher and they tend to utilize various strategies to lead to academic excellence (Vellymalay, 2011). Parents' education and family interaction patterns during childhood also might be linked more directly to the child's developing academic success and achievement-oriented attitudes (Dubow, et al, 2009). Moreover, the social capital accrued through the higher education status (and often livelihoods) are passed onto the next generation, who are then supported to continue the social mobility experienced by the parents.

Conversely, low socioeconomic status or low parental educational levels could affect family interaction patterns and aspirations, which can have a detrimental influence on child behaviour and in turn affect lowered academic and achievement-oriented attitudes over time (Vellymalay, 2011). Taking this into consideration, if we look at the educational status of the parents, we find that 26% of the fathers had no education, whereas about 41% of them had an education level of upper primary and above and just about 5% had some vocational training or degree. The educational levels of mothers were much lower at 40% of them having no education and 29% with education up till primary level. Mothers with some kind of vocational training or a degree were just a mere 1%.

We also wanted to specifically investigate whether parental knowledge can potentially have a bearing on the children. In this case, we investigated their knowledge of various languages. We found that among the students who said they knew how to speak English, 49% of them had mothers who had attained an education level of more than upper primary and above, as against 39% of students whose mothers had below primary or no education at all. When the students said they did not know how to speak English, just 32% of their mothers had an education level of upper primary and above with 52% of the mothers having below primary or no education at all.

We already know that when parents possess a certain level of education, they have wider vocabulary which can help the child develop language fluency (Kainuwa et.al, 2013). So, these patterns do indicate that parents' education does have a visible impact

on the on the skill levels of the child, and it is important for us to pay particular attention to parents' education in the field to support and strengthen other social resources that can allow children to widen their horizons, so that the structural disadvantages are not passed through intergenerationally. It is also important, therefore, to engage critically with parents, so as to ensure they act as support mechanisms for their children's growth.

#### 4.4 School profile

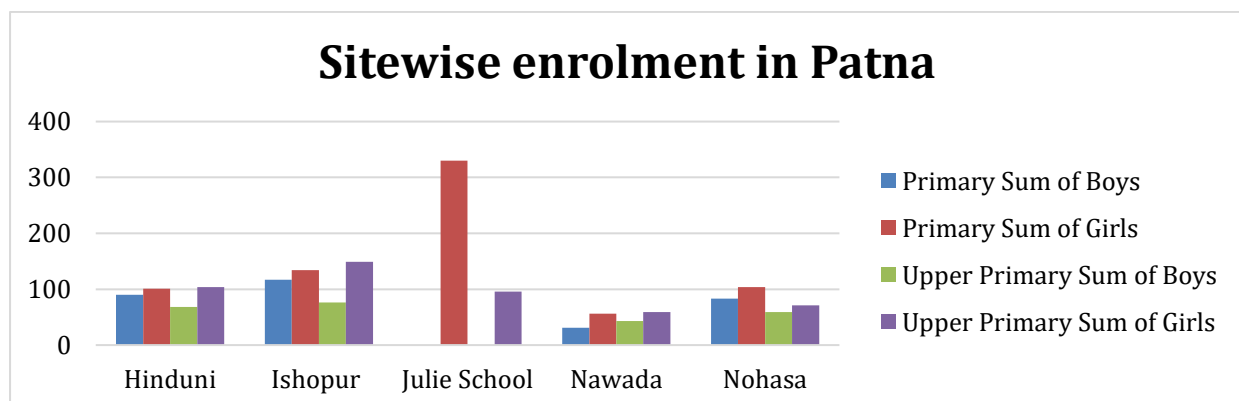
Prior to the pandemic, the institution where children spent majority of their time in is the school. In order to understand the lives of these children, we first have to investigate the relationship that they have with these educational institutions.

##### 4.4.1 Enrolment and attendance

We first start with the gender distribution of the classes. In general, we find that the gender parity index (GPI) at all the schools in Patna is greater than 1 indicating that the number of girls enrolled is higher than the number of boys at primary and upper primary levels of schooling.

While not available in the survey data, our field observations indicate that part of the reason might be the burgeoning number of private schools in the vicinity of this school. Our mentors have observed that parents in this school tended to send their children (primarily boys) to private schools, even if it is at a distance. These patterns of overrepresentation of certain gender categories in private and public schools are corroborated by studies (in UP and Bihar) that indicate the household educational expenditure is higher for boys as compared to girls (Chaudhari & Roy, 2006). Additionally, we find that regardless of the enrolment rates of these schools (documented through the official registers located in the schools), the children attending are not always consistent with those registered. For example, RMV Imampur has a very high enrolment rate, but our field observations indicate that there are very few children attending the classes.

Figure 4-1: Sitewise enrolment in Patna



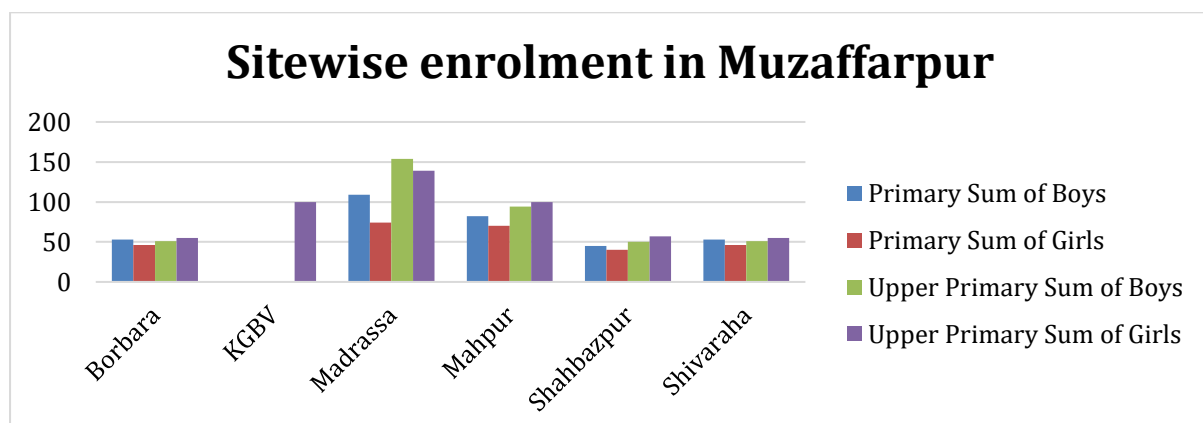
These attendance rates are significantly influenced by household characteristics (Dosti & Jayaraman, 2006). Pressure of care work, financial and physical restrictions within

the household have historically influenced the regular attendance of children. We see examples of this in our observations of the data as well. For example, a Muslim girl studying in class 7 at UMV Natwariya is a single mother and comes to school in the afternoon after completing her household work. In another instance, a young girl at UMV Himmatpur remains absent from school for long periods because she needs to look after her sick sister at home.

If we turn our attention to the schools in Muzaffarpur, RUMS Mohanpur have higher enrolment rates, and while the enrolment rates for boys is higher than the girls at the primary level while an exact opposite trend is observed at the upper primary level. Even though the GPI is not very high at the upper primary level at this school, we posit that this might again be a function of the private schools in the area. Additionally, we have also observed that a number of boys are pulled out of schools from time to time for agricultural work. Attendance is also influenced by specific socio-cultural contexts around the school (Dosti & Jayaraman, 2006). For instance, at RUMS Birpur, the schooling hours are reduced because the students in that school go to the mosque every Friday as part of *jummah* (congregational prayer held by Muslims every Friday at noon time). These influence the attendance rates of a school as well.

Next, we looked at the comprehension and literacy skills of the children in these schools. We found that if we compare the two blocks, the reading and writing capabilities of the students at all the schools in Muzaffarpur are much lower than that of Patna. When we do a detailed examination, we find that in Muzaffarpur, only at RUMS Shantipur and RUMS Birpur, can some of the students read and write. All other students have limited comprehension of words and cannot always string words together to make sentences. In terms of the religious make-up of the schools, with the exception of RUMS Birpur, the schools primarily consist of Hindu students.

Figure 4-2: Sitewise enrolment in Muzaffarpur



#### 4.4.2 Accessibility and infrastructure

On the whole, we found that physical accessibility to these sites was not a major hurdle as the students often walk to their respective schools. Even with varying degrees of

accessibility, all the schools were situated within a two-km radius from the homes of the children. This could also be because of the RTE norms of establishing an elementary school within a radius of three kms of any habitation (Census, 2011). However, roads to some of the schools by themselves are not necessarily easy to navigate. For example, in Patna, while the road leading to UMV Himmatpur is quite narrow and hard to navigate, the UMV Natwariya is situated among big buildings and apartments, and the access is through wide pucca roads.

In terms of infrastructure, all the building in the schools that we worked with were *pucca*. However, we found that all of the schools had broken walls and floor, in varying degrees, and were in severe need of repairing/painting. We also found that the physical accessibility to the sites in terms of catering to physically disabled children was varied. As per the RTE norms, each school is expected to have a ramp for the disabled students. We found that Jashpur School in Patna and Krantipur in Muzaffarpur had not constructed a ramp. All the government schools had built a ramp on ground floor of the building, but none for the higher floors had ramps. This meant that physically disabled children were likely to be confined only to certain portions of the schools, and therefore, their movement was highly restricted within the school. When we examine classrooms, we found that Jashpur school and Krantipur were the only two schools in our entire sample that were equipped with separate classrooms for each class, a separate staff-room, a computer lab and a library. We also found that RMV Jashpur in Patna and Krantipur in Muzaffarpur were the only two schools that had a separate space as 'activity room'.

Amongst all the sites, UMV-Natwariya and RUMS Shaktipur had the most limited space, but had tried to make the best of their limited resources. For example, UMV Natwariya has rented a single room from the Panchayat centre located adjacent to their school building. This room doubles as a storage unit for food grains and a combined classroom for class 1 and 2 and the compound of this Panchayat center is used for cooking midday meals. The corridor of the main building is also used as a combined classroom for classes 3 and 4. UMV Natwariya has also divided their school timings into two separate shifts to cope with these space constraints. In Muzaffarpur, RUMS Shaktipur was using one of the older classrooms as a kitchen and the HM's room was being used as a storage unit for food grains.

We also observed whether the school had a boundary wall. Often, the presence of the boundary wall can create a specific space in which the children can play and run, and can help in creating a sense of community within the school. We found the presence of boundary walls only in RMV Imampur and Jashpur School in Patna, and RUMS Shaktipur, and Krantipur in Muzaffarpur had a boundary wall. The absence of a boundary wall, for example, in UMV Himmatpur created a lot of disturbance in the school, with a number of fellow villagers, farmers, and cattle crossing the premises of the school on a regular basis. In Muzaffarpur, because RUMS Birpur was located right

next to the bus stop and an auto stand, the constant movement of traffic makes it extremely unsafe for the students to move around freely.

All of the schools that we have selected had a source of electricity, but its use was varied across all the schools. There was availability of electricity for most of the day in certain schools such as Jashpur School in Patna and Krantipur (24 hours electricity with generator) in Muzaffarpur. The government run-schools in Patna also received electricity intermittently for an average of 3 hours a day. But the other sites at Muzaffarpur had no effective access to electricity. Access to water was also fairly universal in all of the schools, with RMV Imampur in Patna and Krantipur at Muzaffarpur having access to RO water filters. The situation was markedly different when we examine access to toilets within the schools. We found that in Muzaffarpur, except for RUMS Shaktipur, none of the sites had gender-segregated toilets. All of the schools in Patna had gender-segregated toilets except for UMV Natwariya. Because of the limited space, UMV Natwariya constructed a make-shift toilet next to the school building where the walls and roof were made of tin sheets and a mud pit functioned like the toilet inside.

In terms of functionality of the toilets, we found that the presence of toilets alone does not assure its use. For example, in Patna, UMV Himmatpur does not have a boundary wall, and the villagers and community members had broken the toilets and stolen the sink fittings. At another site at RMV Imampur, it was observed that the toilet blocks allocated for the males were open cubicles and built extremely close to the girls' toilet making it uncomfortable for both the groups to use them. In Muzaffarpur, there was not a single toilet available in RUMS Birpur and hence the students took longer breaks to go home and use their own toilets. Even if toilets were available, the water was either unavailable or dirty as was in the case of RUMS Shantipur and RUMS Shaktipur. In terms of functionality, the toilets at all the sites seem to receive water intermittently.

We also wanted to engage with the question of cleaning of the toilets, as often this kind of care work is allocated to those who are most marginalised within the communities – often women, children, and persons from the lower castes. True to form, we found that in Patna, the toilets were cleaned by hired external personnel who mostly belonged to the Dalit caste. In Muzaffarpur, the toilets were being cleaned either by the teachers themselves or the students (especially girls)

#### 4.4.3 Resources for students

Where children sit, how they sit, what they play, how they play and whether they read or how they read has a huge impact on their experience of schooling. This foundational infrastructure was not merely an indication of the functioning of the school, but critically impacts the way in which children are able to explore their minds and gain knowledge and skills with their peers. Given that most of the schools are located in resource-poor environments as evidenced in the earlier sections, we should not be surprised that none of the schools had a separate room allocated as a library. But each

school attempted to create a space that would be termed as a 'library'. For instance, UMV Nadiyapur in Patna had a collection of books, but it was mostly locked up in a cupboard in the staff room. In RUMS Birpur, all the books were piled across the benches in one of the classrooms that functioned as a make-shift library. In Muzaffarpur, only RUMS Birpur had books in multiple languages in order to cater to the particularities of their student population, especially their Muslim students. Most of these books were textbooks and were lent temporarily to their students when the children did not bring their own textbooks. In Patna, all of the schools had books in multiple languages especially Hindi and Urdu. Despite this availability of books, we noticed that none of the sites had a separate time allocated for reading as a library period and none of the students could borrow these books home.

In terms of basic seating arrangements, we found that most students were either using desks or mats to sit. Curiously, who sits on the mats and who sits on the desks appear to be highly gendered. For example, in RMV Imampur only the boys are allowed to sit on the benches and the girls were made to sit on the mats on the floor. These seating structures were not just decided by the students, but was actively enforced by the teachers as well. In schools such as UMV Himmatpur and UMV Nadiyapur in Patna and RUMS Shivraha Basudev, RUMS Mohanpur and RUMS Shantipur, there appeared to be a discrimination based on age hierarchy. Students from the lower classes were sitting on mats and the higher classes had benches in their classrooms. Having mats is extremely difficult for all students who sit on them, especially in winter because of the chilly-cold floors. In all of the schools, we found a dearth of desks and so, children did not have any space of their own to keep their possessions within the classroom.

In terms of a physical space for play and leisure, RMV Imampur, UMV Himmatpur and Jashpur School in Patna and RUMS Shantipur in Muzaffarpur had a playground. All of the other schools in Muzaffarpur had a small space outside their building that could be termed as a 'space for playing' but could not be strictly defined as a 'playground'. Issues of space management were an obstacle for students' leisure activities for many of the schools in Patna and Muzaffarpur. Since RUMS Birpur in Muzaffarpur had open access to the main road, the students were not allowed to play freely because of risk of accidents and fear of harassment, especially for girls. Primarily because of the lack of equipment, both boys and girls in all of the schools spend their time playing games like kho-kho and kabaddi that require no equipment at all. There are some gendered difference in the kind of play that boys and girls indulge in. We observed, for instance, that many girls spent most of their time playing games that involved limited movement (such as indoor games like ludo), while most boys enjoyed playing cricket. Of course, this is highly dependent on the space available.

#### 4.4.4 Government entitlements

We wanted to understand the major entitlements that were made available to children through the school administration. The prominent among them is the Midday Meals Schemes or MDMs which is a central level scheme started in 1995 to provide hot-

cooked meals to all the children studying in government schools. Besides, the larger goal of tackling micro-nutrient deficiencies, the MDMs also aimed to facilitate universalization of elementary education by enhancing enrolment, attendance and retention (Khera, 2006).

In our study, we found that MDMs are provided at all the sites except for Jashpur School. This is because Jashpur School is run by a private management and serving of MDM is not compulsory. As per the norms, we found that the menu was fixed as per the state guidelines and was followed almost regularly at all sites. There were no complaints with respect to the quality or regularity of food at any of the sites in Patna. However, children from many of the schools told us that the food was not necessarily of good quality. Despite this, we found that many of the children attend school only because of the MDMs. In fact, one of the teachers told us that most students leave the school as soon as the midday meals are consumed. Students were also observed to be jumping over the wall at RUMS Shantipur in Muzaffarpur after the MDMs because the main gates were locked.

We also observed whether the school management committees (SMCs) as mandated by the Right to Education Act (2009) was functional in all of the schools, and found that we did not have easy access to that information. After some investigation, we realised that while there were regular meetings recorded in the books, there was no evidence in the field that indicated their functioning.

In terms of availing scholarships or other entitlements such as books, uniforms or shoes, we found that the bureaucratisation of the processes impeded availing these benefits (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 12 Oct 2018; Call note with mentor, Patna, 4 June 2019). The schools had previously been able to access textbooks directly from the Block Education Office (BEO). However, the parents are now expected to open bank accounts and receive scholarship funds as well as funds for uniform, books etc into their accounts. For many parents, this was not feasible as they were unable to take the time out to go to the banks, and also faced a lot of bureaucratic paperwork in order to open these accounts. Even for those who had opened the bank accounts, they had not received any money. Moreover, for families who had very little income, these meagre resources were spent on household expenses, and children often came to school without uniforms or shoes.

#### **4.5 Teacher profile**

Teachers are the prominent allies and enforcers in any educational process within a school. A lot of the activities that we have designed in MMP required an active engagement with the community of teachers, as they are the primary actors that shape the ways in which children internalise and externalise their knowledge. So, we decided to examine more closely the composition of the teachers in the schools that we are working in. We found that in Patna, UMV Nadiyapur has the least number of teachers as compared to the other schools. Incidentally, this same school also has the highest

number of cooks (6 cooks). In our observations of the classrooms, this often led to boys from the older classes being regularly recruited to play a supervisory role or to be in-charge of the younger students in various classes.

Almost universally, women teachers were more in number compared to men, with RUMS Shaktipur (11 women to 1 man) having the highest gendered skewness. When we examine the caste and religious composition of the teachers, we find that teachers are primarily from OBC and General category in Patna. In Muzaffarpur, we were unable to discern any definite patterns of social composition. Instead, the teachers appeared to depend on the particularities of the local contexts of the schools. For example, RUMS Birpur which has a predominately Muslim neighbourhood, the teachers also appear to be primarily Muslim. In RUMS Mohanpur, the teachers are from BC category and the school (coincidentally or not) is located within the BC ward.

We also looked at the educational qualifications of the teachers, so that we are able to understand the backgrounds of the teachers that we will be working with. As per the RTE norms, teachers should have at least a diploma/Bachelor's in elementary (Bihar Government, 2011). Given that the experience of the teachers with the students also influences their interactions with the students, we also examined their experience. Across all the sites, the number of years of experience was between 11 to 20 years for most teachers except for UMV Nadiyapur where most of the teachers had less than 10 years of teaching experience.

Most of the pupil-teacher ratio is quite high, with almost all of the teachers in our schools handling an average of 40 to 50 students at a time, much higher than the norms set by RTE. Perhaps because of the dearth of teachers, a number of contract teachers helps are often seen as 'regular' teachers, as they often have to attend to the classes regularly. In addition to the high pupil-teacher ratio, the actual duties of the teacher also appear to be concentrated outside of the classrooms. We found from our field observations that teachers across all sites were often called on for extra duties and meetings that diverted their time away from teaching. For example, during the normal course of events, at any given time, 2 or 3 teachers are often missing from school as they had to attend meetings at the cluster level to discuss issues of drop-outs or were called for checking of exam papers. This pattern was also been observed in other studies (Minni & Jha, 2021), where about 85% of the teachers were deputed for non-teaching tasks. All of these factors influence the way in which teaching is conducted within the schools, and inherently influences the culture of learning within the classroom.

We also wanted to examine whether teachers had enough space, materials, and infrastructure to be able to function in the schools. We found that in Muzaffarpur except for RUMS Birpur and the Krantipur, all the schools had a separate room for the staff. The staff room at RUMS Shaktipur was the most spacious and was, in fact, an in-kind donation made by Mahila Samakhya 15 years ago for conducting activities for adolescent girls. This is currently being used as an administrative room for HM and the

teachers. The situation was quite the opposite at Patna, where none of the schools had a separate staff room except for RMV Imampur and Jashpur School.

At all of the schools, tables and chairs were available for teachers to use. In terms of teaching and learning materials (TLM), all the classes were equipped with a blackboard and chalk and duster. In Muzaffarpur, except for RUMS Shantipur, all the sites had TLM such as charts, maps and other stationery. Some classes do have charts hung up on the wall (as mentioned before, in Krantipur), but most of the materials appear to be unused and stored in the staff room.

## 4.6 Children's profile

### 4.6.1 Basic demographic information

When we started the project, we worked with students who were enrolled in class 6 and 7 who fell in the age group of 11 to 14 years. In terms of the distribution of the students between class 6 and 7, our sample has about 56% of students in Class 6 and 43% in Class 7. The children also included 33% Muslims, 42% OBCs and 16% SC/STs students. We worked with more girls (65%) than boys (35%). There are several reasons for this. One of it is our sampling framework. Two of the schools that we have selected are girls-only schools: the Krantipur school and Jashpur School. One fifth (22%) of all the girls in our sample are from these schools. The other reason could be the higher propensity of families to send their girls to local government schools, as compared to boys.

If we examine the enrolment data from U-DISE in 2016-17, we find that boys tend to be much more likely to be enrolled in private schools (as compared to girls). In fact, other studies have documented that there is a strong preference to send boys to private schools and girls to government schools for two reasons. Parents typically do not want to spend much on their daughter's education and do not want to compromise on the quality of their son's education. Even in our data, we find that families who can afford it send their boys to private education while sending their girls to government schools. When they do not have the resources, only then are boys sent to government schools. These trends also indicate that boys in our sample are likely to be coming from very marginalised backgrounds.

### 4.6.2 Work and play

To understand the lives of adolescents, we wanted to get a sense of how they spend their time. Traditionally, time-use surveys have been used to provide evidence for the gendered division of labour within the household (Addati et.al, 2018). The traditional and more focused time-use surveys take down detailed information about every aspect of the day, and include self-reported dairies that allow participants to document the minutiae of their day. Given the scope of our study and the time we had within the instrument of a survey, we decided to engage with a limited version of a time-use module. We decided to broadly capture the activities of children, and get their approximation of the time that they spend on each of these activities. Because children do not necessarily have a clock-oriented sense of time, these numbers reported do not

necessarily add up to 24 hours. In fact, they rarely do. Instead, what we are examining here are the ways in which children themselves perceive their own lives and the things that define their every-day activity.

If we count the time spent in school, the time spent in tuition classes, and the time spent in doing homework after they come back from school, it appears that children spend upwards of 7 hours in the day just doing school work. There are very slight gender variations (449 minutes for boys as compared to 453 minutes for girls) as well as very slight geographical variations in reference to this. There appears to be some distinctions with respect to caste and religion. Children from the general or OBC category spend about 7.6 hours in school work as compared to SC/ST and Muslim communities (7.4).

Another point of interest that we had with respect to children's activities was related to their leisure and play. We find that regardless of gender, children appear to be spending approximately 3.1 hours in a given day on some form of leisure or play activity. We also wanted to know about the work patterns of adolescents. While care work has been specifically dealt with in the next section, we also wanted to examine if children worked in their family farms or elsewhere. Many children do not appear to be working regularly, but of those who did, 28 girls reported spending 1.45 hours doing unpaid family work as compared to 46 boys who are spending 1.76 hours of unpaid family work. We also found it curious that a majority of the 74 students who report working on their family farm, a majority appear to be concentrated around Himmatpur (an urban site) and Mohanpur (a rural site). As expected, we find differences with respect to caste. Adolescent children from SC/ST families report spending over 2.3 hours and children from Muslim families spend about 1.9 hours in and 1.9 hours in unpaid family work, as compared to children from general category or OBC families who spend only about 1.3 hours on an average on family work. To a large extent, these trends point to the differential experiences of children who come from marginalised families, especially with respect to their early exposure to labour.

One of the easiest ways to establish gender differences within the household is to examine care work done by girls and women within the household. Although social roles with respect to labour force participation have changed, a shift in the household responsibilities has seen absolutely no change, leading to what is popularly known as the second shift (Hoschild & Machung, 2012). In the literature and even in our own study around adolescent girls, we have found that girls take up bulk of the care work responsibilities while boys are much more likely to pursue leisure activities. While we didn't find any difference in terms of the leisure activities, we do find the stark pattern in care work done by girls in our study.

Girls report spending an average of 117 minutes as compared to 94 minutes for boys. In fact, there are 42 girls in our sample who spend more than 15% of their time doing unpaid domestic work as compared to 13 boys. Even if we look at that section of the sample that spends the lowest amount of time in doing care work, we find that 37.9% of

the girls appear to be working for 49 minutes, as compared with 47.1% of the boys who are working for 42 minutes in unpaid domestic work. These gendered differences, even at the lowest end, provides us ample evidence of the stability of gender norms within the household. As will be seen in subsequent sections, these only increase in the post-pandemic period.

When we break down this care work to particular duties, we found very strong gender patterns. Almost all of the girls do some form of cooking (95%), cleaning (81%), and washing (86%). When the activities start to get less gender-typed, such as fetching water or purchasing groceries, we find the percentage of boys slowly increasing in these activities. For instance, about 32% of boys report fetching water and nearly 55% of the boys report purchasing groceries. These patterns are universal across religion, regional variation and caste, which provides us with ample evidence as to the unequal labour shouldered by young women and girls.

Carework and paid work (whether in one's family farm or elsewhere) does appear to impact school attendance. In our project, we found that children did say that they only were absent from school for an average of 3.65 days in a given school month. The reasons for the absenteeism were usually stated as a member's illness (9.1 days) followed by a few children who said that they had to work in unpaid family farm work (8.8 days). The third reason that children cited was that they simply did not want to go to school (8.4 days). Going out for a function, relative or friends house also emerged as one of the reasons (7.2 days) that children stayed away from school.

#### 4.6.3 Social networks and support

One of the key defining features in any adolescence research is the focus on the social networks that they are able to access. These networks play a significant role in creation of an individual or a collective identity, provide important coping strategies for multiple stressors, and lay the basis for the development of good social and networking skills. Moreover, support networks are able to improve the well-being of adolescents by enhancing emotional support, attachment, intimacy and trust in relationships. In order to really understand this aspect, we asked children about whether they had friends in school, whether they had friends outside of school and we asked them to name a person with whom they shared their feelings, especially when they have had a difficult day at school, had some trouble in their lives, or were feeling alone, or even if they wanted to share their happiness.

What we found was that about 81 per cent of the students said that they had friends both inside and outside of school, suggesting a strong circle and network of friends. When we look at the gender dynamics with respect to this strong friend networks, we find that a majority of both the boys and the girls have friends in school and outside of it, although a slightly higher percentage of boys reported strong friend networks (89%) compared to girls (77%). Interestingly, while 3 per cent girls reported having no friends, there were no boys who reported that they had no friends. This strongly

suggests the boys in general appeared to have strong heterogeneous networks across multiple contexts, as compared with girls, and were likely to be able to draw social support from various contexts, as compared with girls.

A major source of support turns out to be the mother. The girls (54%) saw their mothers as a main source of social support along with boys (46%). When we look at the gender dynamics within the family, we find a stark difference in the gendered preference for mothers and fathers. While 28% of the boys told us that they go to their fathers for support, only 10% of the girls did so. Even if we look at the gendered distribution of support (including other women and male members apart from mothers and fathers), we see that 63% of the girls saw the women members of their houses as a source of support and shared their feelings and emotions with them, while 48 per cent boys reported the same. The numbers were much smaller for men household members, 31% of boys reporting that they shared their emotions with men members as compared to 13% of girls. These are clear indications that mothers and other women members of the family are seen as an affective source of support for children, which is also supported by previous research.

In general, the children with whom we were working with were not only experiencing different variations of school infrastructure or facilities provided, but also the underlying social and structural narratives that prevent children from benefiting from these facilities and infrastructure. It is also clear that the socio-cultural locale of the students, teachers and community continues to have a collective effect on the access, usage and functionality of these resources. While there is much diversity among the sample, we also found that similar structural narratives plague all of the schools. A case in point in the patterns of attendance, teacher availability, absence of critical infrastructure such as toilets, as well as the implications of government schemes. Even if we take the narrowest definition of education – which is that it is an institution that is imparting reading and writing skills – we can see the institutional failures reflected in many of the schools in our sample. In order to really understand the implications of these forms of deprivations on the development and implementation of our model, we will closely examine the learning environments and structural constraints of the model and the implications thereof.

## 5 Structural constraints and learning environments

What is clear from the previous sections is that the lives of young children, especially living in marginalised communities, are fraught with inequities, vulnerabilities, and lack of agentic behaviour. This lesson was brought home very early in our intervention when during our meetings with parents, we received news that one of the children in the community had committed suicide. The reason was: his marriage had been fixed and he didn't want to get married as he was in love with someone else. Not knowing what else to do, he took his own life. Although we had gone into the intervention knowing and understanding that through critical thinking, we were going to engage with the emotional lives of children, it was still a shock to us. However, the incident was a good reminder for us to realise the social and cultural constraints under which children operate, which include poverty and deprivation, inequalities related to gender and caste, and the environments that influence critical thinking abilities.

### 5.1 Poverty and deprivation

During the third phase of the Covid-19 survey, the mentors were trying to reach children to understand the impact of the pandemic on children's lives. Most parents were cooperative, but some would lose patience with the questions or would be suspicious of our call. In one instance, the mother of Supriya (Himmatpur) got angry when questions were asked. She said – *We have so many different kinds of problems. My brain doesn't work these days. You don't help us – so what's the point of asking all of these questions?* This and many such exchanges (even when they ended in the survey not being completed) helped us to understand the horrifying ordeal that many families went (and are going) through the pandemic period. In fact, some of the major factors that the telephonic survey highlighted was that children who were already marginalised were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. While gender, caste, geographical location and religion added layers of vulnerability, poverty and deprivation was one of the significant factors that influenced children's lives.

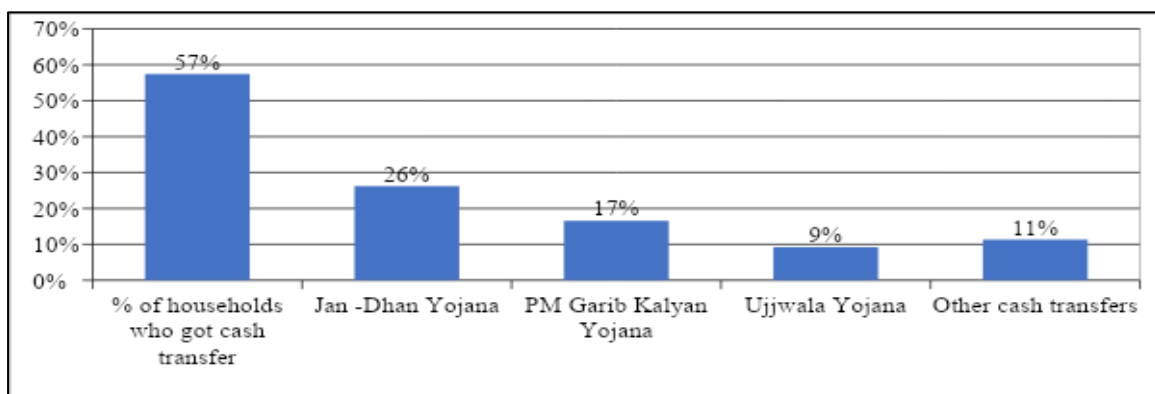
Even prior to the pandemic, we realised the important role that poverty played in determining children's lives. One of the first lessons that we learnt in the field was to ensure that our mentoring activities would not disturb in any way children's access to food. This was informed by an early incident. We were conducting the activities and the HM neglected to inform us that the mid-day meal was being distributed. This meant that when the activities were conducted, children had no food to eat and they were very hungry (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 21 Sept 2018). Although alternate arrangements were hastily made, this episode was an early indication to us to understand the larger ecosystem of poverty that children were situated in and engage with it as a larger structure rather than restricting ourselves only to our classroom interactions and the issues that they faced within the classrooms.

The reasons of poverty and deprivation featured prominently in children's attendance to classes. After the first few months, we realised that children were not always attending all of the classes. One of the reasons stated was that they were unable to

afford it. During our community visits to Mohanpur, for example, parents told us that children were not in school because they were unable to get subsidies for clothes or books on time, and they had no money to purchase either unless the cash transfers arrived. The parents also felt that their children were not given any priority in the classroom and consequently, the ‘atmosphere’ in the classroom was not good for the children (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 12 Oct 2018; Fieldnotes, 31 July 2018; Fieldnotes, 22 Oct 2018; Fieldnotes, 14 Feb 2019). Parents were also transparent in articulating that in situations such as theirs, children had a lot that they needed to do in terms of care work and farm work, so they didn’t really have the time to go to school (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 7 Jan 2019).

The Covid-19 pandemic made the situation of these families much worse. Girls often had to stay at home and engage in housework and on occasion, farm or paid work. Boys were definitely pushed towards earning more money for the family, in these dire circumstances. Although the Government of India had announced additional ration through existing PDS system and the state government had also instructed Anganwadi centres to distribute food, we found that this was not sufficient for many of the families in our region.

*Figure 5-1: Cash transfers by government*



**Source:** Report titled ‘Life in the times of Covid-19’ published by CBPS in 2020

In fact, only one-fifth of the respondents told us that they did not have a ration card with which to avail benefits, just over half (57%) received some form of cash transfer, and only 9% families received cash transfer for the already existing Ujjwala Yojana. Less than half of the families (41%) had received some support from the Department of Education to continue their children’s education whereas 38% of the families told us that civil society organisations were able to help them out.

In an effort to understand the deprivations that families experienced, we asked them whether the families were facing shortages of cash and food, and what was clear to us was that almost all of the families (81%) were under severe economic distress. When we look at the three rounds of the Covid rapid survey data, we can clearly see the prolonged effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the precarity of these households. in We

see an increase of at least 8% of families experiencing cash shortages, with families in Patna being more vulnerable (an increase of 11% as compared to previous surveys).

*Table 5.1: Percentage of households that reported cash shortages*

District	Percentage of households facing financial distress	
	Round 2	Round 3
Muzaffarpur	73%	77%
Patna	74%	85%
Grand Total	73%	81%

Source: Round 2 (first wave) data collected between Jul - Aug 2020 and round 3 (second wave) data collected between Jun - Sep 2021

*Table 5.2: Percentage of households that reported food shortages*

District	Percentage of households facing food shortages	
	Round 2	Round 3
Muzaffarpur	81%	56%
Patna	74%	14%
Grand Total	77%	35%

Source: Round 2 (first wave) data collected between Jul - Aug 2020 and round 3 (second wave) data collected between Jun - Sep 2021

We also found that access to food was much more variable. Even while there were high food shortages in the second wave, this was mitigated by the time that we conducted the third round of surveys. This could potentially be because we had interviewed families in the peak of the lockdown when the nation was experiencing large scale economic distress, affecting particularly those working in the informal and agricultural sectors. It is also likely that rations were available post the lock-down through the Public Distribution System (PDS). Around the time of the third round of the survey, almost all households (91%) reported to be beneficiaries of this extra ration scheme, reducing their food shortages by the time we interviewed them. It is important to note that food shortages is not equivalent to meeting the nutritional requirements of the family. Almost half of the families reported that they were eating subsistence-level food and many of the people we spoke to asked us - *“Sirf gehun aur chawal se kaise kaam chalaye”*? How do we survive with only food grains? (Survey, 2021, Muzaffarpur).

Food or cash shortage, however, was not the concern for many families facing the Covid-10 pandemic crisis. When asked about the biggest obstacles faced by households, a majority of them (81%) felt that the loss of wages, unemployment and lack of livelihood options weighed heavily on their head. They worried about the future,

especially in terms of food and income security as well as being able to educate their children.

*Table 5.3: Biggest obstacles faced during Covid-19 during Round 3*

District	No obstacle	Learning loss	Economic difficulties	Food shortage	Fear of Covid-19	Don't know / Others
Muzaffarpur	7%	8%	80%	3%	5%	6%
Patna	11%	15%	82%	13%	8%	6%
Grand Total	9%	11%	81%	8%	7%	6%

Source: Round 3 data (second wave) collected between Jun - Sep 2021

These concerns by parents were completely valid. Our data as well as the literature documented during the pandemic period clearly documents that with the prolonged period of school closures and online education being out of reach for children from marginalised groups, they were likely to be the most effected, especially girls<sup>1</sup>. When we tried to engage with this question of access to digital education within our own communities, we consistently found that if technological means were only used to reach children, they would not reach the majority of the children living in our communities. When we used caste and mother's education as proxy indicators of marginalisation, we found that marginalisation decreased the chances of access to online education – often, the only available source of learning during that time.

*Table 5.4: Access to children based on caste*

District	Method of Survey	General	MUSLIM	OBC	SC/ST	Grand Total
Muzaffarpur	Telephonic	33%	43%	33%	30%	33%
Muzaffarpur	In-person	67%	57%	67%	70%	67%
Patna	Telephonic	75%	72%	69%	63%	68%
Patna	In-person	25%	26%	27%	36%	30%
Patna	Mixed	0%	1%	4%	2%	2%

Source: Round 3 (post second wave) data collected between Jun - Sep 2021

<sup>1</sup> A recent study by UNICEF shows that increased rates of poverty, household responsibilities, child labour, teenage pregnancy may prevent as many as 20 million secondary school-aged girls around the world from ever returning to the classroom.

*Table 5.5: Access to children based on mother's education*

District	Method of Survey	No Education	Some schooling up to 5th Standard	Between 6th and 8th Standard	Between 9th and 12th Standard	UG college or UG Degree	Grand Total
Muzaffarpur	Telephonic	26%	39%	40%	48%	50%	33%
Muzaffarpur	In-person	74%	61%	60%	52%	50%	67%
Patna	Telephonic	61%	80%	74%	63%	100%	68%
Patna	In-person	34%	20%	26%	35%	0%	30%
Patna	Mixed	5%	0%	0%	2%	0%	2%

Source: Round 3 (post second wave) data collected between Jun - Sep 2021

We also asked families about their coping strategies. We wanted to get a sense of whether the crisis was likely to create long-term indebtedness and social stagnation for families living in the margins. What we found was that more families were borrowing money to cope with the crisis as time went on (by 7% between second and third round). Given that almost all of the households (93%) had reported cash crunch, it was not surprising to hear that many families had borrowed money from local money lenders at very high rates. The pandemic, therefore, had trapped most of these households in a cycle in indebtedness as opportunities for employment shrunk and food inflation increased.

*Table 5.6: Coping Strategies adopted by households*

District	Round 2			Round 3		
	Borrowed	Ate basic food	Sold assets	Borrowed	Ate basic food	Sold assets
Muzaffarpur	52%	46%	2%	93%	4%	3%
Patna	59%	43%	5%	34%	89%	11%
Grand Total	56%	44%	4%	63%	48%	7%

Source: Round 2 (first wave) data collected between Jul - Aug 2020 and round 3 (second wave) data collected between Jun - Sep 2021

What we are now afraid of is that this cycle of marginalisation is also likely to continue intergenerationally. The effects of this, even in the short term, was starkly visible to us. For example, if we looked at the way in which we were able to reach children through telephone or other means, we found that access was neither stable or consistent. The same child was not often available and in our total of 757 children, we could consistently contact only 16% of the children through all three rounds. Although some children were accessible through in-person interviews, increasingly, children were absent either because they were working, busy, or had moved away because of work or marriage. Although our access to children is not a proxy for marginalisation, it does

provide an insight into whether children were able to consistently be available for other forms of learning processes such as online education.

*Table 5.7: Access to children using various methods of survey*

Access to children	Unreached	Once	Twice	Thrice	Grand Total
Unreached	18%	0%	0%	0%	18%
Door-to-door	0%	22%	0%	0%	22%
Telephonic	0%	13%	18%	16%	46%
Telephonic and door-to-door	0%	0%	9%	4%	13%
Grand Total	18%	35%	27%	20%	100%

Source: Round 1 (first wave) data collected between April-May 2020, round 2 (first wave) data collected between Jul - Aug 2020 and round 3 (second wave) data collected between Jun - Sep 2021

In the absence of schools or access to online education, children from marginalised communities were access private schools or tuitions to fill the gaps. In fact, many children consistently going to private tuitions or schools even if they were enrolled in the schools because parents felt that the schools were not adequately invested in their children. Parents also felt that because of this neglect, their children were drifting into bad habits. Some of the complaints that parents had of their children is that they do not always listen to their parents, and they fight a lot. They also felt that the boys had substance abuse problems – they chewed tobacco, they gambled, and generally played truant (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 7 Jan 2019). Parents were not wrong in their understanding of the situation.

When we started engaging with children much more, we too realised that many children, especially boys, were affected by substance abuse. There were a few instances where children would come to the class intoxicated, and we would have to take measures to ensure their safety, for the moment. We also found that some of the younger children were also addicted to gambling. During our community visits, they could be seen using coins to gamble with each other (Call note with mentor, Patna, 22 May 2019). When we spoke to teachers about it, they felt that parents were not invested enough in their children to monitor their behaviour and that’s why they were drifting into bad habits. The relationship between community and schools, therefore, was not necessarily harmonious, and this influenced the way in which children learnt within schools.

## **5.2 Relationship between community and schools**

After working with the community for an extended period of time, whether it was trying to find space within community areas to run community classes or interviewing them for case studies, or calling them for the Covid-19 survey, we realised that the communities and families were very angry with the schools. Because parents often felt that we were ‘representing’ the school, they would often get angry and curse at us, the teachers and the schools. They believed that the school was not paying attention to their children and that it was a phenomenal waste of their children’s time to go to school. In

fact, in one of our community visits, a family member told us that schools barely opened and when they do, they do not function. Instead, most of the learning happens at home with the help of family members. They felt it was fruitless to send their children to school when much of the learning was happening at home or at tuition centers (Call note with mentor, Patna, 4 June 2019).

When we tried to look at mechanisms by which the relationships between the community and school could be build – primarily through the SMC – we found out that these were essentially non-functional and many members didn't even realise that there was an SMC (Call note with mentor, Patna, 4 Oct 2018; Call note with mentor, Patna, 11 Oct 2018). Soon, we realised that the SMC meetings were not held and that the register was filled in by the school administration and it would be sent home to the members for their signatures (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 12 Oct 2018).

As a consequence of this antagonistic relationship, it was very common for children, especially boys, to be enrolled in both private and government schools, as mentioned earlier. They would often attend the government school for one day and attend the private school for the other days (Call note with mentor, Patna, 4 June 2019). When we asked about the reason for this system, we were told that the teaching in the government schools were very irregular in the government schools, and therefore, there is only way to learn is the private schools.

When teachers heard this criticism, they would often defend themselves by stating that parents had to be more involved in the lives of their children and their education (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 12 Oct 2018). Teachers also felt that parents make much more of an investment when they send their children to private schools, but when they send them to government schools, they tended to be neglect them. Teachers also felt that parents are thankless and enrolled them only for the 'dole' that they got from the State. They felt that the children were in government schools so that parents could collect the money allocated for the school books or uniforms or get the meals from the MDMs.

In turn, parents felt that this was an unfair accusation and that the argument could only apply if they actually received any money. Many parents complained that there were long periods of time between payments and the efforts to pursue the money was not worth the gains. Parents also felt that they'd rather send their children to private tuitions rather than the government school, as it was not necessarily safe because of the low attendance of the teachers (Call note with mentor, Patna, 4 June 2019). Parents also attested (we also observed) that while MDMs might be ostensibly the reason for many children to attend the schools, the distribution was not necessarily regular and they were not provided in sufficient quantity (Call note with mentor, Patna, 4 June 2019).

What was clear in this antagonistic relationship was that children were the ones who were being affected. For example, in the absence of irregular or non-receipt of books or uniforms, many children used old text books and workbooks from their seniors (Call

note with mentors, Muzaffarpur, 9 October 2018). It was not that teachers universally were unsympathetic. In fact, one of the teachers told us that they would like to purchase these books themselves, but they were not allocated these responsibilities. The money to purchase books had not been disbursed and they had been pursuing the official channels with little results. The teachers' helplessness also give us an insight into the structural constraints that the schools themselves were functioning under.

### 5.3 Structural constraints of school

One of the first issues that we encountered (as elaborated above) were the lack of text books that were accessible to children. When the new systems of cash transfers were instituted, children were unable to buy books. One of the HMs told us that more than 75% of the children in his school did not have any textbooks with them because of the cash transfers. Although instituted for a very good reason, this policy often meant that children did not have books or uniforms either because parents were already using the money for other immediate requirements, or the process of accessing was cumbersome and expensive. The HM also felt that parents who already had very little had to put in their own money to 'maintain' the bank accounts, and while it might seem as 'small amount' to us, they were critical for a family with limited means. It was also clear to us from our community visits that in spaces where there was an obvious antipathy to daughters' education, the cash transfers were rarely used for funding their daughters' uniforms or books. Even from our study, it was very clear that any additional money is now used for consumption of material goods like food or even mobile phones, rather than books or uniforms (Fieldnotes, 14 Feb 2019).

The systems of schooling were difficult for us as well to navigate. For example, even though we would plan for 3 months of intervention, it would invariably stretch to five to six months because of the frequent closures of the school (Call note with mentor, Patna, 20 Sept 2018). In fact, we have recorded a number of disruptions in the school years even prior to Covid. Apart from the absences that children themselves took either for agricultural work, marriage season or illnesses of their family members, schools were periodically closed for festivals, floods, hot or cold weather, and often times, because the teachers had to prepare for other duties apart from teaching.

Schools themselves also struggled with resource constraints (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 1 Oct 2018). As covered in Chapter 4, many schools barely had any room to conduct classes. Children were often sitting on the floor with dhurries, and it was difficult to teach children when they were also suffering from the cold or heat that would invariably make sitting on the floor extremely uncomfortable. Despite this, many teachers opened up their spaces for our activities, even under constrained circumstances. In fact, the HM of one of the schools gave us the only chair and table in the entire school so that mentors could work within the children using that lone chair and table (Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 Oct 2018). In general, some teachers and the mentors strongly felt that the current systems of schooling were not useful for children and were letting them down badly (Fieldnotes, 14 Feb 2019). They were in agreement

with the parents that the schooling system were not beneficial for the children. However, what we realised over the course of the project was that this was very teacher-dependent and that teachers themselves faced a lot of constraints in their work.

#### 5.4 The role of the teacher

When we first entered the classrooms and started the intervention, we were sympathetic to the parents' point of view. We found that majority of the time, teachers were busy making reports and no one was teaching the classrooms (Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 Oct 2018; Call note with mentor, Patna, 23 Nov 2018). As a consequence, many children were left alone and were mostly playing, talking, creating a lot of noise in the schools (Call note with mentor, Patna, 19 Dec 2018). During an exercise where we had asked children to interview their teachers, some teachers refused to be interviewed. Some others criticised the children about asking inane questions. One felt so angry about being asked the motivation for joining his profession that he started shouting at the children.

Moreover, they often reinforced problematic and patriarchal attitudes. For example, when one of the children from a higher class was rude to the children in the lower classes, some of the girls in the lower classes objected (Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 July 2019). The teacher got to know about this and admonished the girls from the lower girls. The teacher told the girls that *if a girl has to run the entire household, she has to learn to tolerate these things. Otherwise, she will have a problem in the future* (Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 July 2019, p. 8). In another instance, when children attested that boys ought to be the head of the family, many of the teachers, and in one instance, the HM himself agreed with the children (Call note with mentor, Patna, 15 July 2019). The teachers felt that it was important that the gender status quo in the family must not change or disrupted.

Over a period of time, we started to realise that many teachers didn't know the children in their own schools. They didn't always recognise them and sometimes had to look them up in the registers to see if they were, in fact, enrolled in the classes (Fieldnotes, 24 July 2018). Another example that we witnessed in one of our interactions in the classroom was related to a speech given by a teacher about the evils of drinking (Call note with mentor, Patna, 12 Aug 2019, p.3). When the teacher asked whether the drinking should be stopped, one of the children said - *if the drinking stops, then we will starve*. He asked - *how will we survive if we do not make illicit liquor?* The teacher scolded the child saying - *Can't any other work be done apart from making of alcohol?* Even though the teacher was from the community and understood that these were not just a matter of 'bad habits', but a caste-based occupation and potentially one of the few means of earning a livelihood, he was not able to engage with the very valid question asked by the student. Instead of engaging with the actual question that the children were asking, he decided to take a moral high ground. Watching this process unfold over and over again made us realise that children are often made to lead double lives in the

classroom – one within the classroom, which is an ideal make-believe world and divorced from reality and the one in which they actually lived.

But as we started working with the teachers much more, we also realised that they were also structurally constrained by many factors, the least of which was time. In all of the schools, teachers were often overburdened with academic and administrative responsibilities, and in the beginning, they saw the mentoring activities as a break from their teaching responsibilities, so that they could devote time to the other activities that they were also held accountable for (Call note with mentor, Patna, 20 Sept 2018).

As the intervention progressed, we soon realised that the interest of the teachers as well as their presence mattered a lot (Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 Oct 2018; Fieldnotes, 22 Oct 2018; Call note with mentor, Patna, 5 Dec 2018). For example, in one of the early activities that we conducted, when the students were very shy to do the activity, the teacher started to participate in the class, and gently pushed all of them to talk and participate more. With this level of safety, the students felt more at ease (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 1 Oct 2018). These students also started to familiarise themselves with the mentor with much less difficulty. The quality of the interaction also changed. For example, in just one of the schools, the exercise on articulation of emotions was done with the help of the teacher who spoke extensively about the nature of emotions and the importance of expressing them (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 7 Jan 2019). Because of the cues that the teacher provided, the children were able to use different objects in their surroundings to articulate various emotions such as using dhal and rice together to invoke some complex emotions (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 7 Jan 2019).

But we also knew that without an orientation on the critical thinking module, they are likely to always prioritise the other work that were assigned to them (Call note with mentor, Patna, 12 Dec 2018). Therefore, we needed to engage with the teachers directly so that they are an important support system throughout the classes, and also lend legitimacy to the efforts in the classroom (Call note with mentor, Patna, 12 Dec 2018)<sup>2</sup>. They were also a key player in changing the current knowledge or learning cultures prevalent in the classrooms.

## 5.5 Learning cultures

One of the first activities that we used to introduce ourselves to the children was Just a Minute. Children were encouraged to speak continuously about any subject that they wanted for 60 seconds. While we knew that not all children were functioning at grade-level in the schools, we were surprised that even though the activity was simple, they had a really hard time doing so. It was not that children didn't know enough about any one subject, but they had to unlearn the idea that they had to say 'prescribed' things in classroom. In fact, the children were so used to rote-learning that even when we asked

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<sup>2</sup> It was on the basis of these interactions that we formulated a series of teaching workshops, which ultimately led to the development of a toolkit on Education in Emergency.

them to create individual stories or answers, they would invariably converge on 'acceptable' answers (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 21 Sept 2018). For example, if one girl said something in response to a question and this was met with approval by the mentors, all the others would repeat it.

We also found that because teaching has been intermittent in many schools (especially Muzaffarpur), children were unused to sitting down for long periods of time and hence, were often very restless after a period of time (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 1 Oct 2018; Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 Oct 2018; Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 21 Jan 2019; Call note with mentor, Patna, 18 Feb 2019). In fact, some of the older children often left class during the activities, and we had to first establish a level of comfort within the classroom before we were able to really engage all of the students in the class. So, we started devising strategies and activities that allowed children to move around after we started observing this pattern.

For example, when we realised that the children were starting to get restless only with certain forms of 'doing' activities, we often switched it to creating more visual content, by showcasing documentaries or Meena videos that were accessible to us (Call note with mentor, Patna, 27 Feb 2019). In time, we provided the mentors with a fun wheel where they could dispel the restlessness of the children by spinning the fun wheel and doing one of the activities on the board, such as a small skit or a song or a game of some sort.

When the activities started progressing to a point when children were able to speak more openly, we realised that they were unable to write and read at their grade level. In fact, we found that for many children, they had a hard time stringing alphabets together and had no confidence in writing well (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 9 Oct 2018). So, introspective activities such as diary writing didn't really work as well because many children had to familiarise themselves with the process of writing. We started providing more opportunities of learning to write after learning about these dynamics.

As we started working more closely with children, we learned that children were never given the space to tell their own stories. They were taught to memorise from the books, but are not taught even to tell these stories out loud. So, even when we encouraged them to read out the stories, they were hesitant to do so. They required the support of the book in order to feel confident (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 13 Nov 2018). Even when they did extra-curricular activities such as drawing or painting, they often 'copied' what was already present. When provided opportunities to draw or paint based on concepts or use some form of imaginative or creative expression, they would often hesitate.

Only after some prompting, did they start to see that their own local contexts (instead of the text book) could be used to create stories or poems, and that these were not always something that needed to be memorised (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 1 Oct 2018). This was also because children were constantly oriented within the classroom to

be either corrected, or to prepare specifically for exams and tests. So, the concept of evaluation and testing was never far from the activities<sup>3</sup>, which we found disengaged children from the joy of creating and from the process of learning.

A consequence to this focus on providing the 'right' answer or functioning solely within the evaluative frame was that children understood or tried to figure out 'right' answer is and tended to parrot it. So, we constantly encouraged the mentors to play the devil's advocate so that they are able to elicit what the children actually think. Even if children hold these views, they must also be aware of 'why' they hold these views. These kinds of interactions also allowed them to move away from the right/wrong framework and into the why/how framework (Call note with mentor, Patna, 12 Aug 2019). For example, usually when we talk about ecology, children are constantly encouraged to talk about saving trees. But when the question is posed in an open-ended format, children actually felt that the kinds of development that ensures that they have a house, an AC or a motorbike is very important. They are free to say – *we can always grow tress, but we need these things in our lives* (Call note with mentor, Patna, 12 Aug 2019, p. 3).

One of the ways that we felt that we did this was to push back against the values of 'obedience' and 'silence', and instead really focus on questioning and full (if noisy) engagement (Call note with mentor, Patna, 21 Jan 2019). The idea that was constantly reinforced in the class was not to take the answer for granted, but to dig deeper so that they are able to understand the implications of their own belief systems. Of course, this was easier said than done. While these methods were easier to do with activities related to communication or information-processing, the conceptual ones were harder to conduct.

In fact, we had to work extensively with the mentors and ourselves to move away and unlearn the process of lecturing, and focus on mentoring. We wanted to ensure that we were consistently using the ERAC method to ensure that children were left with questions rather than predefined answers (Call note with mentor, Patna, 25 July 2019). The training with the mentor, therefore, was constantly to ensure that they were allowing the space to leave things open-ended and to allow for questions to percolate. This and the method of spiralling allowed the ideas to take root or if not, to repeat these lessons using different activities and different analogies so that they are able to think for themselves instead of remembering what it is that they were supposed to learn.

We also had to work with a lot of internalised discrimination within the classroom. For example, often children would not want to work with 'slow' children as they were not seen as 'intelligent', and actively tried to exclude them from activities (Call note with mentor, Patna, 19 Dec 2018). Because of the way in which we conducted the classes, we ensured that (either through group work or through pairs) that everyone needs to

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<sup>3</sup> A list of patterns that we identified that were prevalent in the pedagogical culture of the classroom s compiled in Appendix A2.

contribute. While it took a long time for 'slow' children to assimilate, they did get opportunities to do the same kinds of activities as all the other children.

Perhaps, the strongest cultural frameworks to dismantle was the identity of the 'good' child – the high value given to obedience and conforming to parents' wishes. When children were asked to move against certain norms – such as good children must be silent, most children were unable to articulate the rationale for that value, and pushed back against questioning it. Similarly, it was often difficult to engage children in conversations related to gendered behaviour. Although boys and girls co-existed in the same space, they were not necessarily encouraged to be social with each other. As a result, girls and boys formed very antagonistic and adversarial feelings towards each other (Call note with mentor, Patna, 23 Nov 2018; Call note with mentor, Patna, 26 Dec 2018; Call note with mentor, Patna, 19 Jan 2019). Most of the time, girls take a defensive stance and preferred to do most of the activities without the company of boys. For these reasons, it was often difficult to get children to work together and often made it difficult to build a cohesive identity (Call note with mentor, Patna, 20 Sept 2018).

Part of the reason is because they were keenly aware of the discrimination they faced as compared to boys, as evidenced by the unequal access to school resources. So, even while children want to conform to their well-prescribed social roles, and to their parents' wishes, they struggle with it constantly. This struggle is especially harder for girls, as these impulses also push against notions of honour, as we will see in the subsequent section.

## 5.6 Gender and inequality

Adolescence is a particular time period in the life course of an individual where girls are strongly socialised into notions of femininity that inherently devalue their independent identity, which deeply influences their self-image and self-esteem. We found many signs of this within our classrooms. For example, some of the stories that girls told us gave us their gender scripts for femininity and the expectations that others have for them. In an activity which was about creating stories around emotion, children wrote very revealing stories about their emotional lives. The story on sorrow was about a girl who was not beautiful. She had a sister who was very beautiful, but she died. So, the parents started cursing the girl – why didn't you die instead of your sister? When asked about this story, the girl told us that the girl in the story was not harassed because she was not beautiful. When asked the definitions of beauty, all of the girls spoke about the traditional norms of beauty, most of which was related to being fair-skinned. In fact, they told us that if the girl is dark, no one will marry her. The identity of a girl is her beauty (*sundartha ladki ki pehchaan hoti hain*). The girls also told us that it was always like this with us, the boys don't face it at all.

This awareness of a difference in experience was also mirror within the classrooms. In one school, it was only the boys who enjoyed the comfort of sitting on chairs while the girls were asked to sit on floor mats. The teachers from that school justified this

distribution by saying that the boys would refuse to come to school if the situation was reversed and it was easier for the girls to *adjust*. These notions of *sacrifice and adjustment* were invoked quite frequently in classrooms as justification to deny girls equal treatment within the classrooms. This preoccupation with notions of femininity extended to conversations of 'safety' and 'security'. A prime example of this was that during the Covid-19 pandemic, when we tried to contact girls to get their addresses for the LtL initiative, it was not easy to talk to girls. We found that many men who picked up the phone, whether they were brothers, fathers or other relatives, would often tell us that the girls had a lot of work to do and don't have time to talk to us. Even if it was related to some educational materials, they would tell us that *the girls do not have time to receive such materials and no time to read them* (Call note with mentors, 25 June 2020, p. 2).

Even when family members wanted to secure good education for their children, they were very concerned about the 'nature' of the schools. Some parents showed reluctance in sending their girls to a local high school as it had a 'bad' reputation of having its boys and girls mingle and have 'affairs'. The parents stated that they will 'let' their daughters join the high school, only if she restricts herself to interactions with girls. If she has interactions with boys, she will be locked up and not allowed to step outside of the house. This notion is strongly internalised within girls who feel: (1) that they need to be 'safe' and protect themselves till they get married and (2) after their marriage, they will be protected by someone else. This unequal treatment was visible for all to see. For example, one of the anganwadi workers told us that in the village that we were working, we won't find many girls. When we asked why that would be, she told us that – *in this village, they don't wait for girls. If the boy is born first, they'll quickly do an operation so that no other child is born, but when it is for girls, they'll try. So, consequently, there are more boys than girls in the village* (Call note with mentor, Patna, 4 June 2019, p. 7).

Girls are keenly aware that their social lives are heavily constrained, as evidenced by the following incident. In one of the classes, we asked children to draw out a story that they had written. One of the girls drew a picture of a girl sitting under a tree. When asked about the story, the girl said: *This was the story of a girl who wanted to study. But she was told that she would have to get married and go away, so there was no reason for her to be educated. Her brother, instead, was sent to school and tuition classes. The girl felt sad and went to the tree to be alone. She even spoke to the tree about how she wanted to study. Finally, through her determination, the girl becomes a doctor, but the brother doesn't do much with his life.* It is clear from the story that girls do understand the realities and restrictions of their lives, and are able to clearly articulate the differences in the social ambitions of their parents, and their brothers. It is also clear that girls do not necessarily know how to get past these restrictions to get to their imagined futures.

Even if girls were not aware of this manifest preference for boys, they were reminded of it in more subtle ways at home and in the schools. For example, girls insisted that families did not necessarily discriminate against them on food, but they felt that the

family ensured that boys studied and paid more attention to them. Girls felt that they never get any attention or encouragement from their parents (Call note with mentor, Patna, 15 July 2019). In other cases, the discrimination was not very subtle. Many children have mentioned an unsupportive/toxic/compulsive environment as a reason for not being able to attend school regularly. The reasons that we have collated are early marriages, alcoholic family members, violence at home, or pressure to work to sustain the families. In fact, there was one girl who told us that she would not do many of the activities in our classes even though she wants to because she has an alcoholic father who beats her mother and her every day. She told our mentor that because of this 'mental tension', she was really not able to focus on studies and it was hard for her to concentrate.

Although their lives were circumscribed by structural and patriarchal forces, girls were still using whatever space that was available to them to exert their agency. During our implementation, we did notice that girls were asserting certain forms of independence. In one of the interactions that we documented, some girls in the classroom were questioning other girls about their use of lipstick. The girls who were wearing lipstick declared: *We are free to do what we want. If you don't want to wear it, then don't wear it. If we want to wear it, we'll wear it.* In this small exchange, it became clear that the conversation was not about the lipstick wearing, but about the nature and character ascribed to girls who wear them. This policing of girls is not uncommon, and is an essential aspect of socialisation. So, the 'lipstick wearing girls' were not just fighting with the other girls in the classroom, they were also trying to assert a small modicum of independence in a space that is fairly restrictive.

These struggles of figuring out identities within very restrictive social norms and roles also manifested in our classrooms. For example, all the schools were heavily gender-segregated and it was very difficult in the beginning to really engage with the groups in mixed group settings (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 21 Sept 2018). Even when we set up the groups in mixed-gender groups, the children resisted, and it was only after a lot of effort and building of familiarity did girls and boys talk and work together. In the beginning, we didn't want to push the children too much out of their comfort zones. We felt that it was essential to address these dogmatic practices, but we needed to also give it time and prepare the children as well as the mentors for the transition. In time (as we will see in the next chapter), this became more and more normalised in the classrooms.

Gender, however, was not the only avenue through which discrimination and inequality presented itself within the classrooms. It was very clear to us right from the beginning that certain children were being systematically excluded from the classrooms. For example, in one of the schools, the teachers and the children mostly belonged to the Yadav community, and there were a few children who belonged to the SC/ST communities. It was clear right from the beginning that there was a class division between the children, and the caste lines were drawn quite strongly within the class

(Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 21 Sept 2018). But caste or gender was not the only line of division.

In one of the exercises that we were conducting with children, we asked them to create stories around pictures that we gave them, most of them delegated the role of rural boys to become drivers but urban children in the role of owning the car (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 9 Sept 2019). When we probed this further, we found that children did believe that if an urban and a rural boy received the same education, the urban boy would get a job. Also, the children felt that the world perceives them as dumb. So, geographical location and the associated tag of 'poverty' was a marker for children as was caste and religion. Apart from these inequalities that created different dynamics within the classroom, the gendered phenomena of care work, paid work and child marriage were also structural constraints that influenced the learning process within the classroom (Asadullah & Wahhaj, 2016; Gupta, 2012; Lee-Rife et.al, 2012).

#### 5.6.1 Care work and paid work

When we started working in the classrooms, even before the pandemic, girls were often absent because they were helping out their families. In Patna, in our community visits, we found that girls were frequently out doing chores for the house (fetching water etc.) but also helping out with the farm work and selling vegetables or manning the stores (Call note with mentor, Patna, 4 June 2019). Boys were also helping out with the farm work with their fathers and mothers. The extra work that they had to do was not restricted to only the households. Even within the schools, many boys and girls had to do care work for the schools. We were not able to conduct the activities because of this. Apart from the cleaning duties that many children appeared to have, others had duties for the teachers that they had to perform, including teaching or 'minding' the other children in lower divisions. For Krantipur girls, they had to help out with the cooking and serving, and cleaning. So, activities with these girls had to be scheduled around their care work for the school (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 1 Oct 2018).

These high levels of care work increased (as we will see in the next chapter) when the pandemic hit. Even before the pandemic, families eking out a meagre living have to account for children's time away from productive labour (whether in the household or outside) even if the schools are 'free'. While parents might see the utility of education, it is another matter whether they could afford it, in direct or indirect material ways. During the pandemic, the already vulnerable families became even more so, and consequently, our telephonic survey as well as conversations with the children reveal that most of the girls are engaged in household work or are learning sewing and embroidery work. Boys had joined farm labour work, had migrated out to work, and didn't have the time to study. We anticipate that this will continue to pose a problem in the future.

### 5.6.2 Child marriage

In one of our activities, children were asked to write their own stories as a way to build writing and imaginative capacities. One of the stories that emerged from the children was that of a girl who had a dark complexion. She had a sister who had a lighter complexion, but she died of an illness. After her sister's death, her parents started telling the girl that she should have died instead of the sister as it would have been easier to get the lighter skinned sister married instead of the dark one. During the discussion that ensued, the girl who wrote the story disclosed that she was actually narrating the story of her own life. Other girls agreed and reported that they had been taught: *sundarta hi ladki ki pehchan hain* (a girl's beauty is her identity). The conditionality of affection and love provided to girls, especially based on qualities beyond their control, clearly damage the self-image of girls and their expectations of their future. In fact, many girls have reported that their parents do not really care about them and view them as a burden. This was especially evident in the high number of child marriage cases that we saw both before, during and after the pandemic lockdowns (Call note with mentor, Patna, 9 Sept 2019; Call note with mentors, 12 Mar 2021; Call note with mentors, 9 April 2021).

We first encountered children's notion of marriage through the elopement that happened in one of the villages. In one of our schools, girls were discussing how they would not have 'good futures' and that they were all 'spoiled'. When asked why, the girls reported that one of the girls from their village had eloped with a boy from another community. The girl was eventually found and brought back to the village. Even though she was being severely beaten, she was not listening to her parents, and wanted to go to her husband. For the girls in the class, the lessons that they learnt was that choosing love inevitably leads to violence and non-fulfilment of wishes, but more importantly, that an incident wholly unconnected to them can impact their futures and deem them 'unmarriageable'. This idea or notion is not just held by the girls, but also by the parents who seek to overcome this hurdle by marrying the girls before the legal age of consent (Gupta, 2012; Asadullah & Wahhaj, 2016).

This burden, mostly associated with the costs of a marriage, is also seen as an escape route for many of the girls. Given that marriage is seen as the inevitable and natural destiny for girls, many of them pin their hope of emotional fulfilment through imagining a future where a husband will love them. Even though many of the girls realise that this future is a matter of chance and luck, some of them actively engage in creating fictional futures that involve a stereotypical 'prince of their dreams' who will whisk them away to a life of security and safety.

Even as we were grappling with these notions of marriage, we found out that one of the girls in our class – 'Nutan'<sup>4</sup> – was to get married. Given that Nutan was only 13 years old, we tried to talk to various authorities including the Head of the School and the teachers about stopping the marriage. All our efforts to delay this marriage, including contacting

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<sup>4</sup> Name changed to protect the identity of the child.

the local NGOs, local women's groups, and the authorities within the education department, proved fruitless. Especially at the community and the school-level, we faced fierce resistance. In fact, the HM and the teachers in the school told us to leave the matter alone, as the interference with such an important function would not be appreciated. Needless to say, Nutan's wedding took place as originally planned. In the aftermath of the incident, the mentors working in the schools were treated with some suspicion by the teachers and the community members as they felt that the mentors were a 'bad' influence on the children.

What this experience made clear for us was that children, families, teachers and communities were very clearly aware that while child marriage was a crime, it was also an 'inevitable' reality (Call note with mentor, Patna, 14 May 2019). For example, in the case of Nutan, even though she was only 13 years old, the community was able to devote energies into producing a birth certificate proving that she was about 19 years old (Call note with mentor, Patna, 14 May 2019). Even if schools knew that this was not the case, they were either too afraid or too complicit to intervene. These fears and concerns are quite valid. In fact, for a time, we were afraid of the safety of our mentors within the community as we were asking many questions related to it, and the community (for a time) turned hostile.

Given that this was the reality of children's lives, and we had limited means to stop the phenomenon, we decided to start focusing on the ways in which these gender scripts and gender roles are constructed. For the gender module (which was not administered), we had started working on concepts that started to question the traditional values of chastity, purity, modesty and obedience. Thinking for oneself, questioning why and how, and being able to articulate your own choices are not often part of the gender script that is provided to women, and we had hoped to bring these conversations into the classrooms to start to work on it. While we were able to engage with dismantling stereotypes and the social roles that are assigned to women, we were not able to implement the aspects that covered family roles and marriage (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 9 Sept 2019; Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 Oct 2019; Call note with mentors, 26 Feb 2021).

Although we engaged and built our relationship with the community post the incident, we learnt another very important lesson: unless there is some support from the social institutions and social structures around girls, they alone cannot fight this battle of independence and agency. It became clear to us that the focus has to be on fostering the agency and freedom of the children, but not without addressing the larger social impediments that bind their existence. This incident of child marriage, was by no means, the only one we have encountered, but our responses in the aftermath of the incident has been to push gently but firmly against the narratives of girls' safety and security, which has the potential of putting them in harm's way. To understand much more about the challenges that we faced and the support systems that we encountered, we move to the next section.

## 5.7 Challenges and support systems

As is evident from the section above, communities, families and teachers were not always pleased about the implementation of the project. In fact, in the beginning, the community was very resistant to the ideas of equality or justice. In community meetings, men would often object and say that *if women were given too much space, it would be problematic for the men to survive and that the husband would turn out to be a 'wet cat' (bheegi billi)* (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 12 Oct 2018, p.3). These attitudes were also brought into the classrooms through the children and we started to feel it was necessary to start the process of sensitising the community to create supportive environments for new knowledge systems that were being introduced within the classroom.

Families and communities also blamed technology for all the social ills. Prior and after the pandemic, communities felt that technology was responsible for much of the social problems that they have been experiencing. For instance, during the conversations related to the elopement of a girl and a boy, we found that parents of the children and community blamed it on accessibility to cell phones. The community believed that children often waste their time on phones and lose their 'moral values' (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 12 Oct 2018). So, even when we had to work with families to create WhatsApp groups during the pandemic or tried to call them over the telephone to interview their children, the resistance and suspicion was very high and refusals to participate were correspondingly high (Call note with mentors, 18 Dec 2020)

Another challenge that we faced in the field was that our implementation model was not tangible for parents, teachers, or the community to see. In the beginning, especially, we were constantly asked whether we would provide any tangible benefits to the schools. Given that many of the charitable organisations associated with the schools before had provided infrastructural facilities (such as providing books, bags, school benches, or even building bathrooms), there was some pressures on us to provide these 'materials' to the schools (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 12 Oct 2018). It took us a while for us to reorient them towards a different kind of system that was set up.

While the communities and families often questioned and challenged us regarding the utility or benefits of the BMP or LtL, they also turned out to be strongest support systems. For example, one of the HMs told us that the women in the neighbourhood might not be literate, but they were stubbornly convinced about educating their children – *unko apne bacchon ko padhane ki zid hai'* and would continue to support the education of their children despite many restrictions. The HM told us that this was not necessarily universal. There were several instances where even if the mothers were invested in their children (especially their daughters) studying, other members of the family would often get angry and try to stop it – *Yeh sab kya hai? Pheko iss sub ko'* (What is all this? Throw these out!!)

Correspondingly, we found both forms of parents – those who were highly resistant and those who were highly supportive. Some parents, for example, were very enthusiastic about the mentorship classes, as the children would bring home the various projects, paintings or their writings home to show to their parents (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 12 Oct 2018). The parents felt that the children were expressing a lot of interest in the classes. In fact, when we heard about the incident of the boy committing suicide (mentioned earlier in this chapter), we were conducting a focus group discussion with mothers. The mothers who had gathered around felt that if children were taught to think for themselves, reflect on their actions or have a modicum of coping mechanisms, the boy might not have died. They felt that *children these days do not open up and keep things to themselves* (Call note with mentor, Patna, 11 Oct 2018, p.2), and therefore, they welcomed any initiative which would help children become more self-aware and open about the issues that they face. While we took heart from these encouraging words, what we didn't realise that the self-awareness, articulation, and resilience that we were gearing the children up for would be sorely tested during the Covid-19 pandemic, which created its own set of structural constraints and impact.

## 5.8 Education in emergency

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, Covid-19 exacerbated further the marginalisation of children and their families in terms of their economic stability and social mobility. For example, the family of one of the girls in our schools used to sell snacks such as samosas and chaat as a livelihood. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, they were left with no means of earning any money. Even after the lockdown has lifted, they are unable to sustain their families as people are still afraid of being in public spaces and eating out. Additionally, with the several waves of the pandemic, they are unable to plan ahead, affecting their livelihoods and the sustainability of their family considerably.

### 5.8.1 Work and marriage

In situations like these, it is clear that children in the family have been deployed as additional labour, either in care giving at home (to free up other members for paid work) or directly into paid work. For example, when we tried to contact children over the phone or try to meet them while visiting their villages, we would not be able to get in touch with them as they were working in the fields for about Rs. 100-200 per day. When we were able to meet them, they didn't necessarily want to interact as they were very tired. When asked about the postcards or about their studies, they told us that they were too tired to study and didn't even get proper sleep. They were often tired from their work as a painter, plumber, as a shop's assistant etc. The teachers were also aware of this dynamic. In one of our interactions with one of the teachers, he told us: *Even an 8-year child is going to work in the field. The children are mostly engaged in planting potato in the farms. For an acre of land, they get about Rs. 100. Boys especially are doing a lot of farm labour. They have also started to sell liquor. The father buys the liquor and the child act as a delivery boy* (Fieldnotes, 28 Nov 2020, p.12).

For children who were not working, there was still a lot of care work that they were doing. When one of our mentors spoke to a few children about their daily routine, they told her: In the morning, they complete household chores and washing. Then from around 9am to 11am, they go for coaching. They then have lunch and spend some time watching television. After this, the girls have to start their chores again, mostly helping their mothers to cook. After they finish the chores, the children do some homework for the next day. The children told us that the homework from the coaching was quite extensive, and it often took them a really long time to complete, and they were often quite tired to do all of it.

The fact that girls are putting in a lot of time in the care work is a fairly universal finding. The time use data from third round of survey that we collected clearly indicated that 79% of the girls were spending an inordinate amount of time on chores and care work. This number when compared to the number of boys who reported the same is disproportionately high as only 38% of the boys said that they participated in household chores and care work. As indicated in children’s own narratives, this time devoted to care work takes time away from studies for girls as compared to boys. Even though girls themselves state that they are studying, our data also reveals that only 75% of the girls are able to spend time in their studies, as opposed to boys (84%). Only 5 % of the girls spent time playing with their friends.

*Table 5.8: Time Use*

		Round 3			Round 2		
District	Gender	Play	Studies	Chores and Care work	Play	Studies	Chores and Care work
Muzaffarpur	Male	27%	80%	42%	37%	96%	44%
	Female	6%	64%	76%	14%	86%	88%
	Total	15%	71%	62%	20%	88%	77%
Patna	Male	25%	90%	34%	34%	89%	51%
	Female	4%	86%	81%	16%	86%	95%
	Total	12%	88%	64%	23%	87%	79%

Source: Round 2 (first wave) data collected between Jul - Aug 2020 and round 3 (second wave) data collected between Jun - Sep 2021

Even the anganwadi workers have told us the different ways in which girls’ care work and mobility has been severely restricted since the pandemic started: *‘The girls stay at home much more than boys. This is what I have observed. Girls are not allowed to go out of the house. However, boys do not have such kind of restrictions* (Fieldnotes, 28 Nov 2020, p.18). Akin to the increased work load of girls, there has also been a resurgence of certain social norms that have influenced girls’ lives much more than boys: child

marriage. In our survey, we found that 21 girls from our schools have already been married. Some were married almost immediately after the closure of the schools, and some had had their first child by the time we had completed our third survey.

We already know that early marriages put girls at risk for increased violence, severe malnutrition among other things (Lee-Rife et.al, 2012) – but the clearest consequence of early child marriage is dropping out of school. True to form, we found during our telephonic survey that those who had gotten married were no longer intending to rejoin school. It was clear that almost all of them were unhappy at the turn of events. In our interviews with them, they expressed anxiety about their futures, and regressed the loss of freedoms related to their mobility and access to education. When we asked them about the prospects of higher studies, one of them told us: “*Ab toh meri shaadi ho gayi, bacha bhi ho gaya, school kaise jaaun?*” (I am married now, I also have a child, how do I go back to school?) (Child interview, Patna, 2021). Regardless of whether children were working or not, what was a universal finding was learning loss.

### 5.8.2 Learning losses

From our survey, we found that children had lost all kinds of familiarity with reading and writing during the Covid period, and they had regressed in their learning levels considerably (Fieldnotes, 28 Nov 2020). It is very likely that absence of mobility, time away from schools and friends, the time spent on chores and work has affected children adversely. Additionally, without regular contact with any form of learning, whether it is through peers or classrooms, they have not been able to keep up their knowledge bases. The children are also aware of these losses. When asked, about 87% of the children (89% girls and 83% boys) reported that their life was better before the lockdown. When asked why that was the case, the most frequent answers were that they would be able to study (76%) and they’d get to meet their friends (22%).

The fact that this was felt most keenly by girls should not come as a surprise as their lives and prospects were drastically changed during the pandemic period. For example, one of the girls told us: *As the schools have been closed for a long time, now I am not able to keep my mind busy. We try to entertain ourselves by watching dance show on T.V. We go to tuitions from 7 to 8, but that’s all* (Fieldnotes, 28 Nov 2020, p. 41). Even boys drifted during this period of time. When we spoke to the mothers of one of the boys in our class, she mentioned that he no longer studies (even at the coaching centres), and has lost all interest in education. He was heavily addicted to drugs, and is constantly out of the house (Fieldnotes, 28 Nov 2020).

Teachers were also clear that the closure of the schools would inevitably lead to some learning losses (Fieldnotes, 28 Nov 2020). But we found that it also affected the regularity of attendance (Fieldnotes, 31 July 2018; Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 21 Jan 2019; Call note with mentor, Patna, 27 Feb 2019). For example, when we examined our Covid survey data, we realised that only 11% of the children had gone to

schools regularly when the schools opened and over 33% couldn't recall the number of days that they had gone to school.

*Table 5.9: Attendance in schools between 1st wave and 2nd wave*

District	Gender	Did not attend	< 1 week	1 - 4	4 - 8	Don't remember / No response
Muzaffarpur	Male	24%	0%	29%	8%	34%
	Female	30%	0%	33%	9%	24%
Patna	Male	8%	7%	37%	12%	30%
	Female	9%	1%	32%	14%	41%
Grand Total		18%	2%	33%	11%	33%

Source: Round 2 (first wave) data collected between Jul - Aug 2020 and round 3 (second wave) data collected between Jun - Sep 2021

### 5.8.3 Access to technology

Part of the reason for the disengagement with school was that unlike those who were studying at home using online technologies, children in marginalised communities had no access to these technologies that might have helped augment their learning. When we spoke to teachers, they were very clear that online classes would not be useful for any of the families that we were working with. Because 50% of the children were coming from households where the major profession was landless labourers or migrant labourers, it was almost impossible for them to have access to smart phones (Fieldnotes, 28 Nov 2020). They also felt that even television or access to the time that things were being telecast were not available to some of the students, as they didn't have access to TVs either.

Even for families who did have access to smart mobile phones, these patterns were particularly gendered. From our Covid-19 survey, we found that even though 48% of the students had access to TV, only 11% were viewing any educational channels. Part of the reason is because children are very busy with their chores and work, but it is also possible that TV could not be used exclusively for the children's use. These numbers were even more dismal when we looked at access to phones. Only 47% of the girls had unhindered access to the phones as compared to 53% of boys.

Table 5.10: Access to Phones

		Round 3					Round 2				
		Always	Some times	Rare	Never	No Response	Always	Some times	Rare	Never	No Response
Muzaffarpur	Male	72%	23%	3%	2%	0%	67%	4%	30%	0%	0%
	Female	66%	21%	4%	6%	2%	43%	19%	35%	3%	0%
	Total	69%	22%	3%	5%	1%	49%	15%	34%	2%	0%
Patna	Male	33%	0%	66%	0%	1%	60%	11%	26%	0%	2%
	Female	30%	0%	65%	0%	5%	56%	10%	31%	0%	3%
	Total	31%	0%	65%	0%	4%	57%	11%	29%	0%	3%
All	Total	50%	11%	35%	2%	2%	54%	13%	31%	1%	2%

Source: Round 2 (first wave) data collected between Jul - Aug 2020 and round 3 (second wave) data collected between Jun - Sep 2021

Given that these children were first generational learners with almost no or limited access to technologically-supported education, it is no wonder that they experienced severe learning losses. Coaching centres or tuition centers often filled the gap that was left by the schools and inaccessibility to online education.

#### 5.8.4 Coaching centres

During the pandemic time, when the schools were primarily closed, many of the children were going to coaching centres to study. Some of them were often spending 3 hours in a day (from 10am to 1pm) every day (Call note with mentors, 4 Sept 2020). As one of the representatives of the coaching centres told us: *When schools were open, I did not have to focus so much on the child. In the schools, they were always learning something or the other. But during the lockdown, the schools were completely shut. Whatever the child is studying is happening only here. My efforts have been to fill the gap* (Fieldnotes, 28 Nov 2020, p. 44). During our community visits, we also realised that these coaching classes were not a given for girls, as it was for boys. They were often restricted at home, and when we started the community classes, these were the girls who were the most enthusiastic to join the classes. Apart from girls, many children from the most marginalised communities also couldn't access coaching centres, as the fees were quite high (Fieldnotes, 28 Nov 2020). Only those who could afford to spend out-of-pocket for their children's education could send their children to coaching institutions.

*Table 5.11: Support with Studies*

District	Gender	Round 2					Round 3				
		Self	Coaching	Male Member	Female Member	Friends and Neighbours	Self	Coaching	Male member	Female member	Friends and neighbours
Muzaffarpur	Male	4%	13%	9%	10%	3%	16%	16%	67%	38%	2%
	Female	9%	19%	21%	26%	4%	12%	15%	62%	44%	3%
	Total	7%	16%	16%	20%	3%	14%	15%	64%	41%	3%
Patna	Male	4%	32%	21%	20%	4%	5%	71%	33%	35%	2%
	Female	9%	19%	15%	23%	4%	14%	57%	19%	24%	4%
	Total	8%	24%	17%	22%	4%	11%	62%	24%	28%	4%
All		7%	20%	16%	21%	4%	12%	39%	43%	35%	3%

Source: Round 2 (first wave) data collected between Jul - Aug 2020 and round 3 (second wave) data collected between Jun - Sep 2021

Apart from our observations, our covid survey also indicates that about 62% of the students in Patna go to coaching, and there is a distinct gendered difference (71% boys vs 57% girls). We also found out that reliance on coaching has also increased, but more so for Patna. Given that the coaching cannot necessarily fill the gap left by schools, it is important to really understand the manner in which children are systematically being excluded from schooling (because of various social factors) because of the pandemic.

### 5.8.5 Dropping out of school

By the most conservative estimate, the children that we were working with lost two years of education, at the critical juncture when they were transitioning for elementary to secondary education. When secondary schools finally opened, we found that 90% of the children we had worked with had taken admission in the schools, but that also meant that 10% had not – a situation that appears to have worsened between our two rounds of survey. This was also more severe in Muzaffarpur than Patna.

*Table 5.12: Probability of return to school vs enrolment*

District	Round 3	Round 2
Muzaffarpur	Enrolled	87%
	Drop Out	12%
	No response	1%
Patna	Enrolled	91%
	Drop Out	8%
	No response	1%

Source: Round 2 (first wave) data collected between Jul - Aug 2020 and round 3 (second wave) data collected between Jun - Sep 2021

Although the reasons for the dropping out has been explicated earlier, we wanted to understand the relationship between economic distress and the possibility of dropping out. When we looked at the data, we realised that while most children (91%) from

households who had not experienced any cash or food shortages had enrolled into secondary schools, this was not the case for those who had experienced these shortages. In fact, the percentage of children who were dropping out from the most economically distressed households had moved from 2% to 10%, indicating the degree to which economic distress was driving these drop-out rates.

*Table 5.13: Economic distress and linkages with drop outs*

	Round 2			Round 3		
	Definitely Yes	Probably Yes	No	Enrolled	Drop Out	No response
Households reporting economic distress	92%	6%	2%	89%	10%	1%
No food or cash shortage	97%	0%	3%	91%	6%	3%
Grand Total	93%	5%	2%	89%	10%	1%

Source: Round 2 (first wave) data collected between Jul - Aug 2020 and round 3 (second wave) data collected between Jun - Sep 2021

Even in our interactions with children in the field, we could clearly see that those who were not able to attend school were the ones who had to move into full-time paid work, ostensibly to support the family's economic sustenance. As hard as this is, the situation is much worse for girls, who are often not even given the chance to work and study (as most boys are), but are often shunted into early marriages.

Given all of these tough choices that children are facing, the structural constraints upon them, as well as the vagaries of the learning environments, it is important to document whether the BMP had any influence or impact (however, tiny) on some of these processes. To see if all the elements of the project –the research methods, the documentation, the data collection, the pedagogical framework, the trainings, and the implementation – made a difference, we will now examine the impact of the BMP and LtL.

## 6 Impact of the BMP and LtL

Some of the primary questions that helped us to construct the mentorship modules or the LtL were fairly simple: Who are the children we are working with? What are their lives like? What burdens do they have? What gives them joy? What do they care about? It was integral for us to answer these questions so that the evolution of the mentoring model is geared towards the information that we received. It was important for us to be grounded in the realities of these children's lives instead of postulating and imagining their lives from afar. At the same time, we also wanted to make sure that the answers to the questions was useful for their lives. It was very important that the information gleaned about their lives is fed back into the implementation that would enable them to become confident in their abilities, question the world around them and find their voice. Even though the project was not able to do all that it had planned to do because of the structural constraints listed in the previous section, there were some movements in the right direction. We used data from the interactions that mentors had with students, the questions asked in the Endline, the interviews that we had with individual students and parents to compile a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the BMP and LtL.

### 6.1 Participation and articulation

Before we examined the manner in which children participated in the BMP and LtL, we wanted to get a sense of whether they were able to attend any of the sessions that we had in the classrooms. When we asked children in the endline about their regularity in attending, we found out that about 71% of the boys and 77% of the girls had attended almost all of the classes. Only 4% of the boys and 1% of the girls had never attended any of the classes in the BMP. This also reflected our experience in the field. Although in the beginning, children were restless and always wanted to leave the class, as the activities started getting interesting – despite the hesitation, children were quite curious.

*Table 6.1: Attendance of students in BMP classes*

School Name	Boys				Girls			
	Yes, but not regular	Yes Regularly	No, attended only few	No	Yes, but not regular	Yes Regularly	No, attended only few	No
RMS IMAMPUR	23%	73%	4%	0%	24%	73%	2%	2%
RUMS BIRPUR	38%	63%	0%	0%	26%	63%	11%	0%
RUMS MOHANPUR	10%	48%	24%	19%	30%	60%	7%	2%
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL					2%	98%	0%	0%
UMS HIMMATPUR	25%	55%	20%	0%	31%	64%	5%	0%
UMS NADIYAPUR	12%	82%	0%	6%	11%	89%	0%	0%
UMS NATWARIYA	19%	81%	0%	0%	3%	97%	0%	0%
UMS SHANTIPUR	13%	88%	0%	0%	19%	81%	0%	0%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	15%	80%	0%	5%	18%	68%	14%	0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>1%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Over the course of the BMP, we found that many of the older children (from the upper classes) would sometimes sneak into the classrooms to observe and do the activities. In the beginning, when the mentors were not always clear on who was in 7<sup>th</sup> and who was in the 8<sup>th</sup>, it was easier for older children to come to class (Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 Oct 2018). But as time went on, we realised that this was happening, but didn't discourage the practice. The only condition of their participation was that they would not dominate the space because of their seniority and would allow everyone in the classrooms to speak.

We also asked children about their favourite memories in the classroom. Our field insight and the endline both confirmed that children liked to (1) draw and paint, (2) play games, (3) discuss the information received related to social issues, (4) act in role-plays and skits, and (5) challenging and thinking games. There was a small gendered difference between boys and girls; while girls preferred drawing and painting, boys preferred playing games.

*Table 6.2: Top 5 Favourite Memory of BMP Classes*

School Name	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B
	Drawing		Drama		Info and social issues		Play and learn		Games	
RMS IMAMPUR	41%	46%	8%	4%	16%	4%	24%	8%	22%	23%
RUMS BIRPUR	11%	13%	42%	50%	26%	38%	0%	13%	26%	38%
RUMS MOHANPUR	16%	24%	56%	14%	53%	14%	7%	5%	19%	10%
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	44%		17%		17%		32%		10%	
UMS HIMMATPUR	23%	20%	15%	10%	18%	10%	21%	5%	18%	15%
UMS NADIYAPUR	22%	18%	11%	0%	7%	6%	22%	24%	22%	41%
UMS NATWARIYA	24%	8%	24%	12%	18%	23%	15%	31%	21%	35%
UMS SHANTIPUR	15%	19%	54%	38%	50%	44%	12%	0%	23%	13%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	14%	15%	9%	25%	9%	25%	5%	10%	32%	30%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>25%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Note: G – Girls, B- Boys

Acting in plays, especially appeared to allow people to participate in ways that were not necessarily expected. One of the boys, for example, who never spoke before, started to blossom in the play where he was depicting the difference between monarchy and democracy (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 21 Jan 2019). He did his part so well that everyone clapped for him. After the play, he started to participate in the activities much more and was also active in the classroom. The mentors also thought that the play

in and of itself was a good idea (regardless of whether children found it interesting or not) as children had never acted in plays before, and it gave them a new skill that they had never tried before. Even the teacher who helped the play to come to life felt that providing this space and opportunity for the children was really quite important, especially since it allows them to articulate concepts they are being taught in books.

Children also endorsed this when we asked them about the type of activities that they liked. They told us that they usually liked the interactive activities, followed by group activities. Children also liked watching videos and movies, and felt that they enjoyed interacting with the mentors and doing the activities made them quite happy and joyful.

*Table 6.3: Top 5 things the students like about BMP*

School Name	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B
	Methods used		Group activities		Videos and movies		Mentors		Participating in activities	
RMS IMAMPUR	48%	46%	46%	46%	40%	50%	40%	38%	27%	35%
RUMS BIRPUR	16%	25%	47%	63%	32%	63%	42%	50%	11%	0%
RUMS MOHANPUR	77%	43%	35%	33%	28%	24%	16%	10%	53%	29%
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	56%		56%		39%		24%		32%	
UMS HIMMATPUR	54%	40%	41%	20%	44%	40%	33%	25%	18%	20%
UMS NADIYAPUR	48%	76%	41%	6%	26%	24%	74%	29%	22%	12%
UMS NATWARIYA	29%	42%	59%	23%	21%	50%	53%	31%	26%	31%
UMS SHANTIPUR	58%	69%	54%	56%	42%	63%	58%	38%	19%	19%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	36%	50%	50%	35%	64%	55%	59%	45%	5%	0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>21%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Note: G – Girls, B- Boys

*Table 6.4: Top 5 reasons for liking BMP*

School Name	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B
	Fun		Get to draw, sing and dance		Laugh		Do new things		No punishment	
RMS IMAMPUR	38%	46%	29%	42%	19%	23%	27%	23%	25%	15%
RUMS BIRPUR	37%	38%	26%	13%	47%	25%	32%	25%	0%	13%
RUMS MOHANPUR	40%	19%	53%	29%	16%	19%	2%	0%	47%	19%
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	29%		39%		27%		24%		17%	
UMS HIMMATPUR	46%	20%	36%	30%	26%	30%	23%	0%	23%	20%

School Name	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B
	Fun		Get to draw, sing and dance		Laugh		Do new things		No punishment	
UMS NADIYAPUR	41%	24%	30%	24%	41%	35%	15%	0%	26%	24%
UMS NATWARIYA	47%	23%	15%	31%	26%	23%	38%	8%	21%	15%
UMS SHANTIPUR	58%	44%	23%	44%	35%	38%	31%	25%	23%	13%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	64%	30%	9%	20%	23%	65%	55%	40%	5%	5%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>16%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Note: G – Girls, B- Boys

One of the major reasons for liking the BMP was that it was fun. Children were also able to articulate that they enjoyed the activities because they felt it gave them the space to draw, sing and dance, and do new things. They also stated that they were happy in classrooms as there were no punishments in these classrooms.

Even in our conversations with the children, they were remarkably articulate about what they liked in the BMP activities (Call note with mentor, Patna, 6 Mar 2019). One of the children told us that he liked the teacher interview because it gave him the confidence to ask anyone anything. Before the interview, he felt that he couldn't do it, but once he finished doing it, he felt that he could talk to people older than him. Another girl told us that she liked the simple game of claps and snaps because it taught her to pay attention. She also told us that she learnt that one must carefully listen to the rhythm of claps and snaps and thus maintain coordination between the claps and snaps and the answers. A few other children told us that they also liked writing in their diaries as they had never done it before in their lives, and they felt that they could do so every day.

What surprised us most about these interactions was not necessarily the reasons that children were stating. When we had started working with these same sets of children, they would never talk about anything beyond what they liked or they disliked. But within a few months of the BMP, the students had reflected upon the intent of the activities or had grasped that which was most pertinent to them. Within a few short months of providing the space to explore their own voice, they had been able to unpack the benefits received from each of these activities. Although it might seem small, this movement, to us, is quite significant in and of itself.

To dig deeper into this thought process, we also asked children whether they would change anything in the BMP, if they were responsible for it. Children told us that they would teach more academic subjects based on their syllabus or they would try to incorporate more games and sports. Apart from this, children felt that they would keep the project the way it was. This gave us two important insights. Even though children

had learnt many things that corresponded with their syllabus (as is evident in the [curriculum paper](#)), children still associated ‘learning’ with ‘subjects’. Even though they were functioning with a broader understanding of the world, there is a strong foundation of thought that learning or studying can only be done through ‘textbooks’.

*Table 6.5: Choice of content if they had to teach - top 3 answers*

School Name	G	B	G	B	G	B
	Based on syllabus		Sports and games		Same as BMP	
RMS IMAMPUR	51%	65%	43%	38%	49%	23%
RUMS BIRPUR	63%	50%	58%	38%	16%	25%
RUMS MOHANPUR	35%	33%	19%	19%	42%	19%
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	20%		27%		59%	
UMS HIMMATPUR	59%	60%	46%	15%	41%	30%
UMS NADIYAPUR	26%	24%	59%	35%	44%	41%
UMS NATWARIYA	24%	38%	47%	42%	59%	35%
UMS SHANTIPUR	58%	56%	58%	56%	58%	50%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	73%	80%	68%	65%	9%	25%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>31%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Note: G – Girls, B- Boys

*Table 6.6: Choice of method if they had to teach - top 3 answers*

School Name	G	B	G	B	G	B
	Same as Mentors		Through games		Through books	
RMS IMAMPUR	56%	42%	46%	35%	44%	42%
RUMS BIRPUR	68%	63%	26%	50%	53%	38%
RUMS MOHANPUR	40%	38%	19%	14%	26%	10%
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	63%		44%		20%	
UMS HIMMATPUR	41%	40%	51%	15%	31%	25%
UMS NADIYAPUR	48%	41%	41%	41%	11%	0%
UMS NATWARIYA	71%	38%	50%	31%	24%	19%
UMS SHANTIPUR	77%	75%	35%	50%	42%	56%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	36%	65%	55%	65%	68%	70%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>32%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Note: G – Girls, B- Boys

As is evident from the previous tables, it is clear that children felt that they wanted and appreciated more interaction and engagement within the classrooms. Children felt that it would help them learn better, improve their academic performance, make the class fun and would improve academic performance. This is perhaps one of the reasons why children were very enamoured by the teacher interviews. Almost all of the children across the schools were very happy with the teacher interviews and felt that they had a lot of confidence post the interview (Call note with mentor, Patna, 12 Dec 2018). However, we must write a caveat that this was true only if the teacher was cooperative and willing. When the teachers were happy and engaged with the teacher interview, children felt instantly comfortable and were able to rid of the fear that often plagues the teacher-student relationship.

*Table 6.7: Top 3 answers on what would the students do differently than BMP classes*

	<b>G</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>B</b>
<b>School Name</b>	<b>Have more games</b>		<b>Tell stories</b>		<b>Include more fun activities</b>	
RMS IMAMPUR	40%	35%	33%	35%	32%	27%
RUMS BIRPUR	47%	38%	42%	25%	0%	0%
RUMS MOHANPUR	28%	10%	9%	5%	30%	19%
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	34%		44%		34%	
UMS HIMMATPUR	28%	30%	31%	15%	31%	20%
UMS NADIYAPUR	37%	18%	19%	18%	26%	6%
UMS NATWARIYA	41%	31%	18%	8%	21%	15%
UMS SHANTIPUR	38%	31%	38%	38%	8%	13%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	64%	55%	50%	40%	5%	20%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>17%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Note: G – Girls, B- Boys

*Table 6.8: Reasons for choosing to do things differently than BMP - top 3 answers*

	<b>G</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>B</b>
<b>School Name</b>	<b>Better students/improve studies</b>		<b>To make activities fun</b>		<b>Improve focus of students</b>	
RMS IMAMPUR	44%	54%	21%	27%	22%	35%
RUMS BIRPUR	37%	50%	0%	0%	5%	0%
RUMS MOHANPUR	26%	10%	60%	29%	23%	24%
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	37%		34%		32%	
UMS HIMMATPUR	26%	15%	23%	20%	26%	20%
UMS NADIYAPUR	26%	12%	19%	35%	19%	18%

School Name	G	B	G	B	G	B
	Better students/improve studies		To make activities fun		Improve focus of students	
UMS NATWARIYA	44%	27%	29%	23%	15%	12%
UMS SHANTIPUR	54%	31%	12%	6%	4%	25%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	36%	20%	0%	15%	0%	5%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>19%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Note: G – Girls, B- Boys

Even from our interactions, observations and interviews with the children, it was clear that the children were curious and engaged. The children were sponges for information, curious and unafraid of asking strangers (researchers in the field) a multitude of questions including the physics of flying and the type of tyres used by airplanes (Fieldnotes, 14 Feb 2019). Other changes that we observed was that children were able to build companionship and friendship within the classrooms. For example, in the Krantipur where girls were living with each other, they didn't appear to know each other's lives. It was only through our activities that they started really engaging with each other (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 21 Sept 2018). Even girls who were shy would open up to discuss the work amongst themselves.

One of the more radical and visible clues of children's participation in class was when they started writing stories on their own (Call note with mentor, Patna, 11 Oct 2018). One, for example, was called "Raat ke Ansoon (Tears of the Night)" and was inspired by the child's sister who told her that the dew drops were often referred to as the tears of the night. Children told us that they drew the inspiration from various stories that they had heard and from their own life experiences. Raat ke Ansoon was not a complete story (and therefore, not featured in this telling); yet, the attempt at thinking about various pieces of information together, taking inspiration from your own life and creating a fictionalised narrative around it are useful skills that the children were clearly learning (Call note with mentor, Patna, 11 Oct 2018).

Moreover, what was evident in the classrooms was that for some girls, providing the means of writing also created an outlet – something that they did not typically have access to. So, when we sent letters to many of the children, it was not surprising for us to hear girls excited about writing again. In fact, two girls from Jashpur School called up the mentor as soon as they received the cards in excitement. They told the mentor that they had already finished reading it and wanted to discuss about it with the mentor (Call note with mentors, 25 June 2020). This unsolicited expression of interest and excitement was a very useful encouragement for us to keep working on improving the BMP as well as the LtL.

## 6.2 Critical thinking skills

One of the major ways in which we were able to foster critical thinking skills amongst children was to use something from their lives and to begin a conversation around it. For example, if we did an activity on family – on who is considered family and who is not – we would ask pertinent questions about the way in which families are defined. We would use the information to start deconstructing the concept of the family itself. In one of our discussions around the family, one of the boys in the classroom mentioned that his cows whom he took care of every day should also be considered as part of the family. Other children in different classes also felt that trees and the farms that they take care of is part of the family as well (Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 July 2019). So, the discussion that was enabled took us far from the usual conversation around nuclear-joint binary that is often part of the discourse.

Moreover, we were able to use this conversation about family to explore the different diversities of families that exist in India. Although initially derisive that other family forms apart from the traditional patriarchal one could be formed, we were able to orient children towards different ‘traditional’ family forms such as matrilineal family forms that exist in India. Here, the orientation was that these were as ‘traditional’ and ‘ancient’ as any other form (Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 July 2019). Although children were initially sceptical, by creating curiosity and interest, we were able to just guide them to find out about the information themselves.

One of the ways that we tried to get children to think was also to get children to understand the process by which they create new memories or store information. When children are made aware of the strategies that they themselves have already evolved, they feel more confident about using them and gain a modicum of self-confidence as well (Call note with mentor, Patna, 5 Aug 2019). We found that within a year of engagement, children were not hesitant about taking risks within the classroom. They started to become unafraid of trying out new things, even if it is radically different from anything that they have ever done before (for example, the taste test), and they had also been thinking about the intent of the activity (Call note with mentor, Patna, 5 Aug 2019). Even simple activities such as asking children to devise up the different ways in which a square can be divided into four parts started to get children interested. Even teachers and mentors were surprised at the number of answers that children were able to generate once the concepts started to get clear (Call note with mentor, Patna, 9 Sept 2019).

Even difficult concepts such as stereotypes about men cooking provided a rich insight into the way children slowly started to examine their own experiences to push against popular notions of gendered behaviour. For example, when children started to create a story about women cooking, a boy piped up and said that he cooks the food in his house, and therefore, a scenario must also include his role. Encouraged, another girl said that girls can also hold guns and fire them as she had seen women constables do it. By getting children to see the exceptions in their own lives, we were able to (with some

difficulty) to push against stereotypes such as ‘girls cannot be strong’ or ‘men don’t feel pain’. Using their own experiences, we were, therefore, able to tackle many difficult concepts (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 9 Sept 2019; Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 Oct 2019; Call note with mentors, 26 Feb 2021).

To understand in greater depth whether children really understood the concepts that we were trying to articulate, in our endline, we included a few true and false questions, specifically related to the second module of BMP which focused on knowledge, caste, scientific temperament and stereotypes.

When we asked children about whether we use all our five senses to make sense of our surroundings, 85% of the children answered correctly. We then asked children about their deeply held superstitions, and we felt a bit relieved that 63% of children felt that ghosts did not exist in reality.

*Table 6.9: Responses of students to the statement - we use our 5 senses to make sense of our surroundings*

Row Labels	TRUE	FALSE	Don't know	Grand Total
<b>RMS IMAMPUR</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	69%	15%	15%	100%
Girls	81%	6%	13%	100%
<b>RUMS BIRPUR</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	75%	13%	13%	100%
Girls	84%	5%	11%	100%
<b>RUMS MOHANPUR</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	95%	5%	0%	100%
Girls	84%	7%	9%	100%
<b>SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Girls	98%	2%	0%	100%
<b>UMS HIMMATPUR</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	95%	5%	0%	100%
Girls	87%	5%	8%	100%
<b>UMS NADIYAPUR</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	88%	12%	0%	100%
Girls	89%	4%	7%	100%
<b>UMS NATWARIYA</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	85%	12%	4%	100%
Girls	97%	0%	3%	100%
<b>UMS SHANTIPUR</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	69%	25%	6%	100%
Girls	73%	12%	15%	100%
<b>UMS SHAKTIPUR</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	90%	10%	0%	100%
Girls	64%	9%	27%	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Table 6.10: Responses of students to the statement – ghosts are real

Row Labels	TRUE	FALSE	Don't know	Grand Total
<b>RMS IMAMPUR</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	35%	65%	0%	100%
Girls	29%	65%	6%	100%
<b>RUMS BIRPUR</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	50%	50%	0%	100%
Girls	47%	47%	5%	100%
<b>RUMS MOHANPUR</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	52%	48%	0%	100%
Girls	28%	72%	0%	100%
<b>SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Girls	22%	71%	7%	100%
<b>UMS HIMMATPUR</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	30%	70%	0%	100%
Girls	33%	62%	5%	100%
<b>UMS NADIYAPUR</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	47%	53%	0%	100%
Girls	37%	63%	0%	100%
<b>UMS NATWARIYA</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	8%	88%	4%	100%
Girls	29%	65%	6%	100%
<b>UMS SHANTIPUR</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	25%	75%	0%	100%
Girls	46%	50%	4%	100%
<b>UMS SHAKTIPUR</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	35%	65%	0%	100%
Girls	55%	36%	9%	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

We also asked them about whether the sense of smell was directly connected to the memory, based on an activity that we had done regarding the information provided to us through the nose. Seventy percent of the children answered this question correctly. As we had done a significant amount of work on sustainability, particularly recycling, we felt that a question related to this was very pertinent. So, we asked children whether recycling meant throwing away things after having used them once. More than half of the children (60%) felt that this was true.

Table 6.11: Responses of students to the statement – sense of smell is connected to memory

Row Labels	TRUE	FALSE	Don't know	Grand Total
<b>RMS IMAMPUR</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	65%	35%	0%	100%
Girls	70%	22%	8%	100%
<b>RUMS BIRPUR</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	75%	25%	0%	100%
Girls	68%	16%	16%	100%
<b>RUMS MOHANPUR</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	86%	10%	5%	100%
Girls	72%	21%	7%	100%
<b>SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Girls	83%	17%	0%	100%
<b>UMS HIMMATPUR</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	75%	15%	10%	100%
Girls	72%	15%	13%	100%
<b>UMS NADIYAPUR</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	65%	29%	6%	100%
Girls	81%	11%	7%	100%
<b>UMS NATWARIYA</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	58%	35%	8%	100%
Girls	74%	24%	3%	100%
<b>UMS SHANTIPUR</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	63%	25%	13%	100%
Girls	58%	23%	19%	100%
<b>UMS SHAKTIPUR</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	55%	45%	0%	100%
Girls	50%	32%	18%	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Table 6.12: Responses of students to the statement – recycling meant throwing things away after we had used them once

Row Labels	TRUE	FALSE	Don't know	Grand Total
<b>RMS IMAMPUR</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	46%	46%	8%	100%
Girls	22%	62%	16%	100%
<b>RUMS BIRPUR</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	13%	88%	0%	100%
Girls	26%	47%	26%	100%
<b>RUMS MOHANPUR</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	38%	57%	5%	100%
Girls	40%	51%	9%	100%
<b>SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Girls	17%	66%	17%	100%
<b>UMS HIMMATPUR</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	25%	55%	20%	100%
Girls	23%	62%	15%	100%
<b>UMS NADIYAPUR</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	12%	71%	18%	100%
Girls	19%	63%	19%	100%
<b>UMS NATWARIYA</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	35%	58%	8%	100%
Girls	29%	59%	12%	100%
<b>UMS SHANTIPUR</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	38%	63%	0%	100%
Girls	38%	42%	19%	100%
<b>UMS SHAKTIPUR</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	10%	85%	5%	100%
Girls	9%	73%	18%	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

To break the stigma and fear that children typically have around mathematics, we had designed an entire class on the concept of mathematics as a language. Consequently, we had devised a game that connected mathematics to music. When we asked children (in reference to this) whether there is mathematics in music, 72% answered correctly.

Table 6.13: Responses of students to the statement – there is maths in music

Row Labels	TRUE	FALSE	Don't know	Grand Total
<b>RMS IMAMPUR</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	81%	15%	4%	100%
Girls	84%	8%	8%	100%
<b>RUMS BIRPUR</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	75%	13%	13%	100%
Girls	53%	32%	16%	100%
<b>RUMS MOHANPUR</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	62%	33%	5%	100%
Girls	63%	33%	5%	100%
<b>SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Girls	85%	15%	0%	100%
<b>UMS HIMMATPUR</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	80%	20%	0%	100%
Girls	79%	13%	8%	100%
<b>UMS NADIYAPUR</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	76%	12%	12%	100%
Girls	59%	22%	19%	100%
<b>UMS NATWARIYA</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	62%	31%	8%	100%
Girls	68%	24%	9%	100%
<b>UMS SHANTIPUR</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	69%	31%	0%	100%
Girls	69%	27%	4%	100%
<b>UMS SHAKTIPUR</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	60%	35%	5%	100%
Girls	64%	32%	5%	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Another question related to their curricula was based on reflection and light. Students were asked whether - *black appears to be black because it absorbs all the light rather than reflect it*. About 57% of the students said that the statement was true, while 31 % said it was false.

Table 6.14: Responses of students to the statement – black appears to be black because it absorbs all the light rather than reflect it

Row Labels	TRUE	FALSE	Don't know	Grand Total
<b>RMS IMAMPUR</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	54%	31%	15%	100%
Girls	54%	30%	16%	100%
<b>RUMS BIRPUR</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	75%	25%	0%	100%
Girls	68%	21%	11%	100%
<b>RUMS MOHANPUR</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	81%	14%	5%	100%
Girls	53%	37%	9%	100%
<b>SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Girls	59%	37%	5%	100%
<b>UMS HIMMATPUR</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	55%	45%	0%	100%
Girls	56%	31%	13%	100%
<b>UMS NADIYAPUR</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	65%	24%	12%	100%
Girls	44%	37%	19%	100%
<b>UMS NATWARIYA</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	46%	35%	19%	100%
Girls	47%	32%	21%	100%
<b>UMS SHANTIPUR</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	75%	19%	6%	100%
Girls	65%	31%	4%	100%
<b>UMS SHAKTIPUR</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	55%	35%	10%	100%
Girls	50%	32%	18%	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Apart from these questions on whether they understand the basic information that we had provided to children, we also wanted to explore children's understanding of more abstract concepts such as stereotypes. We gave them two statements – *only fair and thin women are beautiful* and *women look ugly without makeup*. What we found was that 69% of the children did not believe that the first statement was true and 67% of the children did not believe that the second statement was true. While there are some regional and gender variations (with boys believing this to be true more often than girls), it is useful to know that the difficult concepts of stereotyping were internalised, to some extent.

Table 6.15: Responses of students to the statement – only fair and thin women are beautiful

Row Labels	TRUE	FALSE	Don't know	Grand Total
<b>RMS IMAMPUR</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	27%	69%	4%	100%
Girls	19%	81%	0%	100%
<b>RUMS BIRPUR</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	38%	63%	0%	100%
Girls	32%	53%	16%	100%
<b>RUMS MOHANPUR</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	48%	52%	0%	100%
Girls	42%	58%	0%	100%
<b>SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Girls	5%	95%	0%	100%
<b>UMS HIMMATPUR</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	60%	40%	0%	100%
Girls	28%	72%	0%	100%
<b>UMS NADIYAPUR</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	35%	65%	0%	100%
Girls	15%	85%	0%	100%
<b>UMS NATWARIYA</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	35%	62%	4%	100%
Girls	3%	91%	6%	100%
<b>UMS SHANTIPUR</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	56%	38%	6%	100%
Girls	54%	46%	0%	100%
<b>UMS SHAKTIPUR</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	50%	50%	0%	100%
Girls	18%	82%	0%	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Table 6.16: Responses of students to the statement – women look ugly without makeup

Row Labels	TRUE	FALSE	Don't know	Grand Total
<b>RMS IMAMPUR</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	23%	73%	4%	100%
Girls	17%	83%	0%	100%
<b>RUMS BIRPUR</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	25%	75%	0%	100%
Girls	26%	68%	5%	100%
<b>RUMS MOHANPUR</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	71%	29%	0%	100%
Girls	63%	35%	2%	100%
<b>SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Girls	10%	90%	0%	100%
<b>UMS HIMMATPUR</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Row Labels	TRUE	FALSE	Don't know	Grand Total
Boys	40%	60%	0%	100%
Girls	36%	64%	0%	100%
<b>UMS NADIYAPUR</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	29%	71%	0%	100%
Girls	22%	78%	0%	100%
<b>UMS NATWARIYA</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	42%	58%	0%	100%
Girls	12%	88%	0%	100%
<b>UMS SHANTIPUR</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	38%	63%	0%	100%
Girls	50%	50%	0%	100%
<b>UMS SHAKTIPUR</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Boys	45%	55%	0%	100%
Girls	18%	77%	5%	100%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Apart from understanding the concepts themselves, we were also interested in the ways in which children were starting to connect the concepts. One of the ways that we could document this was in the ways that they were able to use other analogies to depict the same concepts. For example, when asked to draw a healthy body, children enquired whether they could depict a tree to indicate a healthy body. For example, some children drew strong roots and filled fruits on the branches. They were able to then talk about how clean air and water was necessarily for the tree and the body to grow (Call note with mentor, Patna, 14 May 2019).

Another example was when children started to use emotion to engage with events or markers in their own lives. For example, children spoke quite poignantly about having to move away from their parents' home and living in someone else's house because of various constraints, experiencing the death of a parent and turning into the secondary breadwinner of the family, or even just a heated argument with a friend (Call note with mentor, Patna, 18 Feb 2019). Experiences of discrimination, of wanting attention from parents and being unable to get it, and being side-lined by their siblings (mostly, their brothers) – all of these came out rather 'naturally' from children (Call note with mentor, Patna, 18 Feb 2019). We could see students starting to use the concepts that we were introducing in the class in various ways to make sense of their own emotions and their own lives.

These examples done in the classrooms could be reinforced through the postcards. For example, the reason that we were able to introduce the concept of stereotypes in the postcards so easily was because we had already worked on this in our classrooms (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 9 Sept 2019). Given that we had already worked through the points of resistance within the classroom, getting them to navigate the same

concepts through the postcards was not very hard, and children were able to understand and reflect on commonly held stereotypes, especially related to women.

While one part of the explanation for the retention of these concepts were the techniques of spiralling that we were using, the other part was that during the pandemic period, the children had grown or matured. As mentioned earlier, most of the children had had increased duties such as care work and paid work and were shouldering some part of the financial obligations to their family (Fieldnotes, 14 Feb 2019; Call note with mentors, 19 Feb 2021; Call note with mentors, 26 Feb 2021). A few girls had started taking coaching even though they were still studying; still others were selling fruits, working in offices, or doing farm labour (Call note with mentors, 26 Feb 2021).

Even though they were often physically exhausted and drained, they almost always came to community classes. Although they might not have been very interested in school earlier, now they were more appreciative of any learning opportunities. For example, in one of the community classes, children had already finished creating a water filter during the pandemic period as an assignment within the postcard. But when the community classes started, they insisted on doing it again because they felt like *this was something they could do on their own* (Call note with mentors, 26 Feb 2021, p.6). They felt that this was a learning space which had not been available to them for a long time.

### **6.3 Building a safe space**

One of the first insights that we had in the classrooms was that children were performing on the basis of how their teachers expected them to perform. We found, as we went through the activities, that many of the children were hesitant to participate because they were already 'branded' as dull or unable to write, and therefore, did not feel like they needed to make the effort to participate (Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 Oct 2018; Call note with mentor, Patna, 23 Nov 2018; Call note with mentor, Patna, 27 Feb 2019; Call note with mentor, Patna, 24 April 2019). Our initial engagement, therefore, was to ensure that everyone participated, they must try, and an attitude was carefully cultivated that even if they are wrong, there are people who will help him learn (Call note with mentor, Patna, 23 Nov 2018).

To address this, we also started building exercises into the next module that would help children identify being as the 'knower' of things. We strongly felt that the information that was provided to them was not as crucial as the space and time provided so that they could reflect on what was said. Additionally, we also wanted to provide them space for failure. For example, for any new game that we introduced, we allowed space for children to learn the rules first. Children would only start seriously playing the game only after all children had understood the rules after many failed attempts (Call note with mentor, Patna, 7 Nov 2018). This helped children to really get comfortable with the idea of playing the game instead of performing.

One of the ways in which we were able to build this space was by encouraging open debate and discussion around many subject areas. For example, if children had to make rules for communication for the entire class, we encouraged a lot of debate and discussion on both the pros and cons of this (Call note with mentor, Patna, 7 Nov 2018). While the process of building consensus was time-consuming, it also allowed many children to express their own viewpoints within this process and allowed the entire class to come to their own understanding of the issues related to communication. Instead of being directed by another authoritative person, they were able to create the rules, by understanding the benefits and challenges themselves.

Initially, we had also tried to create these spaces outside of the classrooms by assigning a few take-home reflective exercises. However, we gave up on it and concentrated on building the space within the classroom for two reasons. One was that the children were not ready yet to work or think independently and two, children, mostly girls, were unable to prioritise studying when they got home (Call note with mentor, Patna, 3 Jan 2019). Therefore, we switched our focus on ensuring that children were able to independently do the work within the classroom and increasingly encouraged them to work and think through on their own, so as to enable the process of independent thinking.

An example of this was related to a story that a girl wrote in her diary assignment and wanted to share with the class (Call note with mentor, Patna, 3 Jan 2019). During the discussion, the girl started narrating (from her diary) episodes between the age of 3 years to her current age. She wrote about when she got sick, her brother was born and all the good things that happened to her. Two things were impressive about this: (1) this was an unprompted disclosure of one self and what has happened to her, and (2) she was very creative in her narrative. As the mentor told us - the story was more like an 'aapbiti' – an autobiography of sorts. The story was not only written in great detail, but distinct episodes happening to her at different points in her life were written lucidly.

It was this episode that made us realise that children had a lot of stories in them for which they had no means of articulation. They already had a perspective and an understanding of the ways in which they were marginalised and the systematic way in which their families were undergoing various forms of suffering. When we asked the mentor about the next steps related to this, she told us that all children need actually are books – *they don't need any instruction or guidance, as they already have that in their heads. All they need was saadhan (tools)* (Call note with mentor, Patna, 3 Jan 2019).

It must be noted that while we encouraged sharing of stories, we also encouraged introspection. The reason was that we wanted to emphasise the exploration, the introspection and the expression, but not the performance. The mentors strongly felt that the children must feel safe to write whatever that they want without having the scrutiny of sharing (Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 Oct 2018).

One of the primary ways that we felt that we were able to build the space was through the process of mentoring. Given that we had a sense of the socio-economic backgrounds of the children, we already knew that many of the children did not have any adults invested in their welfare. This was truer for girls than boys. Therefore, it was very important for all of us – researchers and mentors – to think about their needs, to find out their motivations and their challenges. We felt that without a central understanding of why children behave the way they do (whether they are silent or disruptive), we would not be able to design activities for different kinds of children. In fact, part of the way in which we created the safe space was by ensuring that children did not feel bad or guilty about their actions in the classrooms. We wanted mentors to function outside framework of ‘punishment’ and figure out how the mentoring in different circumstances would work. Even during disruptions (of which there was plenty of), we felt it was necessary to focus on engaging children so that other behavioural issues such as leaving class and disruptive behaviour can be stopped or at least, mitigated (Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 Oct 2018; Call note with mentor, Patna, 5 Dec 2018; Call note with mentor, Patna, 19 Jan 2019; Fieldnotes, 28 Aug 2019; Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 Aug 2019).

#### 6.4 Gender

One of the major themes of the BMP and LtL has been gender. While the second module of caste and knowledge was more explicitly included into the themes that we covered, gender was an overarching theme that cut across almost all of the activities that we featured in the BMP and LtL. Part of it was driven by prior understanding of the schools, but it was also driven by our experiences with the children. In our earliest visits when we saw girls sitting on the floor, and boys sitting on the desks, we knew that we had a lot of ground to cover. When we started working with children, we also saw this visual demarcation manifest into the way children interaction with each other. When put into mixed groups, girls were much more amenable to playing in mixed groups, but boys were adamant that they would not play with girls (Call note with mentor, Patna, 7 Nov 2018). Children also felt much more secure in their own friend circles.

Although in the initial phases, we allowed children to participate in manner that was more comfortable for them, we started to push these boundaries of comfort as we started working on more engaging activities. Within just a few months, children who were very reluctant to engage in gender-mixed groups were okay with it (Call note with mentor, Patna, 12 Dec 2018). They were not enthused about it, but they had started to create an open line of communication, and this helped us to break down a lot of the myths and mysteries of the ‘opposite’ gender. Even teachers told us that boys and girls had started to speak and interact with one another after some of the activities (such as the play on monarchy and democracy). To really understand whether these interactions helped change knowledge about gender, attitudes, capabilities or their understanding of gender, we observed, made note of, and asked specific questions related to gender roles,

gender attitudes, capabilities, and violence through our daily interactions, the surveys, interviews and discussions. A summary of our understanding is provided below.

#### 6.4.1 Gender knowledge

In our baseline and endlines survey, we had specific questions related to whether children knew about their own bodies and health. We chose menstruation because it was a taboo subject for both boys and girls. This involved true and false questions as well as one pictorial quiz. We asked children whether this statement - *all girls beyond the age of 13-14 years bleed once a month, this is called menstruation*, was true or not. The pictorial quiz was to see if children could identify a sanitary pad. When we looked at the results, we could see some movements. We found that children did seem to understand the meaning of menstruation with us seeing some gratifying improvement from the baseline (54% girls and 42% boys) to the endline (70% girls and 72% boys.).

*Table 6.17: Response of the Boys to the statement - girls beyond the age of 13-14 bleed every month - this is called menstruation*

School	Boys					
	Baseline			Endline		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know
RMS IMAMPUR	24%	12%	64%	58%	19%	23%
RUMS MOHANPUR	23%	3%	74%	57%	24%	19%
RUMS, BIRPUR	0%	13%	80%	13%	75%	13%
UMS HIMMATPUR	16%	6%	74%	35%	25%	40%
UMS NADIYAPUR	19%	6%	69%	53%	18%	29%
UMS NATWARIYA	15%	8%	73%	42%	27%	31%
UMS SHANTIPUR	13%	4%	78%	50%	31%	19%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	17%	13%	70%	10%	30%	60%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>31%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 6.18: Response of the Girls to the statement - girls beyond the age of 13-14 bleed every month - this is called menstruation*

School	Girls					
	Baseline			Endline		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	33%	22%	45%			
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	70%	6%	23%	85%	7%	7%
RMS IMAMPUR	72%	4%	22%	78%	8%	14%
RUMS MOHANPUR	39%	13%	48%	72%	12%	16%
RUMS, BIRPUR	50%	17%	33%	53%	5%	42%
UMS HIMMATPUR	57%	14%	29%	69%	18%	13%
UMS NADIYAPUR	32%	6%	61%	74%	7%	19%

School	Girls					
	Baseline			Endline		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know
UMS NATWARIYA	78%	3%	20%	88%	3%	9%
UMS SHANTIPUR	44%	22%	34%	46%	31%	23%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	47%	18%	29%	27%	5%	68%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>19%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

With respect to the identification of the sanitary pad, we saw some movement with girls, but not with boys. In the baseline, only 36% of the girls had been able to correctly identify the object, but by the endline, this number moved to 60%. The numbers for boys improved (10% to 14%), but only slightly. Part of the reason for the jump with the girls could be that they were at the age that they had started to menstruate and therefore, they were much more aware of the sanitary pad than boys were. Perhaps, the movement with the boys might have been stronger if we had directly engaged with concepts of menstruation within our classrooms, something we had planned to do before the pandemic hit.

*Table 6.19: Identify the object- Responses of Boys*

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Sanitary napkin	Can't identify/ Don't know	Sanitary napkin	Can't identify/ Don't know
RMS IMAMPUR	24%	33%	19%	27%
RUMS MOHANPUR	9%	83%	24%	67%
RUMS, BIRPUR	0%	87%	0%	38%
UMS HIMMATPUR	6%	61%	15%	30%
UMS NADIYAPUR	19%	44%	29%	35%
UMS NATWARIYA	12%	50%	15%	15%
UMS SHANTIPUR	0%	91%	0%	50%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	3%	77%	0%	65%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>40%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

Table 6.20: Identify the object- Responses of Girls

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Sanitary napkin	Can't identify/ Don't know	Sanitary napkin	Can't identify/ Don't know
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	25%	73%		
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	83%	11%	95%	5%
RMS IMAMPUR	56%	39%	81%	13%
RUMS MOHANPUR	4%	83%	26%	67%
RUMS, BIRPUR	11%	83%	16%	58%
UMS HIMMATPUR	33%	57%	72%	23%
UMS NADIYAPUR	26%	71%	74%	15%
UMS NATWARIYA	55%	38%	79%	9%
UMS SHANTIPUR	13%	81%	19%	54%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	12%	79%	18%	77%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>31%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

#### 6.4.2 Gender roles

One of the themes that we were able to cover, both in BMP and more strongly in LTL, were the construction of gender roles. We started to see a shift in the understanding of gender roles, quite early, in the classrooms, indicating to us that children were thinking through these issues prior to our intervention, but did not necessarily have the space to express them.

When we asked children to talk about things that they liked or disliked, most children usually provided us gender-typed answers. Girls preferred doing things at home, and boys preferred things outside like cycling or driving. However, in a discussion when one of the boys commented that boys who helped their mothers in cooking and cleaning were 'mauga' (sissy or effeminate), another boy immediately questioned it. A girl joined in by adding that both the men and women should help with household chores and it was unfair that only women were expected to do all the household work. Another boy also supported this statement by the girl by arguing that since women should help out with the work outside the house, men should also contribute in household chores. What that illustrated to us, very early in the intervention stage that, children were able to state boldly and clearly their experiences and opinions, when a safe space was provided – and these opinions were not necessarily the gendered stereotyped expressions that they were trained to deliver.

In another conversation where children were debating about the various rules of communication, a boy asked that one of the rules of communication has to be that the girls should always wear two plaits (of hair). When this rule was proposed, our mentors asked them about the purpose or intent of the – how was this rule related to

communication? The boys responded by saying that the girls should follow the rules of the school which was to tie two plaits. Almost everyone agreed to this, except one boy and one girl. The girl said that it was not comfortable, so she didn't want to adhere to the rule. The boy said that he didn't think two plaits was necessary. Based on this, there was a lot of argument back and forth, which then gave us an opportunity to go 'out of syllabus' and really engage with the deep distrust and antagonism that girls and boys had towards each other within the classroom (Call note with mentor, Patna, 23 Nov 2018).

Even in this discussion, when boys started to protest that they didn't know any girls (as a way of distancing themselves from girls), our mentors pointed out whether they didn't know their mothers or sisters or aunts. The boys appeared to be taken aback with the idea that the 'idea' of women/girls could also be embodied in other people as well, including their own mothers and sisters. Using this as an opening, the mentors were able to disentangle the hostility. To see if these efforts bore any fruit, we asked a few situation-based questions in our endline to engage with stereotypes and gender roles. The first situation was about a girl who wanted to be a cricket player, and the second, where a boy wanted to be a nurse. The students had to tell us if they supported their career choices, and the reasons for the same.

The results indicated that most children were in support of the girl wanting to be a cricket player. This support increased from baseline to endline for both boys (65% to 73%) and girls (78% to 87%). The reasons stated for the support of the girl was that she should pursue her ambition irrespective of hurdles, while those not in support said that cricket was not a traditional career choice for girls and therefore, not a good choice. These responses remained the same from baseline to endline.

*Table 6.21: Responses of Boys to the question if the girl should become a cricketer*

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
RMS IMAMPUR	73%	27%	85%	15%
RUMS MOHANPUR	53%	47%	81%	19%
RUMS, BIRPUR	60%	40%	88%	0%
UMS HIMMATPUR	70%	30%	80%	20%
UMS NADIYAPUR	94%	6%	65%	35%
UMS NATWARIYA	81%	19%	88%	12%
UMS SHANTIPUR	61%	39%	31%	69%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	43%	57%	55%	45%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>27%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

Table 6.22: Responses of Girls to the question if the girl should become a cricketer

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	79%	21%		
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	94%	6%	98%	0%
RMS IMAMPUR	96%	4%	87%	8%
RUMS MOHANPUR	59%	39%	81%	19%
RUMS, BIRPUR	69%	31%	89%	11%
UMS HIMMATPUR	83%	15%	92%	3%
UMS NADIYAPUR	68%	32%	67%	30%
UMS NATWARIYA	95%	5%	97%	3%
UMS SHANTIPUR	52%	48%	85%	12%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	46%	46%	77%	18%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>10%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

When we asked the question related to a boy choosing a traditionally feminine profession (something often frowned upon), we also saw movement in most of the schools. We found that while most students (61% of boys and 42% of the girls) found this idea not agreeable, these numbers had changed. Now, 58% of the boys and 66% of the girls supported the decision of the boy to become a nurse.

Table 6.23: Responses of Boys to the question if the boy should become a nurse

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
RMS IMAMPUR	58%	42%	54%	46%
RUMS MOHANPUR	23%	77%	76%	19%
RUMS, BIRPUR	20%	73%	50%	50%
UMS HIMMATPUR	45%	55%	50%	45%
UMS NADIYAPUR	69%	31%	59%	41%
UMS NATWARIYA	31%	69%	62%	35%
UMS SHANTIPUR	13%	87%	31%	69%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	43%	50%	75%	25%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>40%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

Table 6.24: Responses of Girls to the question if the boy should become a nurse

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	55%	29%		
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	47%	53%	71%	27%
RMS IMAMPUR	58%	36%	75%	24%
RUMS MOHANPUR	46%	50%	74%	16%
RUMS, BIRPUR	33%	39%	47%	47%
UMS HIMMATPUR	69%	24%	74%	21%
UMS NADIYAPUR	35%	65%	41%	56%
UMS NATWARIYA	38%	63%	53%	44%
UMS SHANTIPUR	63%	38%	69%	27%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	41%	38%	64%	32%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>30%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

We also wanted to assess whether children’s opinion on division of labour had changed. For example, in one of our sessions, we did have a long discussion on whether or not work done by boys can also be done by girls, and a majority of the children had discussed and debated it extensively (Call note with mentor, Patna, 9 Sept 2019).

To gain this understanding, we presented the children with a situation where the hypothetical character (child) comes home to see his brother cooking food in the kitchen, the reason being, the sister-in-law who usually cooks everyday had gone out with her friends for a movie. We asked the students to express their opinion on the given situation. We found largely mixed results. As is indicated by the table, students from Patna irrespective of gender said that it was okay for the brother to share domestic responsibilities and help his wife. The students from Muzaffarpur, on the other hand, did not share this opinion as they believed that it was largely the responsibility of the women when it comes to cooking. So, there appeared to be an urban-rural divide on the matter.

A curious pattern related to gender also emerged. While the opinions of the girls in support of the wife dropped by 6 percentage points, the percentage of boys who believed the same increased at the time of the endline survey by 5 percentage points. For students in Muzaffarpur, we found that while equal sharing of household responsibilities was not generally supported, the percentage of students who believed it should happen increased for both boys (up by 4%) and for girls (up by 2%). Although we cannot state that these were positive changes across the board, we are able to see some interesting patterns.

*Table 6.25: Opinion of students on a situation-based question - husband cooking in the absence of wife.*

School	Boys		Girls	
	Help wife and share work		Help wife and share work	
	Baseline	Endline	Baseline	Endline
RMS IMAMPUR	58%	46%	67%	51%
RUMS MOHANPUR	37%	29%	48%	35%
RUMS, BIRPUR	47%	13%	28%	53%
UMS HIMMATPUR	58%	65%	55%	74%
UMS NADIYAPUR	75%	82%	58%	48%
UMS NATWARIYA	73%	85%	78%	56%
UMS SHANTIPUR	39%	38%	41%	38%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	33%	70%	38%	36%
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL			70%	73%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>53%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

### 6.4.3 Gender attitudes

To really engage with whether children had made shifts in their attitudes towards various gender concepts, we asked them various questions related to gendered division of food, menstruation taboos, freedom to wear what they want or whom they want to marry and their belief systems about caste. Some of these were situation-based and some were true or false questions. The results from our survey were quite interesting.

We first start with the gendered division of food. We gave children a mix of situation-based, pictorial and true or false questions to understand their attitudes towards gendered division of food. We asked children that after a race (which will be mentioned later in the section), if a boy and a girl reach home, which of the plates would be given to them. The first plate shown to them was full of food, the other one was half empty.

The comparative responses of the boys from baseline to endline showed that the number of boys who wanted the girl to get the full plate had surprisingly reduced by 5 percentage points. Additionally, the percentage of students who wanted the girl and the boy to get the same plate had also reduced by 3 percentage points. These worrying responses were not confined to the boys, as the percentage of girls who wanted the girl to have the full plate of food also reduced substantially by 26 percentage points. Regressive attitudes were also seen in the responses of the boys from Himmatpur, Nadiyapur and Natwariya.

But there are also some positive trends seen. For example, we see that the responses of the boys from Muzaffarpur who wanted the girl to get the full plate of food had increased by 4 percentage points. A closer look at the school-wise responses of the girls clearly showed that except for Birpur, a greater percentage of girls wanted the same

plate for both the boy and the girl, rather than the girl having the full plate of food. This pointed towards a more considered approach towards equal distribution of food in comparison to the baseline numbers. Similar was the trend for the boys in Imampur, where more percentages of boys wanted the same plate for both the sexes compared to baseline numbers.

*Table 6.26: Responses of the students to the question, which plate does the girl get*

School	Boys					
	Full Plate	Half Plate	Same Plate	Full Plate	Half Plate	Same Plate
	Baseline			Endline		
RMS IMAMPUR	73%	6%	21%	46%	23%	31%
RUMS MOHANPUR	49%	29%	23%	67%	24%	5%
RUMS, BIRPUR	47%	40%	13%	63%	38%	0%
UMS HIMMATPUR	77%	10%	13%	75%	25%	0%
UMS NADIYAPUR	88%	0%	13%	65%	29%	6%
UMS NATWARIYA	65%	27%	8%	65%	31%	4%
UMS SHANTIPUR	57%	30%	13%	38%	44%	19%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	70%	27%	3%	70%	15%	15%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>11%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 6.27: Responses of the students to the question, which plate does the girl get*

School	Girls					
	Full Plate	Half Plate	Same Plate	Full Plate	Half Plate	Same Plate
	Baseline			Endline		
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	68%	26%	6%			
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	85%	0%	15%	54%	5%	41%
RMS IMAMPUR	88%	7%	6%	35%	16%	49%
RUMS MOHANPUR	76%	22%	2%	60%	12%	21%
RUMS, BIRPUR	71%	18%	12%	47%	47%	5%
UMS HIMMATPUR	79%	10%	12%	62%	13%	26%
UMS NADIYAPUR	84%	6%	10%	56%	15%	30%
UMS NATWARIYA	68%	18%	15%	47%	12%	41%
UMS SHANTIPUR	69%	28%	3%	50%	19%	31%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	67%	27%	6%	55%	14%	32%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>33%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

On the true or false question based on the statement on whether girls needed less food than boys, the aggregate responses of the girls remained almost the same from baseline to endline while some variation was seen in the responses of the boys. It was observed

that the greater number of boys believed that the statement was true with a 5-percentage point increase in these numbers. This was most visible from the responses of the boys from Muzaffarpur (42% to 51%). In aggregate, however, the majority still declared the statement to be false.

*Table 6.28: Responses of the Boys to the statement - girls need less food than boys*

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
RMS IMAMPUR	52%	42%	50%	50%
RUMS MOHANPUR	23%	74%	57%	43%
RUMS, BIRPUR	27%	73%	38%	50%
UMS HIMMATPUR	29%	68%	45%	45%
UMS NADIYAPUR	50%	44%	35%	65%
UMS NATWARIYA	31%	69%	38%	62%
UMS SHANTIPUR	48%	52%	56%	44%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	67%	33%	45%	55%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>52%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 6.29: Responses of the Girls to the statement - girls need less food than boys*

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	33%	62%		
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	15%	79%	20%	80%
RMS IMAMPUR	35%	63%	32%	65%
RUMS MOHANPUR	41%	52%	49%	47%
RUMS, BIRPUR	50%	33%	58%	32%
UMS HIMMATPUR	31%	67%	31%	69%
UMS NADIYAPUR	29%	65%	41%	59%
UMS NATWARIYA	30%	68%	24%	74%
UMS SHANTIPUR	53%	47%	58%	38%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	47%	41%	27%	68%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>61%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

These numbers showed that even though there was some positive change in perspective related to food, there were also regressive movements. While we cannot speculate as to the reasons for this change, we strongly believe that the pandemic and the hunger that children experienced during this time might have something to do with the way in which children thought about food and who should get how much to eat. Although this is merely speculative, we do not think it is a coincidence that such a strong regressive attitude is visible when we examine the division of food.

This regressive movement is especially interesting when we look at attitudes related to menstrual taboo. For example, more boys believed that statement, ‘*menstruating women are untouchable*’, was false (31% baseline to 36% endline). There was a shift even for girls who also believed the statement to be false (39% to 49%).

*Table 6.30: Responses of the Boys to the statement - menstruating women are impure*

School	Boys					
	Baseline			Endline		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know
RMS IMAMPUR	30%	30%	39%	31%	23%	46%
RUMS MOHANPUR	37%	26%	37%	43%	52%	5%
RUMS, BIRPUR	40%	20%	40%	38%	0%	63%
UMS HIMMATPUR	26%	26%	48%	30%	40%	30%
UMS NADIYAPUR	31%	38%	31%	35%	41%	24%
UMS NATWARIYA	23%	38%	35%	19%	62%	19%
UMS SHANTIPUR	17%	30%	52%	31%	25%	44%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	17%	40%	43%	10%	20%	70%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>35%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 6.31: Responses of the Girls to the statement - menstruating women are impure*

School	Girls					
	Baseline			Endline		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	20%	56%	24%			
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	40%	49%	11%	15%	80%	5%
RMS IMAMPUR	43%	42%	15%	43%	40%	17%
RUMS MOHANPUR	46%	26%	28%	35%	51%	14%
RUMS, BIRPUR	50%	28%	22%	37%	42%	21%
UMS HIMMATPUR	45%	43%	12%	33%	51%	15%
UMS NADIYAPUR	35%	16%	45%	33%	48%	19%
UMS NATWARIYA	50%	38%	13%	50%	38%	12%
UMS SHANTIPUR	31%	44%	25%	50%	27%	23%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	35%	32%	32%	14%	23%	64%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>18%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

To engage with the notions of freedom, we gave the students a situation-based question where a girl wants to wear shorts because she wants to participate in a race, but her friends advise her otherwise, saying that people will laugh. We asked the students to tell us what should the girl do, and to provide us with the reason as to why the friends thought that people will laugh. We could see a shift towards a more open and egalitarian attitude when it came to choices related to clothing. In the majority of schools, we could

see that there were some positive shifts that from majority of the children – 69 % boys and 56 % of the girls – saying that the girls *shouldn't* wear shorts to 43% boys and 63% girls saying the girls *should* wear what she wants for the event.

*Table 6.32: Responses of Boys to the situation-based question– girl wearing shorts*

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Wear the half pants	Not wear the half pants	Wear the half pants	Not wear the half pants
RMS IMAMPUR	36%	61%	54%	46%
RUMS MOHANPUR	23%	77%	48%	52%
RUMS, BIRPUR	13%	73%	50%	50%
UMS HIMMATPUR	35%	65%	60%	40%
UMS NADIYAPUR	19%	81%	47%	53%
UMS NATWARIYA	42%	58%	42%	58%
UMS SHANTIPUR	17%	78%	13%	88%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	37%	60%	25%	75%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>57%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 6.33: Responses of Girls to the situation-based question– girl wearing shorts*

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Wear the half pants	Not wear the half pants	Wear the half pants	Not wear the half pants
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	31%	62%		
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	79%	21%	100%	0%
RMS IMAMPUR	36%	63%	65%	35%
RUMS MOHANPUR	26%	67%	47%	53%
RUMS, BIRPUR	11%	67%	47%	53%
UMS HIMMATPUR	43%	57%	62%	38%
UMS NADIYAPUR	61%	39%	74%	26%
UMS NATWARIYA	38%	63%	79%	21%
UMS SHANTIPUR	34%	66%	19%	81%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	26%	53%	55%	45%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>37%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

When it came to the freedom, where we asked children to state whether the statement - *after the age of 18, girls were free to marry whoever they choose to, irrespective of caste, class and religion* – was true or false, we saw again a change in perception. For boys, the percentage who agreed with the statement increased by 24 percentage points. This change was significant, as majority of the boys had disagreed with the statement during

baseline and during endline, most of them (54%) agreed that the statement was true. For the girls, a change in perspective was visible to the effect of 11 percentage points for those who agreed with the statement, but the majority (52%) still were in disagreement that the girls had the freedom to choose their life partners.

*Table 6.34: Responses of Boys to the statement - after the age of 18, girls were free to marry whoever they choose to, irrespective of caste, class and religion*

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
RMS IMAMPUR	30%	64%	50%	46%
RUMS MOHANPUR	31%	66%	81%	19%
RUMS, BIRPUR	20%	80%	63%	38%
UMS HIMMATPUR	29%	65%	35%	60%
UMS NADIYAPUR	50%	50%	71%	29%
UMS NATWARIYA	27%	73%	54%	46%
UMS SHANTIPUR	13%	87%	25%	75%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	40%	57%	55%	45%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>45%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 6.35: Responses of Girls to the statement - after the age of 18, girls were free to marry whoever they choose to, irrespective of caste, class and religion*

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	25%	73%		
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	45%	53%	59%	37%
RMS IMAMPUR	43%	56%	57%	40%
RUMS MOHANPUR	41%	57%	37%	63%
RUMS, BIRPUR	50%	50%	47%	53%
UMS HIMMATPUR	31%	64%	38%	62%
UMS NADIYAPUR	35%	61%	41%	56%
UMS NATWARIYA	25%	70%	50%	50%
UMS SHANTIPUR	31%	69%	31%	65%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	29%	65%	36%	59%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>52%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

To understand the caste-based perceptions and attitudes of the students, we asked them to respond to two questions. Firstly, we asked them to respond to the statement based on the practice of 'untouchability' - 'People belonging to so-called 'low castes' should not be touched'. The baseline data had previously shown that most students (67% boys and 71% girls) said that this was not true, demonstrating that they did not

believe in untouchability. This was strongly demonstrated in the endline as well, where an overwhelming (76% boys and 85% girls) of the students said that the statement was false. These trends were congruent throughout the data set irrespective of school or gender of the students.

*Table 6.36: Responses of Boys to the statement - People belonging to so-called 'low castes' should not be touched*

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
RMS IMAMPUR	36%	58%	8%	92%
RUMS MOHANPUR	29%	66%	33%	67%
RUMS, BIRPUR	40%	60%	25%	75%
UMS HIMMATPUR	35%	61%	25%	75%
UMS NADIYAPUR	31%	69%	29%	71%
UMS NATWARIYA	31%	69%	19%	81%
UMS SHANTIPUR	22%	78%	25%	75%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	27%	73%	35%	65%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>76%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 6.37: Responses of Girls to the statement - People belonging to so-called 'low castes' should not be touched*

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	22%	75%		
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	11%	87%	93%	2%
RMS IMAMPUR	21%	71%	86%	2%
RUMS MOHANPUR	33%	67%	86%	2%
RUMS, BIRPUR	50%	50%	79%	0%
UMS HIMMATPUR	29%	71%	74%	3%
UMS NADIYAPUR	16%	81%	89%	0%
UMS NATWARIYA	30%	70%	97%	3%
UMS SHANTIPUR	34%	66%	69%	0%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	32%	62%	86%	0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>2%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

What was also interesting to note was the shift in their responses for the second question, where students had to say true or false, for the statement, 'so called high caste people are smarter than so called low caste people'. During the baseline survey, about 47% of the boys and 49% of girls agreed with the statement showing some form of caste

bias, but the number of students who demonstrated the same attitude towards caste in the endline significantly reduced, with only 44% of boys and 30 % of girls agreeing with the statement. This was very encouraging, as we had focused very strongly on caste in the second module.

*Table 6.38: Responses of Boys to the statement - so called high caste people are smarter than so called low caste people*

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
RMS IMAMPUR	58%	39%	27%	69%
RUMS MOHANPUR	49%	49%	62%	38%
RUMS, BIRPUR	47%	53%	63%	38%
UMS HIMMATPUR	52%	45%	50%	50%
UMS NADIYAPUR	25%	75%	53%	47%
UMS NATWARIYA	38%	62%	27%	73%
UMS SHANTIPUR	30%	70%	50%	50%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	60%	40%	40%	60%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>56%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 6.39: Responses of Girls to the statement - so called high caste people are smarter than so called low caste people*

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	44%	51%		
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	21%	77%	10%	90%
RMS IMAMPUR	53%	43%	24%	75%
RUMS MOHANPUR	52%	46%	53%	47%
RUMS, BIRPUR	50%	39%	47%	37%
UMS HIMMATPUR	62%	38%	28%	69%
UMS NADIYAPUR	52%	45%	11%	85%
UMS NATWARIYA	43%	55%	18%	79%
UMS SHANTIPUR	56%	44%	50%	50%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	68%	26%	50%	50%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>68%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

#### 6.4.4 Gendered capabilities

Apart from attitudes related to gender, we also wanted to understand whether children had changed their minds about gendered capabilities. As illustrated earlier, children did

debate about whether women could do a man's job and vice versa. To deepen our understanding on what children think about the ways in which roles translate into capabilities, we wanted to present to them various situation-based questions, among others.

The first situation that was presented to the students was that they had to choose the winner of a race between a boy and a girl who were from the same age group and same local context. The students also had to give the reasons behind choosing either the boy or the girl. We compared the results between the same set of children who answered the baseline question and endline. The results showed that boys continued to root for the boy to win (72% baseline to 83% endline). However, more number of girls (59% baseline to 62% endline) felt that the girl would win the race. This shift was most remarkable in the girls from Birpur, Muzaffarpur, where during the baseline only 17 % girls responded that the girl would win, but during the endline, 47 % of them showed more confidence in the girl winning the race.

*Table 6.40: Responses of Girls to the question 'who will win the race'*

School	Girls					
	Baseline			Endline		
	*Gudia	**Bablu	Don't know	*Heena	**Tinku	Don't know
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	69%	25%	5%	NA	NA	NA
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	79%	17%	4%	76%	15%	10%
RMS IMAMPUR	68%	31%	1%	62%	37%	2%
RUMS MOHANPUR	50%	39%	11%	51%	44%	5%
RUMS, BIRPUR	17%	61%	22%	47%	53%	0%
UMS HIMMATPUR	64%	33%	2%	64%	36%	0%
UMS NADIYAPUR	65%	32%	3%	74%	26%	0%
UMS NATWARIYA	40%	55%	5%	71%	26%	3%
UMS SHANTIPUR	44%	50%	6%	58%	42%	0%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	50%	41%	9%	45%	55%	0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>3%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

\*Name of the girls in the open -ended story-based question

\*\*Name of the boys in the open-ended story-based question

Table 6.41: Responses of Boys to the question 'who will win the race'

School	Boys					
	Baseline			Endline		
	Gudia	Bablu	Don't know	Heena	Tinku	Don't know
RMS IMAMPUR	24%	70%	6%	4%	96%	0%
RUMS MOHANPUR	31%	66%	3%	33%	62%	5%
RUMS, BIRPUR	13%	80%	7%	25%	75%	0%
UMS HIMMATPUR	35%	61%	3%	15%	80%	5%
UMS NADIYAPUR	13%	88%	0%	24%	76%	0%
UMS NATWARIYA	35%	62%	4%	8%	92%	0%
UMS SHANTIPUR	13%	87%	0%	13%	88%	0%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	23%	77%	0%	15%	85%	0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>1%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

When asked about the reason, most students gave us reasons for physical strength. Those who supported boys and those who supported girls felt that because the corresponding gender had physical strength. However, we also found that the belief system that boys or men have more physical strength than girls is still quite strong among the majority of the students. When we look at the true/false question where we ask whether it is true that boys have more strength than girls, about 71% of boys and 62% of the girls say that it is true. Despite the fact that majority still believe this statement, there have been some positive shifts. As compared to the baseline, fewer boys (71% endline vs. 83% baseline) and fewer girls believe (62% endline vs. 80% baseline) believe this statement to be true, indicating some positive movements in this belief system.

Table 6.42: Responses of Boys students to the statement - Men have more strength than Women

School	Boys					
	Baseline			Endline		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know
RMS IMAMPUR	76%	21%	3%	81%	15%	4%
RUMS MOHANPUR	86%	14%	0%	76%	24%	0%
RUMS BIRPUR	93%	7%	0%	0.5	0.5	0
UMS HIMMATPUR	84%	6%	10%	95%	5%	0%
UMS NADIYAPUR	88%	13%	0%	82%	18%	0%
UMS NATWARIYA	69%	31%	0%	73%	27%	0%
UMS SHANTIPUR	87%	13%	0%	56%	44%	0%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	90%	10%	0%	40%	60%	0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>1%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

Table 6.43: Responses of Girls to the statement - Men have more strength than Women

School	Girls					
	Baseline			Endline		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	64%	35%	2%	NA	NA	NA
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	66%	30%	4%	59%	41%	0%
RMS IMAMPUR	88%	10%	3%	68%	32%	0%
RUMS MOHANPUR	83%	15%	2%	65%	35%	0%
RUMS, BIRPUR	78%	22%	0%	74%	21%	5%
UMS HIMMATPUR	71%	24%	5%	51%	49%	0%
UMS NADIYAPUR	84%	16%	0%	67%	33%	0%
UMS NATWARIYA	85%	15%	0%	62%	35%	3%
UMS SHANTIPUR	100%	0%	0%	69%	31%	0%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	94%	6%	0%	36%	64%	0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>1%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

We also looked at other stereotypes regarding gendered capabilities. The next one that we will examine are the responses to the statement that girls cry more than boys. The data indicated that their opinion on this stereotype largely remained the same, with only 5 percentage point difference between the responses of the boys from baseline to endline who said 'true' for this statement. While the responses of the girls were almost the same with only 1 percentage point difference.

To gauge their perception and belief on academic capabilities and the role of gender, we asked them if it was true or false that boys were better at mathematics than girls, we saw a positive shift from their responses from baseline to endline. At the baseline, the majority of students (66%) irrespective of their gender said that it was 'true' that boys were more capable when it came to mathematics. But at the time of the endline survey, even though this belief was still popular with the majority with almost 52 % percent students saying the statement was 'true', there was significant dip by 14 percentage points.

The comparative data from endline and baseline showed that it was the opinions of girls that was driving this shift. The responses of girls from all 9 schools had tilted towards 'false' with the most significant changes seen in answers of the girls from Ishapur, Himmatpur, Nadiyapur, Natwariya, and Jashpur school (all based in Patna). It should be noted that a majority of the girls from these schools had said 'false' during the baseline also, but a greater percentage believed the statement to be false during endline. Even though the majority of girls from Birpur, Mohanpur, Shaktipur and Shantipur (all based in Muzaffarpur) did not say that the statement was false, a significant number did. This number was much larger than the baseline showing a shift in perception. The most remarkable was the change witnessed in the responses of the girls from Shantipur

where 82 % girls had agreed with the statement during the baseline, but only 55 % of them agreed during the endline.

*Table 6.44: Responses of Boys to the statement - Men are better in mathematics than Women*

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
RMS IMAMPUR	76%	21%	42%	50%
RUMS MOHANPUR	74%	23%	86%	14%
RUMS, BIRPUR	80%	20%	63%	38%
UMS HIMMATPUR	74%	23%	90%	10%
UMS NADIYAPUR	75%	25%	59%	41%
UMS NATWARIYA	69%	31%	81%	19%
UMS SHANTIPUR	87%	13%	81%	19%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	77%	23%	65%	35%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>28%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 6.45: Responses of Girls to the statement - Men are better in mathematics than Women*

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	75%	20%	NA	NA
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	38%	62%	15%	80%
RMS IMAMPUR	53%	46%	46%	52%
RUMS MOHANPUR	80%	20%	63%	37%
RUMS BIRPUR	83%	11%	63%	37%
UMS HIMMATPUR	48%	52%	36%	62%
UMS NADIYAPUR	55%	45%	33%	63%
UMS NATWARIYA	40%	60%	21%	74%
UMS SHANTIPUR	78%	22%	69%	31%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	82%	15%	55%	45%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>55%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

We also tried to examine children's belief systems about roles that women could hold, and asked the students if men were better chief ministers than women. In response to this question, there was a change in the responses of all students irrespective of gender, from baseline to endline. While in baseline 69 % boys and 64 % girls said 'true', this number reduced by 11 percentage points for boys and 7 percentage points for girls

during the endline. But it must be acknowledged that majority of students still believed that men were better CMs than women.

*Table 6.46: Responses of Boys to the statement - Men are better Chief Ministers than Women*

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
RMS IMAMPUR	70%	27%	42%	50%
RUMS MOHANPUR	74%	23%	77%	20%
RUMS, BIRPUR	80%	20%	67%	27%
UMS HIMMATPUR	74%	23%	58%	39%
UMS NADIYAPUR	75%	25%	69%	25%
UMS NATWARIYA	69%	31%	69%	31%
UMS SHANTIPUR	87%	13%	65%	35%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	77%	23%	77%	23%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>28%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 6.47: Responses of Girls to the statement - Men are better Chief Ministers than Women*

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	64%	27%		
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	51%	47%	41%	51%
RMS IMAMPUR	67%	32%	54%	35%
RUMS MOHANPUR	70%	28%	67%	28%
RUMS, BIRPUR	78%	11%	68%	21%
UMS HIMMATPUR	64%	31%	64%	33%
UMS NADIYAPUR	55%	39%	41%	48%
UMS NATWARIYA	68%	30%	65%	35%
UMS SHANTIPUR	63%	25%	62%	38%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	68%	18%	59%	36%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>37%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

#### 6.4.5 Gender violence

To understand the attitudes of the students towards gender-based violence, we asked them questions based on two subjects, firstly domestic violence and secondly, sexual assault either at home or public spaces. For this section, we stuck to true or false questions. Two kinds of true or false questions were asked to the students for domestic violence. The first was to gauge their knowledge and awareness related to domestic

violence and the second one was based on their attitudes towards domestic violence. The students had to respond 'true or false' to the statement – *husbands could be jailed if they beat their wives*, and the second statement was – *husbands should beat their wives if they refused to obey them*.

We found that there were slight shifts that we could see in the students' responses from the baseline to the end line, where most students expressed a high level of awareness regarding the legally punitive provisions for domestic violence in the country. For both boys and girls, the number of students who displayed greater awareness regarding this issue increased (3 percentage points for boys and 2 percentage points for girls) from baseline to endline. This change was mainly driven by students in Patna where the responses for 'true' for boys increased by 7% and girls by 1%. Sadly, this positive change was not reflected in the awareness levels of the students from Muzaffarpur, where we witnessed a regression in responses of boys who said 'true' during the baseline to endline by 3 percentage points and girls by 2 percentage points.

*Table 6.48: Responses of Boys to the statement - husbands can be jailed for beating their wives*

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
RMS IMAMPUR	82%	12%	92%	4%
RUMS MOHANPUR	71%	26%	76%	24%
RUMS, BIRPUR	87%	13%	75%	25%
UMS HIMMATPUR	68%	29%	90%	10%
UMS NADIYAPUR	88%	13%	94%	6%
UMS NATWARIYA	92%	8%	77%	23%
UMS SHANTIPUR	87%	13%	69%	31%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	73%	27%	80%	20%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>17%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

*Table 6.49: Responses of Girls to the statement - husbands can be jailed for beating their wives*

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	65%	29%		
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	89%	9%	95%	5%
RMS IMAMPUR	81%	19%	89%	11%
RUMS MOHANPUR	74%	26%	74%	21%
RUMS, BIRPUR	56%	39%	47%	53%
UMS HIMMATPUR	81%	19%	85%	15%
UMS NADIYAPUR	90%	10%	78%	19%

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
UMS NATWARIYA	93%	8%	85%	15%
UMS SHANTIPUR	81%	19%	65%	31%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	65%	21%	73%	18%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>18%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

We could also see a change in the attitudes towards domestic violence when we compared the baseline and endline data for the second statement – *husbands should beat their wives if they refused to obey them*. During the baseline, a majority (60%) of the boys believed this statement to be true. This number shrunk to 43 % during the endline survey showing a remarkable shift in attitudes. Although the girls were a bit divided in response to this question for the baseline, an overwhelming majority of 64% girls disagreed with the statement showing an incredible shift in attitude. This change was significant for the girls from Patna with a change of 17 percentage points.

*Table 6.50: Responses of Boys to the statement - husbands should beat their wives if they refused to obey them*

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
RMS IMAMPUR	52%	48%	27%	73%
RUMS MOHANPUR	63%	31%	62%	38%
RUMS, BIRPUR	67%	33%	63%	38%
UMS HIMMATPUR	55%	45%	50%	50%
UMS NADIYAPUR	56%	44%	47%	53%
UMS NATWARIYA	58%	42%	38%	62%
UMS SHANTIPUR	70%	30%	50%	50%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	63%	23%	25%	65%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>56%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

Table 6.51: Responses of Girls to the statement - husbands should beat their wives if they refused to obey them

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	44%	49%		
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	38%	62%	17%	80%
RMS IMAMPUR	50%	49%	30%	67%
RUMS MOHANPUR	61%	35%	65%	33%
RUMS, BIRPUR	56%	44%	21%	74%
UMS HIMMATPUR	52%	48%	33%	67%
UMS NADIYAPUR	45%	48%	22%	74%
UMS NATWARIYA	40%	60%	29%	65%
UMS SHANTIPUR	59%	41%	46%	50%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	35%	53%	9%	82%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>64%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

We also explored specific questions related to sexual assault. We wanted students to respond whether two statements were true or false - *only women get raped/sexually assaulted*, and *women who are sexually assaulted are generally at fault, for example, wearing short clothes*. We wanted to gain an understanding of their knowledge and attitudes towards sexual violence. The students during the baseline widely believed that only women/girls faced sexual violence with 55 % of boys and 50 % girls said that the statement was true. While this perception changed for girls, it didn't change much for boys. In fact, the data clearly shows that the majority of students irrespective of their gender still believed that it was only women/girls who faced sexual abuse.

Table 6.1: Responses of Boys to the statement- only women/girls get sexually assaulted

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
RMS IMAMPUR	48%	33%	42%	38%
RUMS MOHANPUR	57%	31%	76%	24%
RUMS, BIRPUR	87%	7%	75%	25%
UMS HIMMATPUR	45%	39%	55%	35%
UMS NADIYAPUR	56%	38%	76%	18%
UMS NATWARIYA	62%	38%	58%	38%
UMS SHANTIPUR	48%	48%	63%	31%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	53%	37%	45%	45%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>33%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

Table 6.52: Responses of Girls to the statement– only women/girls get sexually assaulted

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	45%	40%		
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	68%	30%	46%	49%
RMS IMAMPUR	49%	39%	57%	37%
RUMS MOHANPUR	54%	28%	42%	42%
RUMS, BIRPUR	56%	28%	32%	58%
UMS HIMMATPUR	45%	48%	54%	38%
UMS NADIYAPUR	42%	48%	52%	26%
UMS NATWARIYA	55%	35%	44%	44%
UMS SHANTIPUR	47%	47%	35%	54%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	38%	47%	23%	64%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>44%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

With respect to the attitudinal question whether it was the fault of the victim/survivor that the sexual assault happened, we found some regressive attitudes, but also positive indications. Most of the boys (61% baseline to 56% endline) and girls (68% girls to 61% girls) believed that this statement was false. What was slightly worrying was the fact that the number of students who believed this statement to be true and pointing towards attitudes of victim shaming, increased by 5 percentage points for boys and 7 percentage points for girls. The only positive aspect of this is that except for the boys in Mohanpur, the majority of the students did not believe that it was the survivor/victim's fault.

Table 6.53: Responses of Boys to the statement– Women who get sexually assaulted or raped are mostly at fault. Example wearing revealing clothes.

School	Boys			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
RMS IMAMPUR	24%	58%	27%	54%
RUMS MOHANPUR	34%	49%	57%	43%
RUMS, BIRPUR	40%	53%	25%	63%
UMS HIMMATPUR	10%	68%	35%	55%
UMS NADIYAPUR	31%	69%	41%	53%
UMS NATWARIYA	27%	73%	50%	50%
UMS SHANTIPUR	26%	70%	19%	81%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	37%	53%	25%	65%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>56%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

Table 6.54: Responses of Girls to the statement– Women who get sexually assaulted or raped are mostly at fault. Example wearing revealing clothes.

School	Girls			
	Baseline		Endline	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
KRANTIPUR SCHOOL	13%	73%		
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	28%	68%	29%	66%
RMS IMAMPUR	17%	76%	27%	70%
RUMS MOHANPUR	30%	50%	42%	49%
RUMS, BIRPUR	28%	61%	21%	68%
UMS HIMMATPUR	26%	71%	31%	67%
UMS NADIYAPUR	13%	74%	26%	59%
UMS NATWARIYA	28%	73%	26%	65%
UMS SHANTIPUR	28%	63%	38%	50%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	21%	56%	41%	41%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>61%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020. Baseline Data as collected by CBPS on July 2018.

The varied results in our survey reflect the realities within our classrooms. When we first introduced gender into the classrooms, it was a difficult conversation to have. In a discussion which raised questions about whether girls could wear jeans, Ranjeeta (our mentor in Patna) asked the children - *If I wear jeans and T-shirt, would I still remain to be Ranjeeta or not?* Children told her that Ranjeeta would remain Ranjeeta. So, she asked the children, if noting changes on the inside, then why are people so focused on the outside? She also tried to talk to them about why clothes are so definitive of gender or who the person is. Children told her that *this is who the society wants it*. Ranjeeta pushed again asking – *who constitutes society? Are they not part of society?* They told her that - *we are all part of the society*. Then, Ranjeeta let them know that if they have to bring about changes, perhaps, they should think about making the changes themselves. Ranjeeta ended the conversation with this thought precisely because she felt that it was important for children to make up their own minds about these things, and the more important thing was for them to ask the questions rather than provide the answer for them.

Even though some of the attitudes were quite entrenched, the mentors were of the belief that leaving the space for some doubt enabled children to truly talk about what they thought, rather than what they were supposed to. For example, when one of the girls responded to the question – *are girls and boys the same?* – she vehemently told us that *they can never be the same. Girls are always going to mature faster than boys, and that is the reality of things*. Even though we might consider this statement to be an indicator of ‘failure’, we often viewed it as an opportunity as well – we were able to find out children’s value systems and viewpoints and use that as the starting point for engagement.

As we can see from the endline results, sometimes, it worked and other times it did not, but when we did see it working in the field, it was gratifying. For instance, during one of the community classes, where we were engaged in a discussion on filling in the missing faces in a postcard, the children started discussing the face of a barber. Most children had drawn the face of the barber as a man. When Ranjeeta asked them why they had done so, the children told them that it is usually men who cut the hair on the roadside shop. When Ranjeeta asked again whether they had never seen a woman cut the hair, children were taken aback a little, and then agreed (with some reluctance) that *yes – women also cut hair*. Although it is likely that children might hold on very gendered belief systems (as is evident from some of the results in the endline), it is also important that these conversations act as breakage points into neatly constructed narratives of gender. We require time and space to use these breakage points to shift attitudes and behaviours. In our understanding of the field, teachers emerged as the primary fulcrum through which this process could take place.

## 6.5 Teachers as the fulcrum of change

We already know that teachers in this country are “undertrained, misqualified, under-compensative, demotivated instruments of a mechanical system of education” (Batra, 2005, p. 4347) that has lost all of its value apart from the fact that it is still a ‘government’ job. Teaching as a profession is often seen as the last choice for educated unemployed youth, an acceptable position for upper caste women living in the villages, and is rarely pursued as a life choice except for those for whom a steady income is vital for social mobility (Batra, 2005). While it is useful to understand that we would like to have an empowered and empowering teacher in our classrooms, the realities that we had to deal with initially and throughout our implementation of the programme was the more nuanced understanding of the figure of teacher as both abusive and tragic. They are often the cogs through which the mechanical universalisation of education is taking place (Batra, 2005), and while we felt sometimes angry and frustrated that teachers didn’t necessarily care for their students, we also realised (in the same breadth almost) that they themselves were heavily constrained. As indicated earlier, our mentoring activities greatly changed with the interest levels of the teachers.

### 6.5.1 Challenges with/of teachers

When we first entered the field, we formed an impression that teachers were largely apathetic and uncaring. For example, in the residential school that we used to go regularly, the warden was almost always on the phone and never paid attention to whether the children were being taught or fed. There were no supplies provided to the girls, including books and given that some of the girls were orphaned, this created a lot of difficulties for many living in the Krantipur (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 9 Oct 2018).

We also found that in other schools, teachers were absent, would not attend classes, would be more focused on their other work, and were neglectful (sometimes, violent and abusive) of children. Even during the pandemic period, we found that teachers had

no idea about what was happening with the children and they had no way of contacting them. When we spoke to teachers about their impressions of their students, some of them often talked down to children, criticized their capabilities based on their caste or gender affiliations, or worse – did not remember their students at all. They often blamed children for failing – *slow learners are not interested in educating themselves* (Fieldnotes, 28 Nov 2020, p.11). Some teachers would go to the school at their own convenience, register their attendance and attend to their other chores / professions.

But as was evident when we started working with them, teachers were also given lot of responsibility and accountability in areas apart from learning (Call note with mentor, Patna, 1 Oct 2018; Call note with mentor, Patna, 23 Nov 2018). For example, many of the teachers complained that they had to organise each and every detail of food procurement for MDMs, or the cash transfers with respect to schools and uniforms. If there were any mistakes, they were reprimanded severely. They also had to go for invigilation duties or election duties, in addition to all the work that they had to do. They also had very little resources (in terms of materials or time) to really engage with children, even if they wanted to. Many teachers also felt that because of these external pressures, they had very little time to teach, and often rushed through the syllabus as they had to complete it before the year end. Despite this, teachers often made extra efforts to interest children in learning. For example, one of the teachers had started a small space in which to create an informal library where some books were kept. The children could take up any book that they wished to take home. The teacher told our mentor that she started the initiative because she wanted children to be exposed to books and inculcate a reading habit.

### 6.5.2 Relationship with children

To understand more deeply the relationship between teachers and students, we included a few questions related to children's view of the teachers. We asked them three simple questions – firstly, *who was their favourite teacher*, secondly, *the subject that their favourite teacher taught* and thirdly, *the reasons for considering that particular teacher as favourite*. We did not document the names of the teachers during the survey and surveyors were given strict instructions to maintain anonymity in the data set. The only thing that was noted down was the gender of the teacher, to understand if there was any connection between gender of the students and the gender of the teacher.

We found that there was a slight preference visible for women teachers amongst the girls with 57 % of them naming a woman teacher as their favourite as compared to 43 % girl students saying the same for men teachers. A similar liking was visible for the boys where 56 % of them named a man teacher as their favourite against 44% of the other boys stating the same. Although, when one looks at the numbers school wise, it is clearly seen that students from one school, irrespective of gender had the same gender preference for their favourite teacher.

Table 6.55: Favourite teacher as expressed by the students

School Name	Girls		Boys	
	Women Teacher	Men Teacher	Women Teacher	Men Teacher
RMS ISHOPUR FULWARI SHARIF	89%	11%	85%	15%
RUMS BIRPUR	26%	63%	25%	75%
RUMS MOHANPUR	12%	88%	10%	90%
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	100%	0%		
UMS HIMMATPUR	56%	44%	35%	65%
UMS NADIYAPUR	15%	85%	12%	88%
UMS NATWARIYA	79%	21%	69%	31%
UMS SHANTIPUR	8%	92%	0%	100%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	73%	27%	75%	25%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>56%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

To delve deeper into their academic preferences, we asked children what subjects their favourite teacher taught. This was a multiple-choice question as one teacher could teach multiple subjects, and since the schools in which BMP worked did have teacher shortages, this situation was true for almost all schools. We found that the top 3 subjects taught by their favourite teachers were Hindi, Mathematics and EVS, followed closely by English.

More than half (53%) of the girls had named their Hindi subject teacher as their favourite, while the boys (44 %) had named their Mathematics teacher as favourite. Here again, we saw that the students from the same school named the same subject which their favourite teacher taught irrespective of their gender, lending one to believe that possibly the boys and girls had named the same teacher as their favourite. The only exception to this was UMS Himmatpur where 60 % of the boys said that their favourite teacher taught Mathematics as against girls who said that their favourite teacher taught Hindi.

Table 6.56: Subjects taught by the favourite teacher

School Name	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B
	Mathematics		English		EVS		Hindi	
RMS IMAMPUR	33%	31%	33%	23%	60%	62%	30%	35%
RUMS BIRPUR	68%	63%	47%	63%	37%	13%	58%	50%
RUMS MOHANPUR	65%	43%	79%	62%	56%	38%	67%	48%
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	24%		17%		17%		73%	
UMS HIMMATPUR	46%	60%	13%	5%	8%	0%	56%	35%
UMS NADIYAPUR	33%	35%	7%	12%	56%	71%	44%	59%

School Name	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B
	Mathematics		English		EVS		Hindi	
UMS NATWARIYA	26%	15%	50%	65%	24%	15%	50%	23%
UMS SHANTIPUR	54%	31%	50%	38%	65%	88%	27%	19%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	100%	90%	68%	75%	59%	35%	86%	80%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>42%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Note: G – Girls, B- Boys

The top 5 reasons cited by the students was mainly associated with classroom and teaching- learning processes. About 89 % girls and 92 % boys said that the reason they considered the teacher to be their favourite was because the teacher taught very well. The second top reason was closely associated where 66 % girls and 56 % boys said that it was easy to understand what the teacher taught. The third top reason was interesting, as it differed for the boys and girls. While 31 % boys said that they liked the teacher because the teacher was not strict and did not scold them much. The third top reason for girls was again associated with academics, where 30 % girls said that they considered the teacher to be their favourite because the teacher made them practice a lot.

*Table 6.57: Top 5 Reasons for favourite teacher*

School Name	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B
	Teaches well		Easy to Understand		Not strict/never scolds		Makes us practice		Teaches new things	
RMS IMAMPUR	86%	85%	65%	65%	21%	27%	33%	35%	33%	23%
RUMS BIRPUR	79%	88%	53%	63%	11%	25%	37%	25%	5%	25%
RUMS MOHANPUR	91%	90%	95%	62%	67%	67%	5%	5%	0%	5%
SANT JASHPUR SCHOOL	93%		63%		24%		24%		22%	
UMS HIMMATPUR	87%	100%	62%	55%	23%	35%	31%	10%	8%	5%
UMS NADIYAPUR	93%	88%	30%	41%	19%	18%	26%	12%	19%	6%
UMS NATWARIYA	82%	92%	62%	42%	12%	23%	35%	23%	21%	4%
UMS SHANTIPUR	96%	94%	81%	81%	31%	44%	46%	25%	4%	19%
UMS SHAKTIPUR	100%	95%	64%	45%	5%	10%	55%	30%	18%	10%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>11%</b>

Source: Endline Data as collected by CBPS on February 2020

Note: G – Girls, B- Boys

It is clear from these findings that teachers are making efforts to ensure that children are learning, and it is clear that they have the necessary inclinations to mentor their children. So, it is very vital that they are also oriented towards ensuring that their teaching pedagogies incorporate frameworks of mentoring and critical thinking.

### 6.5.3 Orientation towards critical thinking

When we started working with teachers, they were extremely reluctant to help out with our activities. They felt that the kinds of work that we do would not be possible for them on an every-day basis. They felt that they did not have the time for it. They also were not clear on how the process of ERAC (which often looked like fun and games) could be useful in teaching their syllabus. They would often question the mentors whether any studying was happening in the classes, or was it just about playing games. Even when we tried to explain it to them through their participation in the classrooms, they would not always understand and insist on providing 'moral' lessons at the end of every activity (Call note with mentor, Patna, 7 Nov 2018). Often, because the pedagogy didn't involve immediate, visible results, it was difficult to get teachers interested in the classes (Call note with mentor, Patna, 19 Dec 2018). It was often difficult to explain to teachers that attitudes couldn't be shifted automatically after one class. We realised after these interactions that teachers were not necessarily trained to understand the objectives behind the activities, and therefore, were unable to see the potential implications. After many of these interactions (and taking the suggestions of the advisory board), we started working with them to reorient them to the modalities of our action-research.

We also felt the need for training of teachers because of the exercise that we did with the teacher interview. From the interview experience, we had two significant learnings: (1) it helped boost children's confidence immensely, and (2) it created a litmus test for the teacher's interest in the children. If teachers were interested and participative in the classrooms, they were also the ones who consented to the interviews and took it seriously. Those who didn't were similarly not invested within the classrooms as well.

We also came to two very important insights during the pandemic period which also spurred some of the themes that we covered in our training: (1) teachers have had no systematic training in dealing in emergency situations when schools are closed and children are confined to their homes, and (2) teachers are making efforts, but require additional support. We also realised that teachers are not always equipped to work with children from vulnerable communities, and therefore, capacity building in terms of engaging with marginalised children in emergency situations is necessary.

Based on our understanding, we devised a set of four training workshops, two of which were focused on critical thinking skills ([Orientation](#) and [Critical Thinking](#) Workshops, conducted pre-Covid and two of which were focused on Education in Emergency (one [in-person](#) and the other [remote](#)) conducted post-Covid. We felt that this extensive

training schedule was required so that we were able to provide the same time and space to learn the methodologies that we were providing the children.

While the pre-Covid training was largely driven by us, the post-Covid training that was focused on Emergency in Education was driven by teachers as well. Teachers themselves felt the need for additional training, as they were unable to get a hold of children during or post the Covid pandemic. One of the teachers told us: *Even when we come to the school, we are not able to meet the kids here. Our school was also turned into a quarantine centre for some days when migrants were returning from other states. We have not been able to interact with the children as they are at home* (Fieldnotes, 28 Nov 2020, p. 8). They also told us that because they never foresaw this situation ever coming about, they didn't keep organised records of how to contact the children and thus, were completely unprepared as to what they could potentially do. So, they felt that they really required a training in Education in Emergency so that they are better prepared to engage with such emergencies in the future.

While the feedback from the trainings suggest that teachers gained a lot of insight into subject areas of critical thinking, ODL and education in emergencies, the trainings<sup>5</sup> were also immensely useful for our implementation. After the teachers understood the process, we were able to use their help, experience, and knowledge to conduct the activities, instead of having to explain the 'relevance' of the activities that we were conducting (Call note with mentor, Patna, 15 July 2019). In fact, after the training sessions, school administrators who were initially suspicious of our activities, trusted us fully by allowing us to conduct our community classes even when the schools were closed (Call note with mentors, 9 April 2021).

We also found that after the training, they were better prepared for the work that was ahead of them. For example, when asked about their individual strategies related to deal with children who would be joining school after a long absence, they spoke immediately about three strategies that they had devised after the training: (1) paying attention to slow learners, (2) using the method of group learning extensively, and (3) incorporating more activity-based learning. The teachers told us that they really tried to incorporate critical thinking skills that they had. Even though they were facing a severe problem of retention, they were all making an extra effort to make sure that the children find the classes interesting and engaging.

Teachers also felt that one of the biggest lessons that they are trying to incorporate is the joy, fun and happiness that comes from learning. They felt that this was essential for children as they had gone through so many troubles in the lockdown. They felt that it was very essential that once they are back in school, they should be more joyful and enjoy themselves in the classrooms. When we went back into the field months after the training (March of 2022), we found that teachers had truly incorporated the spirit of the

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<sup>5</sup> Please refer to this website on the content and response of the training modules.

training and had started incorporating techniques learnt in the training into their classrooms. This further solidified our beliefs that the path towards sustainability of our approach is through the teachers (O'Loughlin & Campbell, 1988; Koche & Appleton, 2007; Sindhi & Shah, 2013).

## 6.6 Three stories

To encapsulate our entire experience with the project, we want to present a glimpse into the lives of the children with whom we were able to engage with. Although we have engaged with over 700 children, we wanted to use three themes – marginalisation, ambition and impact – to illustrate the ways in which children's lives are constrained, the manner in which they aspire to be more than what they are, and the difference small interventions (that allow them space and time) can make in their lives.

### 6.6.1 Stories of marginalisation

One of the major rationales for developing the critical module and implementing the BMP and LtL was to understand the implications and the impact of the module on children coming from the most marginalised communities. While working on the module, we realised that in certain circumstances, the module can only be a small piece of the larger structural work that requires to be done in order to provide a comprehensive and holistic education to children. To illustrate the structures of marginalisation, we will engage with the story of Nandini.

Nandini's parents worked as farm labourers in a peri-urban area in Patna. Because Nandini and her family lived very far away from the land that they were working in, the landlord gave them a house closer to the land, so that Nandini's family had an easier commute to their work in the farm. Nandini had two brothers and three sisters and a sister-in-law. Both the brothers were working with their father on the agricultural land, and neither had been educated. Nandini's sister-in-law had studied until 5<sup>th</sup>, but had discontinued after 5<sup>th</sup>.

When we asked about the sister's education, Nandini's told us that both the sisters are married. Her elder sister had studied till the 8<sup>th</sup>, and then got married. The expenses for both the weddings were a lakh each and the family was still struggling to repay the loans that they had borrowed for those weddings. Nandini told us that she had stopped going to school because of the objections of her brother-in-law. When she returned from coaching, he got very angry that they were spending money on her education and on her coaching. Consequently, she had to stop going to school or to coaching classes. When we asked her whether she liked to study. She told us that she liked studying and was very interested and also wanted to go to coaching, but they didn't have the money for her any more. Her parents had told her that they didn't even have the money to send her to the government school. She said that there was not a lot in their house, and while she wanted to join the online groups that we had set up, the phones in the house were not functional and didn't have any balance (of minutes and money).

During the course of our interaction, when we asked Nandini's mother what her daughter wanted to do in the future, Nandini's mother told us that she has no idea. Nandini's mother told us that given she has no money, there was no way that she could educate Nandini any further. She would love for Nandini to be whoever she wants to be, but it was beyond her capacity to educate her as there was no money. When we posed the same question to her, Nandini told us that she has no dreams. She told us: *Dreams do not come true, so I don't dream*. When our mentor told her that only if one dreams, we can work hard and achieve it, Nandini said – *nothing like that ever happens*. She said that after the loan of the previous wedding was repaid, her parents will start to think about her marriage, and that would be that.

What was most striking about this interaction with Nandini was not that she told us that she had no dreams. What you want to be when you grow up is one of the most frequently asked questions of children, and children often have pat answers when those questions are asked. So, yes - it was surprising that Nandini had no answer, but more importantly, it was the way that she stated it – what was shocking was the resigned way in which she was looking at her life. There was no possibility of any articulation of aspiration, ambition or wish. Perhaps, it would be easy to dismiss this one encounter, if it didn't also echo other interviews and interactions where children as young as 12 and 13 felt they had nothing to look forward to and nowhere to go.

We found the same answers, for example, when we spoke to Rupal's mother. When asked about what she wanted for her daughter, Rupal's mother told us that Rupal doesn't want to become anything when she grows up. Her mother felt that given Rupal was a different type of girl and was not interested in studies, she would just get Rupal married. There was also an additional pressure to get married because the family was in dire straits. Rupal's father was often very sick and there were no other family members to support her mother. So, Rupal's mother felt that she wanted to get her married so that she won't have to deal with the burden of her daughter, all by her own. While Rupal refused to say anything about her dreams and barely articulated what she thinks of her future, others like Khusbhoo, told us that she doesn't know what she wants to do and she has never thought of going anywhere or doing anything or being anything. What was common amongst all the stories of children seeing nothing in front of them was the level of poverty and marginalisation that they were experiencing. But not all children were bleak about the future. Many children in the same circumstances felt that they could be something more.

### 6.6.2 Stories of aspiration

Our mentor started talking to Rajneesh on the way to his auto after finishing a BMP session. Rajneesh told our mentor that he loved playing cricket. When the mentor asked whether he wants to continue to play, Rajneesh said that his friends had once told him that there is a school named Chain Blossom near Muzaffarpur, where cricket coaching was given. Rajneesh said that he had to see the school, and even met the coach. He was very sure that he would want to build a career in cricket. He felt he was already very

good, and with coaching, he had a shot to go even further. To enroll, however, Rajneesh would have to pay Rs. 5000 plus the costs of equipment. Rajneesh told the mentor that when he heard the amount, he knew that it was not going to happen. Even so, Rajneesh went to his father and asked him about the coaching centre. His father told him – *We are very poor people. We live in a hut. If you have such big dreams, how will we fulfil them? We don't have that kind of income, and it's all a wasteful activity, anyway. You first concentrate on your studies, as there is barely enough money for that.*

Rajneesh decided to get a loan to fuel his ambition, but none of his friends cooperated with that. After the Covid pandemic hit, and he stopped going to school, he decided to start working in a hardware shop. When we spoke to him in June of 2021, he was being paid Rs. 5000 monthly. Rajneesh spoke to us after a few months and told us that after he saved up a little, he had paid the coaching fee and then had given the rest of his earnings to his father, who was extremely happy. Rajneesh told us that he would now be able to fulfil his dreams without depending on his parents. When we expressed concern about the possibility of him dropping out, Rajneesh told us that he was going to tuition classes every morning and that he won't let his cricket coaching ruin his education. Even though his father had become unemployed, Rajneesh was buoyant that his job was not only helping fuel his family's sustenance but also his own ambition.

We also encountered other similar stories of quiet determination. One such story is that of Pranjali. When we met Pranjali, she was mostly at home and has not been going to school because of the pandemic. She said that her family couldn't afford tuition classes as they were paying back a loan that was taken to fund her elder sister's wedding. The pandemic had also created a large debt in the household and there were no funds for Pranjali's tuition. However, Pranjali told us that she never really felt the need for it – she had always studied on her own. She has downloaded an app on her family's phone and if she had any doubts, she just uses that to check the explanation. When we asked her about her dreams, Pranjali was one of the few children who thought about it for a while. Then, she said that she has always wanted to be a police officer. She said that she didn't want to be a constable, or a traffic police – these were not her ambitions. She wanted to be an inspector, an ACP or an IPS. She feels that if she has to aim for it, she had to be very good, and if she had to be very good, she needed to work and study hard.

While both stories provide you a glimpse of the clear headedness of children's ambition, what is also clear is that the pathways to achieve that ambition is likely to be very different for both the children (Froerer, 2012). Gender matters in terms of the manner in which Rajneesh can fuel his own ambition through being economically independent and physically mobile, but it is also true that urbanity matters. It is possible that Pranjali, even if she is a girl, might have more access to social networks, and social capital than Rajneesh (for example, in English speaking).

One of the lessons that we learnt from encountering many of these stories is that the lines of marginalisation are not always very clear. Children from marginalised

backgrounds are disadvantaged in many specific and invisible ways, and that we have to be cautionary and tentative to ensure that we do not paint all stories of marginalisation the same colour (Fieldnotes, 31 July 2018; Fieldnotes, 14 Feb 2019; Call note with mentor, Patna, 6 Mar 2019; Call note with mentors, 26 Feb 2021; Call note with mentors, 12 Mar 2021). One of the lessons, therefore, from the BMP and the LtL is that we should internalise that children are truly 'satrangi'<sup>6</sup>, even in the levels of discrimination that they experience as well as the manner in which they exercise their agency.

### 6.6.3 Stories of impact

Not all of the stories that we encountered in the field were sad or poignant. In fact, for much of the time that we spent in the implementation, we were always overwhelmed with the enthusiasm and positivity with which children would engage with us. Even when children challenged us (and they did that a lot!), they did it with great passion and we respected it. During these four years of engagement, a few stories stand out. One such story is that of Bubly. Bubly's father works as a carpenter and has a shop in the village where Bubly lives. He also worked in other people's farms as well as his own. Bubly has two brothers, who work in agricultural labour and animal husbandry. She lives amongst her relatives in the village, and feels very safe within the village.

Since the very beginning, Bubly has been interested in all of our activities. She was a regular to all of our sessions and would never leave the school without attending one of our sessions (even when she aged out of the implementation programme). She really enjoyed doing new things and was fairly unafraid to just jump in. During the lockdown, she also received postcards. She is one of the few children who sought out the mentors in our community classes so that she could complete all of the activities in all of the cards. If she had any doubts, she would call the mentors. One of her quirks was that she always wanted to be the first to finish everything. Even in classrooms, as soon as the assignment was given, she wanted to be the first to comprehend it and finish it. Even with the postcards, she wanted to be the first to finish and post her results online. This often helped spur other children to post their results on the WhatsApp groups.

In fact, the pandemic was very useful for her because while Bubly was very participative in class, she was not necessarily very communicative. When the pandemic hit, and we worked with children through WhatsApp and through postcards, she really found her groove and started to be much more vocal. Because of the anonymity that WhatsApp gave her, she was able to openly express herself clearly in the group without any hesitation – something she struggled with in the classrooms.

When we spoke to Bubly about her future, Bubly told us that she has seen how the education of girls stop completely after they get married. Her own sisters had

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<sup>6</sup> This is in reference to a set of two poems – Satrangi Ladka and Satrangi Ladki – by Kamala Bhasin. We have used these poems extensively in our LtL programme to showcase diversity of children and their identities.

experienced it. So, she doesn't intend to get married soon and suffer as she had seen her sisters do. She wanted to study further and wanted to become a teacher when she grows up. When we asked her why a teacher – she told us that she has a very strong relationship with the schools. Some of the school teachers in her neighbourhood (as well as in her school) were her relatives, and they have always looked out for her interests. She feels that they will be instrumental in guiding her, and she has already spoken to her father about becoming a teacher. She told us that her father is supportive, and that she has started to voice her opinion more and more after her interactions with us.

Bubly is not the only one who was impacted by the postcards. When we spoke to Aparna's brother, he told us that before the pandemic, Aparna was a very shy person. Because she has a chronic medical condition, she prefers to spend time alone. Even in the classroom sessions, we noticed that Aparna would not participate. However, during the pandemic, with the postcards, Aparna appears to have blossomed. Her brother told us that earlier, she would be too scared to study, but since the postcards started coming, she has been involving herself in studies, and talks to other family members about the questions that are in the cards. Whatever was asked in the cards, she would do it with full enthusiasm. For example, she was very enthused about the water filter and was one of the first children in Shantipur to make the water filter. She doesn't always answer questions raised in the WhatsApp group as she doesn't have access to the phone all the time, but she studiously devoured the contents of every letter that she received. Aparna's brother told us that given that Aparna had grown up with no friends and has no communication outside of her family, these postcards have not only helped her to speak and open up, but also be involved in activities. In fact, during the time that the postcards stopped coming, Aparna became quiet again.

To us, the stories of Bubly and Aparna are emblematic of the power of education. If really employed to enhance empowerment of children through critical thinking skills, using varied methodologies, education has the power to change children's experiences entirely (Kincheloe, 2000). What these two stories illustrate is that while classroom interactions are important, it is also vital to keep in mind that some children are able to find their voice through a multiplicity of methods. So, the key to designing any empowerment-based mentoring models is to pay very close attention to the multiplicity of children and their needs.

## 7 Conclusion

We started this project with the understanding of three primary things: (1) education is an important vehicle for empowering children, (2) localisation and prioritisation of articulated needs and responses to children and the communities that they live in is crucial, and (3) critical thinking pedagogies can help in working with the structural and social barriers present in the educational space. In response to these three principles, we developed an organically evolving mentoring model that shifted its focus on two different dimensions based on the articulated needs of the children: (1) shifts in subject matter, moving from communication techniques to caste and knowledge to gender-based stereotypes and sustainable development, and (2) shifts in modes of engagement, ranging from activities, role-plays, and skits.

If we examine the institutional framework of education, which is our first point of entry, we can see that the schools that the children study in are woefully inadequate for the enterprise of education, however narrowly it is defined. Not all children have access to basic infrastructure such as benches, toilets, water, fans, electricity, etc (Call note with mentor, Muzaffarpur, 13 Nov 2018; Fieldnotes, 31 July 2018; Fieldnotes, 14 Feb 2019). Additionally, the apathy and disinterest in the children by teachers reinforces the underlying systems of casteism and sexism that the children encounter in the wider world (Call note with mentor, Patna, 5 Dec 2018; Fieldnotes, 14 Feb 2019; Call note with mentors, 9 April 2021). At the same time, we can also see that the administration of the schools are also experiencing the same resource-constraints in terms of the teacher shortages as well as the volume of work that the teachers have to do. We could clearly observe that while there was some apathy among the teachers in the schools, those who are committed to their jobs are also overburdened and cannot physically stretch themselves to accommodate the needs of the students. Thus, the structure of the schooling and education creates barriers for children to learn.

The situation is made worse, more so for girls, if we add any emergency (such as a pandemic or floods) into the mix. For children who have survived the pandemic, the prospects of further education are severely hampered by the spectre of care work and paid work (Fieldnotes, 14 Feb 2019; Call note with mentors, 19 Feb 2021; Call note with mentors, 26 Feb 2021).

In this context, it is important to re-examine the systems of education and schooling in their discriminatory as well as their emancipatory contexts. We know that schooling for children can mean different things: it can be a break from their household labour, friendship, a means for social and economic mobility, a respectable marriage prospect (Froerer, 2012). What it often doesn't denote is learning. In fact, even though it is often assumed that schooling is equivalent to learning, and there is an overarching narrative that schools treat everyone equally, the reality is quite different. It is useful to remember that if *democratic, republican, secular and socialist education is a basic right of all citizens*" (JNUTA Report, 2019, p. 30), we are miserably failing.

The mentoring model was conceptualised as a way to address this. The purpose of the project was to make the connection between education and empowerment stronger. We designed the BMP and LtL in such a way that adolescent children are given the space, the tools, and the time to build their own lives. In order for us to do that more effectively, we also tried to understand some aspects of their lives more systematically, and we hope that with the following insights and recommendations, we can continue to do so.

### **7.1 Pedagogical benefits to mentoring**

Research has established that at the critical stage of adolescence, mentoring by teachers can enhance positive psychological strength and subjective well-being (Khan, 2013). The processes by which this is typically done is through boosting social relationships and the abilities to navigate them, improving cognitive skills through problem-solving and skill-building activities, and promoting a strong positive self-identity (Khan, 2013). In some sense, mentoring allows for role-modeling, spaces for acceptance, counselling and friendship. For children coming from marginalised backgrounds, this can be a massive process by which they can emulate pro-social behaviours (Fieldnotes, 31 July 2018; Fieldnotes, 14 Feb 2019; Call note with mentor, Patna, 6 Mar 2019; Call note with mentors, 26 Feb 2021; Call note with mentors, 12 Mar 2021).

However, this process of mentoring is easier said than done (Call note with mentors, 3 Dec 2019). When we are working at the head of the classroom, it was constantly tempting to be directing the classroom to a defined end. The major lesson that we learnt was to let go of our idea of this defined end. We had to trust that the methods that we were employing would work and that children would learn the necessary skills to think for themselves – even if it was not what you wanted them to think. This can be a very uncomfortable space, as one feels not in control (Call note with mentors, 3 Dec 2019). However, with time, we also believe that this is the only way in which co-learning and collaborative learning can take place. What is more important, ultimately, is a plan, a structure and an objective, but no defined ends to meet.

In that sense, mentoring and critical thinking frameworks focus on the process of learning, rather than the lessons being taught. We argue that creating such a model not only helps build confidence, or create a new identity for oneself, but it improves one's prospects for the future as one is likely to persevere towards goals despite setbacks and if encountered by setbacks, have enough emotional resources to engage with problems and adversity. These are the same resilient skills that we thought are very critical for teachers as well. In fact, one of the reasons why we designed Education in Emergency is to provide the same kind of mentoring relationship that we wanted for children to teachers as well. Using the same methodologies used in mentoring, we could provide teachers a pathway for them to act as mentors themselves.

But as mentioned earlier, this process is not always easy. Teachers are not necessarily given the tools to “evolve pedagogies that foster critical thinking within a consciously

created democratic environment of learning for all children irrespective of caste, religion, region, community and gender” (Batra, 2005, p. 4350). Instead, we find that the emphasis is on the curricula and the material, but not on the orientation of the teacher. In fact, researchers have repeatedly asked the basic question of how one can enable critical thinking within the children when the teacher themselves feel alien to that perspective (Batra, 2005). Even the value systems that teachers hold dear – silent and listening – can be antithetical to the very process of critical thinking (Batra, 2005).

One of the ways that we were able to tackle this problem was by conceptualising the mentoring model corresponding to the school curriculum<sup>7</sup>. When methodologies that emphasise critical thinking are adapted for the content in the curriculum, children are able to incorporate these learnings in a much more holistic manner. Additionally, critical elements of the mentoring model requires customisation as well as broadness. We strongly believe that this convergence of localisation, flexibility and scalability and broad-based applicability is the only way to bridge the divide that we see in the current schooling objectives and results (Batra, 2005). Perhaps, the most crucial element is the creation of the safe space.

We are keenly aware that children currently do not feel safe in the schooling environments primarily because of their past experiences of being ridiculed or their concerns minimised. The potential of the mentoring modules is that they can provide children a safe space to explore their own abilities, their imagination, and their identities, it can bolster critical thinking abilities and allow them to expand their knowledge horizons. This way, children are able to sift through information and knowledge bases to question socially entrenched ideas and attitudes about social identities, roles or capabilities.

## **7.2 Shifting frameworks and attitudes**

We know from our own study that shifts in attitudes are not easy to accomplish, as they are happening within social contexts where these attitudes and belief systems are so rooted that they have the veneer of ‘naturalness’. Moreover, these shifts in attitudes are not just movements in thought processes; they are also gateways to possibilities. A specific example of this is the shift in the children’s attitude towards girls being good at mathematics. When both boys and girls believe that girls are good at mathematics, not only can girls start to push back against commonly held belief systems, they can imagine their own potential and what they can do with it. They can think of career options or their own competencies very differently. While it is important for girls to experience these shifts in their own belief systems, it is also equally important for boys, so that they are able to respect, encourage, support and start to change their own deep-rooted ideas about gender-based competencies.

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<sup>7</sup> The [curriculum paper](#) provides details for these connections.

These small shifts in attitude are especially important given the stability of structural factors that define children's lives. When we developed the mentoring model, we were clear that we were working with larger structural forces such as gender, caste, class, and geography that work in multitude of diverse ways to reinforce these identity-based hierarchies. This is clear when we look at the ways in which certain regressive movements have taken place between the baseline and the endline. For instance, when children are asked about whether men can (or should) cook, or about the equal distribution of food, we can clearly see that there are certain gender-based stereotypes that are quite ensconced within the cultural and social systems in which children function. We can easily understand from these answers that children are gauging what they are learning from the mentoring model against their own experiences and prescribed social orders, especially reinforced by their peers, their families, and society at large. When new ideas are not contested in any other sphere, except within the spaces created by the mentoring model, it can get difficult to push against them.

A very good example of this is to examine the way in which caste is understood by children. Because untouchability as a concept is addressed openly by parents, teachers, and the school curricula, children have been reinforced in understanding that the practices of untouchability is wrong. So, in a reinforcing ecosystem, these attitudes are able to take root. However, when children (especially girls) encounter realities that are different from prescribed values such as not having the freedom to choose a person from another caste, then these ideas of equality regardless of caste are not taken into consideration. Instead, their experiences and their lived realities mould their attitudes and behaviour. So, the changes that we are perceiving have to be understood within a larger cultural and social context in which the mentoring model is set. This is why we feel that any assessment of the mentoring module must be situated within an analysis of the larger ecosystem, because the structural barriers to social change are stable and reinforce through many actors and institutions.

This is primarily the reason we started forming strong supportive networks with teachers, parents and people from the community. While the mentoring model can create safe spaces for critical thinking, they also require reinforcing elements. The importance of engaging closely with schools can be clearly seen when we examine the school-level disaggregated data. When we look at some of the regressive trends or the continued prevalence of gender-based stereotypes, we can clearly see that these are concentrated in some schools more than others (for example, Mohanpur). What we can learn from this is that while we can implement the same module in every school and still get some results, it requires the active cooperation of the entire schooling system to truly transform children into active, thinking citizens. When we look at the entrenchment of certain forms of belief systems, especially related to gender in schools such as Birpur and Mohanpur, we can clearly see the importance for enabling environments for critical thinking modules.

An example of the way in which supportive ecosystems can potentially work can be easily seen in relation to the questions related to menstruation. During the time that we were doing our mentorship model, the teachers were also talking to the children about menstruation. From the results on the shifts in attitudes towards menstruation, we can clearly see that when there is a supportive environment that reinforces science-based knowledge, creates support for defying stereotypes, and challenges structural impositions, then this makes a substantial difference in changing attitudes and belief systems. When issues such as menstruation (such as identification of sanitary napkins) is considered taboo for boys in some schools, the results are not as robust as they could be.

In short, when we are trying to shift frameworks or attitudes or trying to build critical thinking skills within impoverished environments, we cannot look at only the educational system in isolation; instead, we have to embrace the complicated nature in which social rules, social norms, and familial regulations affect children's lives. We cannot think of nudging the children towards planning their own futures, without taking into account the stability and rigidity of social structures that govern them. In that sense, understanding the 'importance of failure' was not just something we introduced in the module, but was a key lesson in developing and implementing MMM. This form of critical thinking is even more important because we already know that an education system that thrives and builds on class-caste-gender-region-religion differences or divides facilitate patterns of systemic disenfranchisement within India. Without youth who are curious and introspective, we are likely to find ourselves reinforcing a social cultural, economic and discursive divide that is already present both in the cultural and political system.

### **7.3 Implications for girls' education**

Taking 'realities' into consideration is especially useful when we consider girls' education. If support systems for critical thinking or mentoring frameworks are not embedded within family and local contexts and especially within the schooling contexts, (Froerer, 2012), then the choices for girls (already limited) are further constrained. Even before the Covid crisis, girls' choices invariably revolved around "agriculture labour and varied only to the degree that the household was solely dependent on agriculture for its subsistence" (Froerer, 2012, p. 346). So, managing the households, the school work, and the additional requirements of agriculture and animal husbandry are par for the course for girls in rural marginalised contexts. These skills were also valued and prized by their families not just for their immediate needs, but signaled the future desirability in the marital home. Moreover, even if girls desire to study and work further, there are no infinite possibilities. The reason that many girls in our study articulated teachers or police persons as their chosen profession is not because they are 'parroted' what they have heard, but those are the only professions that are available to them in the rural villages that they live in. Even if they have to get married and create a professional life, for people in the marginalised sectors, the only options are ANMs,

Anganwadi workers or the teachers. So, children are being pragmatic when they list these choices (Froerer, 2012).

Girls are also victims of deeply entrenched attitudes that reinforce the larger social narrative that denigrates and subjects women and girls to a secondary position. If we look to children's understanding of physical strength and capabilities or their ideas about the appropriateness of a profession or who is responsible for cleaning, we find the patriarchal reflection of societal values in their answers. These are not merely attitudes towards certain aspects of their lives, but have severe consequences especially if we consider their awareness and understanding of health and violence.

Our findings on gendered attitudes are also an affirmation of our belief that a mentoring model that is able to (1) provide information about the larger world, (2) enable the use of tools to critique this social discourse, and (3) create space for children so as that they are able to form their own understanding of the world is definitely required. Our findings also reinforce our belief that this model has to work within the framework of an educational institution and the state if we have to engage with the lived realities that children are experiencing, including the severe lack of resources of their schools and their communities. The model, therefore, cannot move away from the immediate contexts of its setting or deny the realities within which it is functioning.

#### **7.4 Potential policy and institutional development steps**

The state needs to go beyond having progressive policies to improve the present state of education. Schemes such as the mid-day meals and the scholarship funds, and even instituting accountability system such as the SMCs do allow for children and parents to participate in the schools more fully and allows communities a voice within the institution. But given these are barely functional and in fact, often inhibit the education processes. Therefore, there is a need to engage with the structural influences that create different educational ethos and cultures than intended. From our understanding, it is important that we take the following learnings from our study seriously in order to build a better learning environment for all children:

##### **7.4.1 Integrate critical thinking and critical pedagogical practices in regular teaching-learning exercises**

The BMP experience clearly established that critical thinking skills can be built among early adolescents if the content is carefully designed and executed using pedagogical practices that break teacher-student hierarchy. It is vital that children learn to embrace hope and optimism and develop resiliency and confidence in their own abilities in making up their own understanding of the world, instead of blindly following what others tell them. If we are to truly reap the benefits of the demographic dividend, it is important that children not just gain fundamental rudimentary skills to earn a living, but critical thinking skills that can help them dissect, deconstruct and discern the world around them. This demographic dividend is not just our work force, but also the fuel for our current functioning democracy. We require, more than ever, thinking citizens who

are able to create and sustain accountability structures, and are able to understand complexity and diversity in our social fabric. We feel that the BMP and the LtL models are a small step towards building that vision.

#### 7.4.2 Revamp teacher training and school accountability

Although regular teacher training has been in practice in the state system, it is important to take another look at the entire teacher training pedagogy and content from the perspective of teachers understanding and capabilities on dealing with issues of marginalisation, critical thinking skills, mentorship and emergency preparedness. The feedback from this research suggests wide gaps in these areas and indicates a need for in-depth and continuous training using experiential / critical pedagogy to enable internalisation of these issues, which seem very weak at the moment.

In order to address the training-fatigue that has been reported in some parts of India, it is important to reconceptualise training content, pedagogy and delivery. One method could be a compulsory follow up in-person training with certain school-level planning and changes that the school needs to undertake, which are monitored regularly and on-site support provided through this monitoring. Training done in this manner would not remain merely a classroom exercise for teachers in such cases. Collaboration with external agencies and NGO could also be helpful in this supportive monitoring.

#### 7.4.3 Towards resilient schools: Focus on diverse communication and learning materials

The Covid19 experience clearly showed us that schools need to be resilient to deal with emergencies, and only if a school is well resourced, it can respond to emergencies quickly and comprehensively. The state can plan to develop diverse and low-cost distance learning material — radio, TV, SMS, printed material, peer-to-peer and parent resources that can be used during school closures caused by any kind of emergency. For instance, Bihar is a flood-prone state and schools remained closed for unexpected periods during floods. Availability of diverse materials will make it easier to think of alternative ways of continuing education during these unexpected school closures. This is especially important in view of low uptake of either online or TV based education during the Covid19.

Simultaneously, the state also needs to address the digital divide and take measures for expanding access to digital learning while taking the context of low literacy, poor digital infrastructure and low affordability as well as gender divides in mind. Building a framework for inclusive and gender-responsive contingency plans for education now for future public health emergencies based on feedback and lessons learned could also be helpful in the long run. This kind of framework should consider all forms of communication including letters and not depend on only TV or internet connections.

#### 7.4.4 Developing strategies for deep engagement with communities

Although the existing legal framework in the form of Right to Education recognises the importance of community engagement in school governance and formalises it with the

compulsory provision of SMCs, in reality, the relationship has remained tenuous. There is indeed a need for creating institutional mechanism to strengthen these linkages. Again, one way of doing this could be by including SMCs in the movement towards making the school resilient and making them also accountable in the process. We found that schools remain weak in terms of understanding their own children, their families and challenges, and one way of changing this could be to strengthen the school-SMC ties through concrete joint activities that they plan and undertake together.

The BMP experience taught us that it is possible to engage with children and community even for challenging and resisting exploitative social norms if the school-community relationship is built on trust and respect.

#### 7.4.5 Social and child protection measures

The experience made it clear that it is crucial to provide essential care services to adolescent girls (such as the provision of Folic Acid, sanitary pad provision etc.), as sometimes this is the only source for these provisions. More importantly, the need for bolstering strong child protection safety nets to prevent child marriage, child labour or abuse is high and urgent. The present system and institutional arrangements do not seem to be helping as they all operate within the same boundary of social norms. Collaborating with women's and community-based organisations to create safe spaces for children, not just within the classroom, but also in the community, is strongly needed. These could help in enhancing recreational and educational activities in public spaces to start with but also help in garnering the support of community groups for girls' continued education and fulfil their career ambitions by withstanding pressures for early marriage or labour.

It is also important to ensure that teachers, parents and community actors have the knowledge and skills to deal with instances of gender-based violence and prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, including information on safe referral practices and on online safety. At present, these remain either absent or rudimentarily present in some training.

Based on the BMP action research experience, we are developing a toolkit for building a resilient school, which summarises how to translate the experiences of the project into learnings for the system.

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## 9 Annexures

### 9.1 Annexure A1

During the course of our work, we identified markers – valid, tangible, visible indicators – that would help us to guide our design and implementation of the mentoring modules. We also used them as our philosophy, guidelines or non-negotiable principles to ensure that each and every one of our activities were tuned to the needs of the children and the objectives of our action-research. We used them, sometimes, also to motivate ourselves and the community around us.

#### 9.1.1 About children

- A child should be able to critically think and question. He/she must internalize that questioning is not wrong
- A child must be aware of their capabilities and potential of themselves and their surroundings
- A child should be reflective, compassionate and engaged with the self and the society
- A child must believe in the values of equality and equity
- A child should be able to create their own benchmarks and simultaneously be their own best critiques. A teacher/mentor/parent does not get to pre-decide what a child can and/or should become
- Even without external influences or sources, a child already has existing knowledge with respect to various aspects like traditions and culture, gender roles, identity, capability, aspirations, control over emotions, politics of emotions, games, teacher's expectations, social roles, etc. In this sense, a child is an independent thinking individual and is capable
- A child is not a piece of clay to be moulded as it transfers the power of moulding into the hands of the teacher/mentor. The child is not even a plant that needs to be watered as the child needs various inputs to grow depending on his/her needs
- A child is not lifeless or a passive recipient of knowledge. A child is a storehouse of dreams, aspirations and wishes

#### 9.1.2 Guiding principles for mentorship

- The mentors should never critique the teacher but instead make them a part of the teaching-learning process.
- The mentors need to be performers while conducting a session
- The mentors must prepare a set of grey questions that can be posed at any time to the students. Grey questions are those set of questions that have no direct answers as 'yes' or 'no'. These are questions that have no right or wrong answers and only help in spurring debates
- Mentors must also pose challenges to the students and test them on some very basic facts. For instance, ask the students to verify if there are indeed 365 days in

a year. Although most students know it is a fact, such a challenge allows them to verify the fact and engages them in a mental process of exertion.

- The mentors must focus on breaking the student's conventional way of thinking. This can be done by questioning their standards of knowledge and their sources of knowledge. The objective is that the students must begin being comfortable with the idea of 'being uncomfortable'
- The mentors must be able to create an environment where the students feel a sense of ownership. This arises only through participation and handing over the power of decision-making to the students
- The mentors must also try to create a safe space where the children can talk openly
- Mentors must be compassionate and patient learners. This is effectively done through the means of expressions and actions and is not merely expressed through words. Try to lean in and talk to the students and if possible, observe and document the emotional needs and requirements of the children
- Mentors need to learn only 20-30 basic formats of activities that can then be applied in numerous ways. The root activity needs to be identified and then be tweaked according to the goal

### 9.1.3 Guidelines for designing activities

- Whether it is with the students within the classroom or with the teacher within the larger system of schooling, the strategies have to constantly evolve with each level of progress and with each stage of learning that has been achieved
- A small activity can be developed into a long and complex activity by adding layers of engagement and varieties of activities to it
- Learning needs to be immersive where the elements of 'fun' and 'joy' is built within the learning process. The objective is to make learning joyful and not to have 'joy' and 'learning' as exclusive elements of a session.
- The same activity can be done in multiple formats to achieve different objectives and to impart different kinds of knowledge and concepts
- The sessions should be designed in such a way that the mentors have to do fewer activities in more depth instead of doing a lot of activities simultaneously with confusing objectives
- Choose students at random to participate in the activity. It is not necessary that every student needs to participate in every session or activity. Although the activities must be designed in a way that every student is 'engaged'
- The responses from the students have to be selected in such a manner that the future conversations can be built around that. These conversations should help the students in questioning instead of ending it on a straight note
- Engagement needs to be at the level of thought and not only in terms of physical movement and exertion

- A child should not be aware of what the desired objective of the activity or the session is. Hence, sessions should begin with a catchy primer and not with delineating the aims of the session
- Engage the students in a repetitive process till the time they figure out the logic or pattern for a particular action
- Involve the students in sustained and shared conversations. Use innovative methods like role-reversal (mentor becomes the students and vice-versa) or assume fictional characters
- Give real-life examples and contextual examples that the students can easily relate to. Try to exemplify through both local as well as global examples. Also try to both realistic as well as imaginative or fictive situations.
- Try not to impart any moral lessons at the end of each session. Instead leave them with more questions than they already had at the beginning of the session.
- Use the incentive of unpredictability to engage the students. Involve the students in a repetitive activity with different outcomes at each repetition so as to build curiosity within the child
- Equity and quality go hand-in-hand. A program cannot be of good quality without the elements of equity in it
- The confidence of the students must be built initially and then be broken later so that the child is constantly thinking. Hence, mentors must keep shifting between confidence-building strategies and confidence-breaking strategies.
- Merely 10% of a particular session should be mechanical in nature while the remaining 90% should be reflective, creative, imaginative and involve logical thinking.
- The students should be given such a format that the students can follow even without the instructions of the mentor/teachers
- Students must be exposed to experiences and thoughts so that the students frame a language of their own
- Unlearning is the first stage of learning.
- Instead of building a sense of dependency, the team should build mechanisms that helps the students to cope with situations.
- The vision has to be bigger and broader at the top level so that it leads to small measurable changes at the bottom.

## 9.2 Appendix A2

The following are some of the patterns that we identified in the pedagogical culture of the classroom during the course of the project:

1. **Lack of resources:** Children do not have access to textbooks, uniforms, and any kind of learning material.
2. **Rote-learning:** Rote-learning is heavily practiced in the classroom.
3. **Afraid of failure:** Children are completely attuned to the 'wishes' of the mentors and teachers and are afraid to take any risks in terms of their answers, as they are often punished for them. This also results in children not participating unless they are confident they know what the teacher wants them to know.
4. **Repetition of example:** Because of the above quality, children often reproduce examples that have been given to them. They are afraid of taking risks on coming up with their own examples.
5. **Apathetic teachers:** The apathy of teachers in teaching the children have led to a lowering of expectations of the performance of children and children have learned to internalise these lowered expectations of teachers.
6. **Lack of general awareness:** Because of the lack of engagement with the materials in their textbooks, children do not have rudimentary information related to their grade level.
7. **Reading and writing abilities:** Children, especially in Muzaffarpur, do not have the age-appropriate reading and writing competencies.
8. **Caste and gender as dividing factors:** Part of the reason for non-collectivisation is that the children are highly segregated and have internalised strong caste and gender bias, which is reinforced by the schools. Academic performance and seniority add to these divisions.
9. **Privacy:** The concept and practice of privacy is not available to children.

### 9.3 Appendix A3

Table 9.1: The change matrix

The Change Matrix Areas	Positive change	Regression	No Change	Positive change	Regression	No Change
	Girls			Boys		
<b>Physical Strength and Capabilities</b>						
Physical strength - Girls have the physical strength and capacity to win a race against their male counterparts	√			√		
Physical strength - Men have more physical strength than women	√			√		
Intellectual capability - Men are better in mathematics than women	√				√	
Political intellect - Men are better chief ministers than women	√			√		
<b>Career Aspirations</b>						
Girls can also enter male dominated occupations like playing professional cricket	√				√	
Boys can also enter female dominated occupations like nursing	√			√		
<b>Division of Labour</b>						
Share of domestic work by the husband		√		√		
<b>Health</b>						
Attitudes towards distribution of food between Boys and Girls	√			√		
Attitude towards consumption of food between Boys and Girls			√		√	
Awareness on what is menstruation	√			√		
Attitudes towards menstrual taboo	√			√		
Awareness on – sanitary napkins	√			√		

<b>The Change Matrix Areas</b>	<b>Positive change</b>	<b>Regression</b>	<b>No Change</b>	<b>Positive change</b>	<b>Regression</b>	<b>No Change</b>
	<b>Girls</b>			<b>Boys</b>		
<b>Honour, Shame and Violence</b>						
Awareness on punitive legal provisions against domestic violence	√			√		
Attitudes towards domestic violence	√			√		
Awareness of sexual violence – perpetrated on men	√				√	
Attitudes towards victim shaming – sexual assault survivors		√			√	
Attitudes towards control of women’s clothing	√			√		
<b>Marriage and Caste</b>						
Awareness on legal age for marriage for girls	√				√	
Awareness and Attitudes towards freedom to choose partners for marriage	√			√		
Attitudes towards caste untouchability	√			√		
Attitudes towards caste discrimination – lower intellectual capacities of people from so called ‘low caste’ groups	√			√		