



What works for TEACHERS

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What works for **TEACHERS**

Council for Social Development

खनिज :- हमारे शरीर को खनिजों की आवश्यकता शरीर की कार्य करने के लिए तथा अच्छा स्वास्थ्य रखने वाली कुछ रासायनिक पदार्थों को कहते हैं। खनिजों को खाने में सहज

T-TALENT

E-EDUCATION

A-ATTITUDE

C-CHARACTER

H-HARMONY

E-EFFICIENCY

R-RELATION

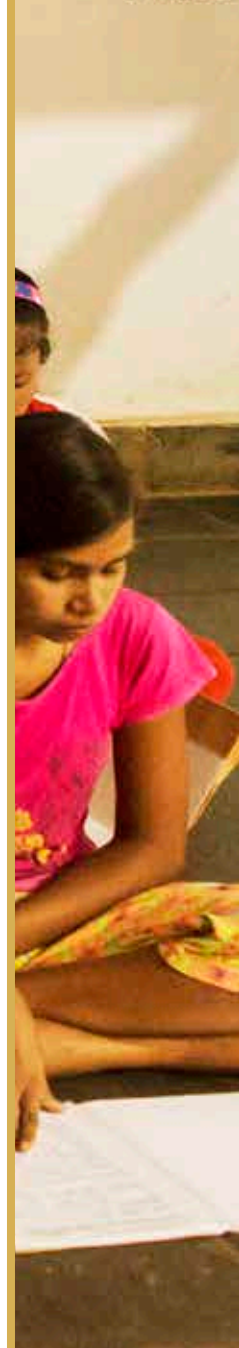
करता है ।
प्रणाली को सुचारु ढंग से चलाने के लिए होती है ।
यनिक अभिक्रियाओं के उत्प्रेरक के यता करता है ।



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BREAKFAST
READ BUTTER, BOILED EG
BANANA
ALIA UPPAMA, APPLE
POTI PURI, CHOLA, BANANA
LI, SAMBAR, CHATNI, SAMBA
VADA
POTI/PURI, CHOLA, ANAR
PURI, ALOO, APPLE
VHA, JALEBI/ FRUITS
उपलब्ध







A PERSON CALLED TEACHER

This research emanates from my own experiences and interest in what is considered to be one of the most noble professions in any country—that of a teacher. I have had the privilege of having wonderful teachers to guide me throughout my schooling and university education. My first ever interaction with some motivated teachers was in my first school where I got enrolled with great persuasion and perseverance from my mother.

I still remember my mother, aspiring for me to join a school in the colony, literally pleading with the Principal not only to enroll but also subsidize the fee. She, being a single parent, could not afford an expensive education for her six year old, but was determined to send her to a school that she believed, could transform her daughter's life. Her determination emanated from her own deprivation from schooling, as she fled to India from Pakistan along with her family, during the partition. Dropped out from school, she got married very early in life, in quick succession she gave birth to four of us, then lost my father to a sudden illness, and was left all by herself to bring us up. Economically incapacitated, she often regretted not being able to complete her education. At that time, my uncle took upon himself to support our family, both emotionally and financially. He became my role model, who instilled in me, a faith in education as a transformative force and a respect for teachers, who enable this transformation. And that faith was indeed confirmed as I continued with my life trajectory.

My journey of two decades dedicated to the development sector, particularly in the field of Education, was invested in learning and applying efforts to reach out to children in and out of the school. In this journey, the domain of gender and social inclusive education started to become an area of tremendous interest to me, and soon I became a strong promoter of quality education for all children, especially girls from the marginalized settings and communities. I started to delve deeper into social, pedagogical, and policy level solutions to address social and gender discrimination in communities and families, which deprive children of development opportunities and human rights, especially the right to education.

I started attempting to work on various educational frameworks, pedagogy and processes to enable a just and equitable society for all, and bring about lasting changes in attitudes of young people and communities, on values of peace and harmony. My passion grew into specifically looking at quality education provisions for children from disadvantaged communities and settings. I began to recognize that, the two most important components for the provision of quality education are the curriculum that addresses the diverse needs of the children from varied settings and the capacitated teachers who can transact this curriculum sensitively and appropriately, to support the completion of a full cycle of education that is meaningful and joyful for each and every child.

The year 2015 was an extremely important phase in my career, when I got a great opportunity through the Echidna Fellowship programme, routed through the Brookings Institution DC, to concertedly dedicate five months on a research to understand the social, pedagogical and systemic issues of multilingual education of tribal girls in India. This research affirmed my belief that the competent teachers along with right policy and its rigorous implementation can support the pathway of empowerment for children.

Being trained as a teacher myself, I realized it is not an easy task to be one. In fact, it is one of the most demanding professions that we have in the world. To begin with, teachers have the most challenging expectation set out for them, that of 'building a

nation'. World over it is recognized that children and youth are the wealth and capital of every nation and strengthening their ability to build knowledge communities, and economy of a country is what is meant by building a nation. This expectation comes with tremendous responsibility resting on her shoulders.

The expectations from a teacher are manifold. Being responsible for the betterment and learning of the students, she is expected to be equipped with the right knowledge that empowers children to take on the challenges of the rapidly changing world. In addition, she must help support students socially, emotionally, personally and be a motivator, guide and a friend. She must be a role model for the students influencing every facet of their growth and developing their innate potentials.

To fulfill these expectations, a teacher faces multiple dilemmas in her personal, social and professional sphere. In the personal and social spheres, the teachers, especially the female teachers or those who belong to disadvantaged communities or are teaching in such settings, struggle to address gender stereotypes within their own families and communities. The professional sphere demands exceptional skills and confidence not only to be a teacher, but also to combat any backlash when she challenges age old norms and mores of communities that create inequities and inhibit growth of her students. Still her status is far lower within a country's workforce.

In a teacher's own words, "Teacher is the most appropriate noun to describe many things - a rose that is surrounded by thorns but gives fragrance to others, a mother that takes away all sorrows and makes her child laugh, a lotus that lives in a swamp but remains beautiful for others".

In recent times, teaching profession has become more dynamic and demanding, with the global agenda shifting to each child learning. The performance of a teacher is assessed solely through the indicators around enrolment, retention and the scholastic achievement as measured by the numerical indices. Changing classrooms and processes in the most challenging situations is not a criterion to reflect her performance.



The system support structured to equip teachers in their role is, most often, not need based, and developed by personnel with limited connect to the grassroots. During a field visit, a teacher had once shared with me emotionally, "No one asks me what I want, when and how often". I figured that there are teachers who love children and are highly motivated regardless of where they teach. I met a teacher in a remote village of Rajasthan who reflected, "My children are like flowers that spread their fragrance all around, despite deprivations they still smile and have so many dreams in their eyes. I must make their dreams come true". However, I also figured that there are also schools that do not have motivated and sensitive teachers. There are teachers with negative attitudes and behavior, and who do not consider their profession creditable.

The teachers, motivated to teach and work hard despite all odds, do need a supportive and empowering environment to strengthen their capacities, to take independent decisions and practice fearlessly and innovatively in a secure school climate. The critical elements of an enabling environment are not easy to fathom, as it is influenced by a number of factors, many socio-political, but it is not impossible to conceptualize.

It is with this intention, that this qualitative research has been undertaken by a team of professionals, who have been teachers themselves and have come of age looking for solutions, through research, for some of the most difficult issues in education, and linking the research to practice. We intend this evidence to be a reflective piece, to empower the teachers and the education functionaries.

I wish to thank Echidna Giving and The Brookings Institution, Centre for Universal Education who supported this research and continue to enrich my personal and professional space to contribute better to the development sector.

The research would not have been possible without the support of several people at all the three locations where the cases studies were undertaken- Potka KGBV Jharkhand, Taswariya KGBV Ajmer Rajasthan and Prerna School Lucknow. Shri S Sukumaran, State Project Director Jharkhand and his team who facilitated our study at Potka KGBV- Arupa Tikri and Bindu Jha, Ruma Haldar, Warden

and Headmistress, Jyoti Sagar, teacher, Sangeeta Mahali, alumni and ISWP CSR of Indian Steel Wire Project. Shri Jogaram Commissioner Rajasthan Council of Elementary Education, Snehlata Harit, Deputy Commissioner Girls Education SSA and their team-Kamlesh Mathur, Program Assistant Girls Education Ajmer, Aradhna Yadav, SSA Consultant and Saubhagya Nandin, Warden. I wish to thank Urvashi Sahni and her team Rakhi Punjwani, School Principal and Anand Chitravanshi at PRERNA for leading us into the amazing work that they are doing for the marginalized girls.

And most of all I thank all the beautiful and inspiring young girls and teachers who interacted with us openly and shared insights which helped us develop our perspective on empowerment.

I especially acknowledge the strong support of the Council for Social Development, especially Professor Ashok Pankaj, Director CSD, for his leadership, Poornima M. (Assistant Professor), Ramandeep Kaur, (Research Officer), Taarika Singh (Research Associate) for contributing to the review of related literature and the administration team headed by Sheela Sabu for their efficient support throughout the project.

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*If dreams could come true
If hopes could be realized
If wishes could be fulfilled
I would make a future for myself
Light up the world with my
work and passion
Out in the sea, up in the sky
And hold back the hands of
time forever*

Poem by Sunita 15 year old tribal girl, Jharkhand
(Translated version)



INTRODUCTION

EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF 'EMPOWERMENT'

Deconstructing the concept

The poetry of *Sunita*, elucidating her longing for a future that is built by her own self, is based on her own decisions, illuminates concrete expressions of empowerment. Empowerment, in that sense, is a loaded term that can be interpreted in multiple ways. For each individual or a specific group, it is interpreted keeping in mind the context, a particular point of time, a life stages and yet it may not be understood unanimously in its depth and entirety.

The term empowerment refers to an individual's capacity to gain power and control over decisions and resources that affect her life (Narayan, 2002; Alsop, Bertelsen, & Holland, 2006) and is defined in this context as the expansion of freedom of choice and action (World Bank, n.d) or the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them (Kabeer, 1999). Involving action, it includes the

aspect of self-empowerment, especially for women, where they are enabled to help themselves, and subsequently help others to become empowered (NPE, 1986).

A broadened horizon of empowerment accommodates different perspectives or approaches to its concept. Women in development (WID), approach associates girls' empowerment with economic independence, identifying the issue of marginalisation of women and girls, but not with the multiple sources of women's subordination and exploitation. The gender and development (GAD) approach associates empowerment with recognizing and challenging gendered structures of inequality (Sahni, 2018).

The capability approach emphasizes upon a girl's capability to lead a life that she values not only through the alternatives available to her, but also by making choices, and having freedom to choose alternatives within her ability and context

(Sen, 2009). Capabilities are not an end but are opportunities or choices that one values, and then uses them to her advantage. In this context, the social conditions in society that create inequalities and affect individuals differently (Robeyns, 2005) such as personal attributes, physical environment, social climate and relational perspectives (Sen, 1999) play an important role. These include not only material goods or resources and institutional arrangements, but also discourses and norms that perpetuate inequalities (Kabeer, 1999).

The critical feminist approach focuses on human needs and well-being (Rai & Waylen, 2014, p.7) against the neo-liberal economic model which is based on the market economy, growth and accumulation. It argues that one's agency, or the ability to analyze, decide and act on decisions as a girl or a woman (Maslak, 2008), is enacted in relation to structures, norms and ideologies about gender relations. It recognises male resistance towards female economic power and patriarchy as main reasons that obstruct female empowerment. This philosophy also supports the sociological theory of gender that views social structures as hindrance to the development of gender equality.

The three approaches discussed above, defined empowerment as a term and elaborated its scope. However, empowerment can also be understood as a process. Lately there has been a shift from understanding empowerment as a 'term' to a 'process' of developing feminist consciousness. This involves gaining a critical understanding of one's social and political reality (Sahni, 2018) by which the powerless, which in this case are girls, gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives (Sen & Batliwala, 2000).

Articulating a world of empowerment (gender equality and towards equality):

In the face of complexities of varied contexts, age, life stages and communities, empowerment becomes more complex to achieve. Empowerment thus, is more difficult for disadvantaged in a society by virtue of their caste, class, community or gender.

Expanding empowerment from a term to a process necessitates defining a framework that can be

applied to this process that must be unfolded in different contexts, situations and time. Stromquist (1988) empowerment framework constitutes of four dimensions, each of which is important, but none is sufficient to empower individuals on its own. These dimensions are cognitive dimension—critical understanding of one's reality; psychological dimension—feelings of self-esteem; economic dimension – capacity to generate independent income; and political dimension—awareness of power inequalities and the ability to organize and mobilize.

Within the limitation of understanding the term empowerment, the consensus from various perspectives is that education is a powerful and perhaps the only tool to gain and sustain empowerment. Education thus is of immense value to the children of the disadvantaged and within them to girls, as they are the most disadvantaged within even the disadvantaged communities.

Education is a powerful tool to address Stromquist framework, but it is not sufficient to achieve all its dimensions. School is considered to be the primary platform of imparting formal education. While schools cannot directly provide girls with economic or political empowerment, they can – provide them with cognitive and psychological development (Stromquist, 1988), which in turn can contribute significantly towards their economic and political empowerment. The context in which the girls live and learn, and the experiences that they have within schools, can also have an impact on the social outcomes.

Schools, through a "hidden" curriculum (Heaton & Lawson, 1996), accelerate the process of gender socialisation. This can work both ways, negatively by perpetuating and reinforcing the existing gender stereotypes or positively by breaking them through courses offered, subjects taught and textbooks used, sports and cultural activities or by providing appropriate role-models. Schools can also break stereotypes by positing alternative definitions of the activities of teaching, learning, reading and writing; that follow the codification of sociological aspects extracted from the learners' immediate environment which is readily identifiable through the sharing of common cultural experiences (Freire, 1973).

Within the context of schooling, it is important to construct a pathway for achievement of different dimensions of the empowerment framework. For such a pathway to be constructed for the girls in India, keeping the diversity of their experiences in mind, it is important to understand their context.

Before a child even starts to understand and actively learn to live in a particular society, she goes through the entire process of socialisation inside her family, receiving the first set of meaningful experiences, social duties and acquiring 'beyond the home education'. This whole process of fitting children into the widely accepted societal roles, and also simultaneously moving towards socially and economically productive roles, is influenced by the patterns existing in individual societies, and their prevalent norms and stereotypes. The cultural diversity of Indian society though lends a distinct identity to its social system but it makes the process of socialization extremely complex.

Context of the girl child in India

The communities in India are extremely diverse and this diversity also becomes a basis for deeply embedded phenomenon of exclusion, rendering some sections of the society to be powerless. These people belong to groups defined by specific caste, class, religion, gender or occupation and are often get marginalised from the society. The consequences of marginalisation lead to the individuals or communities of people being systematically blocked from accessing the rights, opportunities and resources that are usually easily available to all members of the society. Within these groups, the girls are further marginalised due to their sex. This reality has a deep impact on socialisation practices adopted by families which tend to reinforce their own status and position as

they socialise their children. Even in these families the upbringing of girls is influenced more by the same exclusion and marginalisation, which their own communities face.

At this point it is important to state that not all parts of India have similar challenges for girls. In fact India has had a history of rich culture and progressive minds, which reflect a progressive attitude and situations in several parts of the country. Over past two decades India has emerged as a dynamic and influential country, with one of the world's major growing economies. The challenges lie in the pockets and communities that are most disadvantaged and poor. The situation of girls elaborated in the research here especially relates to those who belong to certain disadvantaged communities (Dalits¹, minorities and other backward castes) and in certain neglected and disadvantaged geographical locations (concentrated tribal² populations).

Indian society is marked by the preference for sons across all communities, a preference as old as the Indian society itself. The presence of a son is absolutely necessary for the performance of many sacraments and rituals, to carry family legacy forward and above all for contributing to the family income. Therefore, girls are taught to look up to their fathers, brothers and husbands for familial and economic support and it is not necessary for them to have economic independence. This is much more prominent in the marginalised communities such as scheduled castes, Muslims, and other backward communities, where the parents also accept the discrimination, stereotypes and biases that they themselves face.

The Indian childhood begins from birth to continue up to the age of 18 years, with different parenting

¹ The term Dalit is interchangeably used with Scheduled Caste, including all historically discriminated communities of India, considered at the bottom of this system, ostracized socially, spatially, with untouchability being the worst kind of discriminatory practices against them. They constitute around 16% of the Indian population (Census of India, 2011) today and are listed as the Scheduled Castes in the Constitution of India

² Traditionally referred as Adivasis, the communities identified as the Scheduled Tribes in the Article 342 of the Indian Constitution, are the other most marginalized groups in India. Constituting about 8% of the total Indian population (Census of India 2011), there are 645 tribes (many overlapping types in more than one State) in different States and Union Territories

styles adopted at each level of childhood and to each gender differently. Parents usually adopt extreme styles that range from a relatively lax approach towards their children in early childhood to a more conservative and rigid system as children and especially girls grow. During childhood in India the emphasis is not to encourage child's individuation and autonomy but on teaching them compliance to social and cultural norms. This phenomenon however differs in rural and urban contexts and in different regions, communities and locations. It is more progressive in open cultures and societies across India and restrictive in locations that have disadvantaged communities.

A striking feature of the transition from childhood to adolescence is the rigid standards of absolute obedience to familial, social and stereotypical norms that are in conformity with the immediate society. It is at the stage of early adolescence, that differences between the two sexes start taking shape. Adolescence is thus a very critical period in the life of girls, especially the rural girls belonging to the disadvantaged communities.

In such areas, the situation of girls from early to late adolescence is especially grim with a large proportion of them, from certain communities and in certain geographical pockets, being out of school. Caught in the cycle of early marriage, repeated pregnancy and poverty, they have very limited choices for the future. There are direct linkages between poverty and adolescent girls' health and vast majority of poor girls are caught in this vicious circle where they are deprived of their basic rights to health, education, development and independence, and their psychosocial needs are mostly ignored.

A girl's situation gets defined as per her specific geographical location, class and caste realities. Rural societies in India are relatively more close-knit in terms of kinship ties. They are also relatively more hierarchical, have abounding infrastructural challenges, are conservative and traditional, less amorphous, not open to change and diversity, and tend to offer limited/no opportunities. Poverty assumes varying dimensions with social poverty

being the most basic of economic poverty in rural areas.

Situated in the above context, adolescent girls undergo a sharp transition into more restrictive roles and lifestyles. This transition is often accompanied by a narrowing of social, educational, and economic opportunities which is accompanied with lesser mobility. This results in girls dropping out after primary or elementary schooling, having limited connection with the outer world and restricted exposure to information. Girls' engagement in household affairs and sibling care limits them further to having no time and space for themselves. Therefore, number of girls dropping out of school far exceeds the number of boys in most areas and communities.

Girls spend more time performing household chore which increases the gap between female and male equality in rural parts of India, it also perpetuates the myth that education is of no help to the girl and her primary job is to look after the home, get married early, have children and raise them.

Girls continue to face gender based discrimination which is also visible in the declining sex ratio, growing malnutrition, lower school-enrolment ratios, higher drop-out rates, early marriages, and incidence of dowry deaths, domestic violence, under-age pregnancy, unsafe motherhood and increasing incidence of sexual abuse.

The ineffective and poor access to and use of information by the most marginalized girls, exacerbated by patriarchal attitudes, historical, social and institutional deprivation restrict the ability of marginalised girls to know and understand their rights and entitlements. As a result they are unable to negotiate their positions and participate in institutions, organizations and interest groups.

The situation and context described above is impacting the girls in accessing health facilities, educational opportunities and exercising their rights. With the growing realization and need for a greater participation of girls and women in social development, the discourse around empowering girls, through a strong empowerment framework, in the Indian society is getting stronger.

In simple terms, applying an empowerment framework to the girls means that the girls

- i. Develop intrinsic and instrumental values. Intrinsic values are to discover self, formulate their own identity, integrity and dignity and instrumental values are to carry forward the socialisation process building an understanding about the social structures, values, mores and norms
- ii. Get empowered to challenge norms which take away their freedom, to gain control over resources, land and exercise rights
- iii. Take action towards becoming a change agent capable of making informed choices, negotiation and work to bring change for themselves, their families, communities and nation
- iv. Gain competencies and develop resilience to negotiate their rights (inclusive of health, safe living and economic) and exercise them without the fear of oppression from people and structures
- v. Acquire skills to gain economic self-reliance, and
- vi. Gain effective access and influence over the use of productive resources, services and opportunities like health, education, safety.

For girls to accomplish the above, the role of a teacher as an enabler, becomes very important. She has the major responsibility to focus on removing the barriers that keeps the girls from accessing quality education. Therefore, the teachers have a three-fold responsibility;

- to make girls competent in curricular areas,
- to provide them skills to remove existing barriers, and
- to motivate them to complete a basic education.

This is not an easy task for teachers, especially for those who are working in schools catering to the children from the marginalised sections of the society. Here, their responsibility extends beyond everyday teaching-learning. There are several models and approaches that help these teachers to perform better and create an enabling environment for them.

For example, there are special schools for girls set up by the government and non-government organizations which include formal non-residential, residential schools and especially designed accelerated learning programmes for girls. Certain residential schools such as the Kasturba Gandhi Ballika Vidyalaya (KGBV)³ in educationally backward blocks (EBB), *ashram* schools for tribal girls are funded and managed by the government bodies. There is *Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatrawas Yojana* for Dalit girls, the scheme of strengthening education among Scheduled Tribe (ST) Girls in low literacy districts and grants in-aid schemes for NGOs to support girls' education including residential schools (CBPS, 2015).

Most of these models reflect a number of factors that limit the extent of achievement of the results that they aim to deliver. The teachers are entrusted with the responsibility to remove the barriers that hinder girls from accessing education. The reality is that the teachers themselves face several challenges like being overburdened, travelling to remote location, and lack of supportive networks to address their own needs and challenges.

The Teacher as an enabler

Poor quality of teacher preparation programmes and weak onsite support and supervision mechanism fails to provide the necessary scaffolding to the teachers at the conceptual, emotional and professional levels. This results in concerns around conceptual understanding in specific subject

³KGBV scheme launched by the Government of India in August, 2004 sets up residential schools from class 6 to 8 for SC, ST, OBC and minority community girls living in difficult areas. The scheme is implemented in educationally backward blocks of the country where the female rural literacy is below the national average and gender gap in literacy is above the national average. The scheme provides for a minimum reservation of 75% of the seats for girls belonging to SC, ST, OBC or minority communities and priority for the remaining 25%, is accorded to girls from families below poverty line. A total of 3609 KGBVs were sanctioned by Government of India in 460 districts of India.

domains, restricted ideas in pedagogy to apply on specific groups of girls, girls with special needs, first generation learners, girls from rural-urban context and so on,. Teachers also lack awareness on ways to create enabling environment, to empower girls to discover their self, perspectives around constructs like social, gender equity, disability, safety security issues, needs of adolescents and on initiatives that empower girls and help them to be leaders.

While these models are limited in empowering girls, there are also examples within them, of strategies which are promising. This establishes that the formal access does not necessarily ensure access to quality education, and that the girls can only be empowered when the teacher herself is empowered enough to empower them. That means that when the teacher is supported, motivated and equipped with right knowledge and capacities she delivers a strong empowerment program directed towards the girls.

It is worthwhile to discuss some powerful teacher empowerment approaches that reflect what works for teachers, so that these are used to scale up and drive the agenda of girls' empowerment through education.

The Study

The approach of this study is to focus on the specific life-stage of girls i.e. adolescence, a stage that has been discussed at length in the section above. This stage with its physical, mental and emotional development brings in complex challenges to girls' education. It also focuses on two important platforms, residential and non-residential schooling, that run empowerment programs for adolescent girls. The discourse is built around the three case studies and field work of the identified practices that focus on three different contexts, tribal, urban and Dalit, from where these adolescent girls come. While a non-governmental approach (Prerna, Study Hall Foundation, Uttar Pradesh) is adopted for the urban context, the tribal and Dalit approaches (Jharkhand and Rajasthan respectively) are rooted in the government scheme KGBV that targets adolescent girls in the most backward blocks of the two states, Jharkhand and Rajasthan, in India.

The design adopted for the study is essentially qualitative in nature. Fulfilling the objectives of the

study required collection of relevant data, from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of data included interviews of students, teachers, head teachers/wardens, educational functionaries at the state, district, block and cluster levels.

Most critical decisions were regarding types of instruments to be developed and used for data collection from different respondents across the three settings i.e. KGBV *Potka*, *Taswariya* and Study Hall Education Foundation – Prerna school. A set of tools were made, based on the data requirements keeping in mind the objectives of the study. The instruments developed specifically for the study were school profile, interview schedules for teachers, head teachers/wardens, education officials, focus group discussion (FGD) with students and SMC/PTA groups and classroom observation schedules (COS). Case studies of a few children including those in the school and those who had passed out were also done.

The schedules for the field visits were worked out in collaboration with the district administration officials in *Jameshpur* and *Ajmer* and Study Hall Foundation. Prior to the visits documents related to the site were studied to understand the vision, goals, processes, major components and significant features of all the three programs. All three field visits were conducted by the research team including a photographer, spending 2-3 days at each site. Prior permissions were taken from the KGBVs and Prerna School to conduct interviews and to take photographs. The respondents were assured that their identities will be kept confidential. During data collection, every effort was undertaken to maintain a good quality of data collected for case studies.

Secondary data included reports, records, photographs, and minutes of PTA /SMC meetings, KGBV guidelines and forms, training materials related to the three educational programs being studied.

Across all the case studies, girls from the classes 6 to 8 were focused along with teachers, warden, education functionaries and parents. In all, out of a total of 585 girls enrolled in three programs, 116 girls, 25 teachers including wardens and 15 parents constituted the sample of the study.

EMPOWERED TEACHERS- EMPOWERED GIRLS



Three Case Studies

1. The Tribal context: Potka Kasturba Gandhi BallikaVidyalaya (KGBV)
2. The Dalit Context: TaswariyaKasturba Gandhi BallikaVidyalaya (KGBV)
3. The Urban Context: Study Hall Education Foundation- PRERNA School

**KASTURBA GANDHI BALIKA
VIDYALAYA, POTKA**



KASTURBA GANDHI BALIKA VIDYALAYA, POTKA

1. Introduction

Potka: A glimpse through the eyes of two Potka girls.

We met with *Sujata Soren* (name changed), a girl from the local *Munda* tribe, on our visit to KGBV *Potka*, in November of 2017. An active tribal girl, *Sujata* did not get any opportunity to go to school as a child. Her family lives in *Parasadgoda* village in *Potka*, where her parents work as farm laborers. When her parents were away at work, she took care of her two brothers and one sister, and performed household chores, that kept *Sujata* away from the local village school during her childhood years. She hesitatingly shares that, “when I used to see so many boys in my neighborhood go to school, I used to wonder as a child, why is it that other girls and I, cannot study?” Life changed for her when one day, a cousin came over and told her parents about the KGBV in nearby *Potka* and described all the benefits the girls get there in the school and hostel. He told them that, in addition to studies girls receive “food, clothes, books and even money. My cousin also told us how good the studies and teachers were”. *Sujata*’s parents got interested and after some time decided to send her to school. She says that, “I think why they sent me was because my cousin had said we got everything in *Potka* which was difficult for them to give to any of us at home. I was very happy, but it took some time before I joined.”

Sujata was enrolled in class 6, which is the entry class in all KGBVs. Initially, she says that she found it difficult to adjust, as the environment was very different. In her words (translated from Hindi) “The food was so different; I just did not like it, especially the *pooris* and now it is so strange that I only feel like eating this food. At times, I actually felt like just running away, but then one friend in the hostel, who is from my village, helped me a lot. Things really changed, when I joined the archery class as I started doing well and won many competitions. The praise I received from Sir and my friends made me feel good; it made me very confident that I can achieve more and become something in life.” She realized that she has to also study and do well. While she got help from her seniors and friends, she also recalls that, “we could take our problems and difficulties to our teachers at any time as we were staying in the hostel and they were there with us, 24 hours.”

Having passed class 12, *Sujata* is now employed as a trainer for archery, in the school. She is happy that she is helping other girls of KGBV to learn the sport. She smiles and says that, “When I look at myself today, I think that I was very lucky, that my parents sent me to KGBV in *Potka*. There are many girls in my village and in other villages whose parents just want them to get married. I wish my entire village people would understand the importance of education and realize how it helps, but sadly they do not. We need to do something about this.”

We also met with *Sudha Murmu*, an eighteen year old *Santhali* girl and an alumna of KGBV, *Potka*. Unlike *Sujata*, *Sudha* did go to a local school at the primary stage, despite the poverty at home. Her parents were poor, non-literate and landless farmers. She says, "I was always very keen to study. As I was a good student and wanted to do something good to help the family, I was sent to school. I also loved dancing, but my father never approved of girls dancing". It was by chance that the family got to know of KGBV, *Potka* which had shifted from another location to a site just five kilometers from her village. Her parents agreed to send her as the school offered all facilities including food, shoes, uniform, textbooks and an environment to study. *Sudha* says that she loved the school, as it gave her the opportunity to freely dance and participate in so many things like football, computers, woodcraft and learn so much. She tells us that she was selected to participate at the district level football tournaments. *Sudha* confesses that she has a 'hunger to learn' and she recalls that, "Unlike the primary school, the teachers in KGBV were always there to help us at any time of the day and were very caring. For any problem we could go to them." She has passed class 10. With the scholarship available through the IWSP, after passing the competitive exam, she joined a diploma course in electrical engineering, at a local polytechnic. The course required her to buy her own notebooks and study materials, but her family had no money to spare. Her brother was also preparing for a competition and had to be supported financially. Therefore, she had to drop out of the diploma course. But her spirits are not dampened, her brother now has a government job and she can freely think of moving forward. She is debating whether to enroll for class 12 or do the diploma course and study further for a B. Tech degree. She is inclined towards the latter as she says that, "nobody in my village is an engineer. I will be the first one but my only problem is English but no matter what, I will learn. If others can do it, so can I." *Sudha's* enthusiasm to learn and her self confidence are visible as she acknowledges that, "I want to make my parents proud of me. They are not formally educated but they motivate us. I feel so proud of them. I would not have been able to achieve so much had I not come to KGBV *Potka*."

2. The challenging context

Sujata and *Sudha* are two amongst several KGBV alumni, coming from the marginalized communities in that block, who have had a 'second chance' in life, due to their experiences in this KGBV. KGBV *Potka* is a residential school, set up for upper primary classes by the Government of India. It has now been upgraded to class 12 by the state government of Jharkhand by pooling of resources.

Located in East Singhbhum district, *Potka* block is situated on the *Chhota Nagpur* Plateau and *Santhal Parganas* of the Jharkhand region. The girls enrolled in *Potka* KGBV, which is located in *Khariasai* village, come from villages from all 34 *Panchayats* in this block. Out of the 400 girls enrolled in *Potka* KGBV, nearly all come from very poor, non-literate or semi literate families with the maximum number (66.25%) belonging to disadvantaged tribal communities - 42% *Santhals*, 21.5% *Bhumij*, 7.5% *Puran*, 11.3% *Munda* and 3% from *Ho*. There are 6% girls from Scheduled Caste (SC) families and 24.5% from Other Backward Communities (OBC). The remaining are from families that live Below Poverty Line (BPL). On an average, about 40 percent of those who enroll, are from the most primitive and impoverished *Sabar* tribal community, which has been completely disconnected with education.

The teachers tell us that when we visit their habitations we find most parents, addicted to toddy and other forms of alcohol. All day they sit around intoxicated. Children are largely left to fend for themselves. Due to a very limited social exposure to the outside world, *Sabar* children hide on the trees, when confronted by strangers.

KGBV Potka

The KGBV is managed by a warden and four full time teachers who reside within the campus, in the staff quarters provided to them. A total number of 16 teachers have been appointed in the school out of which five are full time including the warden, and 11 others work part time. The full time teachers take up the role of warden of the KGBV, on a rotation basis. The term of a warden generally extends for a term of three years. There is also a full time accountant. Since the KGBV is a residential girls schooling program, there is a provision for one security guard (*chowkidar*), a head cook and two assistant cooks to take care of the girls' security and food requirements respectively.

The KGBV warden plays a key role in the functioning of the KGBV as she has the major duties of managing the office administration, maintaining discipline, organizing and conducting meetings of the School Management Committee (SMC) and purchasing committee. She also co-ordinates between the staff and students and is therefore, the main link between the school, block administration and district level office. In addition, she is also a subject teacher undertaking teaching, lesson planning, remedial teaching and evaluation and is in-charge of one of the houses too.

While other tribes have some familiarity with Hindi, which is the official regional language used in schools, the *Sabar* children do not know the language at all.

An interaction with parents

We met with a group of 11 parents of the girls studying at KGBV, *Potka*. They had to travel on an average 7 to 12 kilometers and sometimes over 20 kilometers, to *Potka*, every month to meet their daughters and interact with the school teachers. The group was a mix of fathers and mothers and in some cases uncles, where their wards had lost both parents. Most of the parents had studied up to class 6 or 8. One of the fathers had done graduation and he had been selected as the President of the KGBV school management committee (SMC). A large

number of girls are from single parent families and many are orphans. Their lives in the villages were difficult as there is no way, they can study at home. There is a constant demand from them to attend to the younger or elder members of the family, do household chores, fetch firewood or water, or go out to graze animals. They admit that there is no time for the girls to study. Often the school is so far away from home that it is not safe to send the girls. Almost all parents share that they have heard about the school from a neighbor or another student and took help from the educated members of the village to fill the enrolment form. Now they are happy that their daughters are getting all facilities. A parent from *Sabar* tribe says that he had to go with the application form to district authorities and he persuaded them to get the girls admitted. The parents admit that child marriages are rampant in that area and that if, the girls had not come here they would have thought of marrying them off. But now they say that, "marriage can always wait. The girls want to study and we should encourage them to do the same. They can also build a career for themselves and then they will be able to look after us better than sons." They are evidently also very proud of the girls' achievements, they share that, "they are so disciplined, they have learned to speak, their health has improved, and they look nice, clean and well dressed."

3. Life in KGBV Potka: A major shift for the girls

We observed a full day routine of the girls in KGBV *Potka*. Ms *Asha Mahto* (name changed), the physical education teacher in the school shares that the day begins at 4.30 am when the girls get up in their dormitories, brush their teeth and assemble for morning yoga and early morning prayers with her. After that, they go back to their dormitories, where they clean up their living spaces and settle down for self-study. Meanwhile the senior girls do a quick cleanliness check of the dormitories to ensure that everything is in order. This is an informal exercise in leadership training. Next the girls get ready and have their early morning breakfast. They have a different menu every day. We observed that all the girls lined-up in neat rows, impeccably

dressed in clean uniforms, polished black shoes and their hair combed into neat plaits adorning a ribbon. At 8:45 am they attend the morning assembly with utmost seriousness. During the assembly one girl read the day's news which she has identified in advance, another girl shares some general knowledge facts which were followed by the prayers. It is a treat to observe the girls conduct themselves in such an organized manner. They are focused at their work. At 9.00 am the girls proceed to their classes. 40 minutes are allocated to each subject in the time-table. A balanced meal awaits them at 1 pm, in the dining area where they sit on the ground in rows and enjoy their lunch. At 2.00 pm they go back to the classes. Around 3.00 pm they rush to their respective groups to engage in a range of choice based vocational programmes, which include mushroom cultivation, bamboo work, vegetable gardening, stitching and knitting, and woodcraft. A vocational teacher has been recruited to provide the girls with appropriate guidance. As it is a choice based class, complete involvement and concentration was visible in each group. A half an hour break was taken to relax and then they moved to the dining room for the evening snacks and tea.

At 5.00 pm the girls arrive at sports field, wearing a gear of their chosen sport. They were practicing sports like football, taekwondo, archery, boxing, basketball, or participating in a band or just doing a march-past. As evening dawned, they returned to their dormitories and after 15 minutes of rest and evening prayers they settled down for a two hour self study session. Some teachers take remedial classes for those requiring help. Dinner is served at 8.30pm and by 9:30 pm the children retired to their respective dormitories where they relax, read story books, study, chat with teachers or friends. It is a far cry from their routine at home, burdened with household work, animal care or fetching water and fuel and catering to families' needs. But this chance is not always easy; initially many girls cry and want to go back to their homes. There are also some cases of drop outs. But most girls report that with the help of friends and support of teachers they get acclimatized to the new context. Later, they do not want to go back home, in some cases they even stay there during the holidays. It is evident that a sense of cultural alienation from their roots could easily set in which is a major fall out of this significant intervention.

The KGBV Scheme

The KGBVs are residential schools set up at the upper primary level which are provided by the GOI under a scheme launched in 2004, to address gender disparities that persist in rural and tribal areas amongst educationally backward communities. The main goal of the scheme is to ensure access and quality education to adolescent girls from disadvantaged communities who have never attended any formal schooling or have dropped out before the completion of primary grades. It caters particularly to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, minority communities and families below the poverty line in Educationally Backward Blocks. Three models of KGBV include (a) Model I: Schools with hostels for 100 girls. (b) Model II: Schools with hostels for 50 girls and (c) Model III: Hostels in existing schools for 50 girls. *KGBV Potka is in Model 1 category.*

4. A glimpse into the KGBV classroom: A pleasant surprise

In order to gain insights of the entry stage challenges we and then to observe the progress of the girls over the next two years we decided to observed four classes, two in 6 standard and two in 8 standard. We observed the Language, Mathematics and EVS classes. As these were non-participant observations, we sat at the back of the class and observed the classroom processes.

Used to seeing badly maintained and cramped classrooms in many government schools in the country, the KGBV *Potka* classrooms were a pleasant surprise. The classrooms were spacious, clean, well ventilated and were well lit. Each classroom had rows of desks with chairs and a functional blackboard and it could accommodate 50 to 60 girls. However, the availability of teaching-learning material like charts, models and other equipments was limited. In three of the four classes we found classroom environment to be free and interactive. Being taught by a very

popular teacher, the fourth class of around 50 girls were engaged, interested and actively learning, but the teaching there was largely blackboard based. The girls freely share ideas and asked questions and what amazed us the most was that in no case did we see a girl get distracted or focus her attention on us. They appeared to be totally absorbed in the classroom activities that went on in the class, and were listening carefully to what their teacher was discussing.

While the overall medium of instruction was Hindi, the teachers often adopt a bi-lingual mode of using different tribal languages particularly in Grade 6, which is the entry class, since a large number of students were not familiar with Hindi. The learner centeredness among teachers was commendable. The FGDs with a few girls from class 6 and 8 respectively, revealed that they were very happy with the way they were being taught and took their education very seriously. An interesting observation was that teachers had a positive attitude and they take pride in the girls' achievements. They have great expectations from them. Rama (name changed), one of the very popular teacher, says that she begins her class by encouraging the girls to repeat that, "I am the best" and she believed that it motivated them. During the interview another student further substantiated her belief. One student remarked that, "we have come to this school with great difficulty and we get everything here. The teachers are knowledgeable, teach us well and make us understand things well. They support us in everything and never get angry. We must put in hard work".

Interestingly, while we found the classrooms interactive, our interviews with teachers revealed that most of them were graduates and only a few have had a pre-service training. There was no induction or in-service training. Despite that, all the teachers share that they made lesson plans which they consulted in the classroom. They expressed a need for training and on-site classroom based support. One of the teachers emphasized that, "We need more training as it will help us to provide better teaching to girls. There has been no training for two years and we try to do our best, but if we are trained we will get to know more ideas and ways of teaching these girls who need something more.

They are very smart and competitive but we should also do better." Another shares that, "there was no one to guide us towards better transaction of the lesson plan in classroom. So we do things based on what we were told in our B.Ed. classes, but we all know that so many new things are happening and innovative TLM is also available. We need to get more TLM as it will make learning more interesting for our girls, especially in the lower classes and of course we would then need training in how to use the same effectively."

5. Moving towards a wholesome education: Developing leadership in girls

Our interaction with parents, provided some interesting shifts in perspectives, as a result of the education offered at KGBV, *Potka*. Few parents take pride in the feats of their daughters. One parent says that, "I feel very proud that my daughter is excelling in archery now, which is actually our traditional sport". One non-literate mother says that, "this school is better than the school in our area which offers regular classroom teaching whereas

Vocational Training and Skill Building – An important component

Vocational and skill specific training is an important part of the girls' daily teaching-learning along with physical education and self - defense training provided at the KGBV. There are 11 courses available to girls to choose from namely: knitting, bamboo work, stitching, archery training, taekwondo, band, wood work, mushroom cultivation, vegetable gardening, dance and mix-boxing. Nine courses have trainers out of which two - bamboo work and knitting have pass out students as the trainers. Mushroom cultivation and vegetable gardening are run by the girls themselves although both groups were trained initially by the Technology Resource Communication and Resource Centre at Jamshedpur.

here the education is viewed as a broader activity that goes beyond the classroom by including co-curricular activities, like sports, gardening etc." Another parent shares that, "my daughter is now the President of the gardening committee." Another parent apologetically says that, "mine is still to start on sports; she will soon". Another parent shares his take on marriage as, "Marriage can always happen.....we should let girls study as much as they want to. If there is support from the government we will encourage them to build a career, so that the girls can look after us better in our old age." The shift in parental perspectives is visible not only in terms of quality of education but also with regard to gender equality. A far cry from the regular practice of getting girls married off in their childhood.

A productive CSR partnership: KGBV Potka is able to provide holistic secondary education to girls because of the State's commitment to girls' education by extending the KGBV to grade 12. But more than that, a significant factor to support a holistic education has been the consistent support extended by the Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) initiative of the Tata subsidiary company Indian Steel and Wires Products (ISWP), an exemplar public-private partnership, as they have so effectively complemented the efforts of the teachers, kept the teachers motivated in responding to the school's needs, and have been a source of constant support and handholding. We got the opportunity to meet with the CSR team members who displayed incredible dedication to the school, which is also reiterated by the teachers and students. The company has not only provided infrastructure support but also enabled the wide range of context-specific vocational and sports activities discussed earlier. The company official shares that tribes from the Potka block have a cultural proclivity towards archery and came to KGBV to explore how he could identify and nurture this talent, through the CSR initiative. While he came with this intention, he stayed on for years to provide consistent need based support; which in many cases was at an individual student level. A teacher shares with us that, "ISWB supports all girls who excel in their respective sports". Examples of providing support abound among the alumni. During the interviews, a couple of girls reported

that they were guided into polytechnic to do engineering and their coaching fees for polytechnic were borne by the CSR. Sports specific gears are provided by the CSR to girls as per requirement of their activity, the range of vocational courses are made possible through part time teachers, funded by the CSR and so on and so forth. With the girls succeeding in taking-up careers of their choice or pursue further studies, they are now able to transform their lives. The success stories also motivate teachers to put in their best effort and help the girls to reach their full potential. However, a downside of it is the passive dependence seen in case of some girls, for example there is one girl who has completed diploma from the polytechnic, and the cost of her education was borne by ISWP. But she is not making efforts to find a job, instead she is waiting for ISWP to arrange a job for her.

Emphasis on co-curricular activities

Morning Assembly: We observed the morning assembly, which is an important part of their daily time-table and is organized everyday. Senior girls of the school oversee and lead the organization of the assembly while the younger students and teachers actively participate in it. The girls are well-groomed, shoes shining, not a hair out of place and in neat rows. With complete discipline, the students participated actively in the proceedings of the assembly. First the daily news is read, which is followed by prayers recitation and making relevant announcements to the learners. The girls then leave for the classes. The students take the attendance and the teachers shares that there has never been any issue.

Co-curricular activities such as debates, quizzes, science exhibitions, drawing, singing and dance competitions form an integral part of the school curriculum. Teachers also view it essential to provide opportunities to girls to take part in order to build their confidence, and develop leadership ability and self-esteem. Important days such as Annual Day and Annual Sports Day are also celebrated.

Child Cabinet (Bal Sabha): An interesting feature of the KGBV is the establishment and functioning of a Child Cabinet, and we had the opportunity to meet a couple of members of the cabinet. The cabinet has been constituted through a democratic

process of voting. A twenty - two member group has been elected by the students. The cabinet represents the student in everyday decision making of the school. It is led by a Prime Minister (PM) supported by a deputy PM with 10 ministers along with their deputy ministers for the portfolios of health, security and law, attendance, education, environment, games and culture, information and broadcasting, cleanliness and hygiene, food and skill development. The girls in the cabinet are proud to be a part of it. They take their roles and duties very seriously. The teachers view this not only as a leadership activity but also as facilitation for themselves. There is a shortage of teachers and therefore a support of this kind is welcomed from the students' cabinet. Getting the girls to take responsibility for all the daily activities, both inside and outside the classroom, takes the load off them. The girls help in planning and monitoring of arrangements, organization of events, maintain discipline, and cleanliness of dormitories.

Legal Literacy Club: With traditionally prevalent gender insensitive practices like child marriage, gender discrimination and oppression and violence amongst these tribes, a very important activity planned for girls the Legal Literacy Club. We had the opportunity to attend a one hour session of the club, for class 8 girls. The discussion was on child marriage and the message was communicated through a brilliantly enacted and humorous role play by girls, followed by a discussion. Led by one of the teachers and the gender coordinator, the much needed information was provided to the girls in an interesting manner. Although the discussion tended to be largely didactic, the girls were responsive. We were told that the sessions are intended to inform the girls about their rights and to sensitize them about the issues of equality, superstitions, harmful societal practices, and different forms of abuse. This platform aims to not only provide information and knowledge about various topics but to also promote critical thinking, sharing of experiences, reflection and developing consciousness about oppressive societal norms, gender relations, power structures. Two of the girls share their views about the club. Through various club activities, one of the girls was able to realize that, "other girls face similar problems and fears as I did and talking about it helped me understand

about my problems and how to resolve the issue. I feel more confident now." Another was happy that, she came to know about her, " legal rights and who could be approached for different things, I never realized that I could make a choice as to what I wanted to do; I thought girls are only supposed to marry and take care of their families. Now I know better so many things are possible for me to do, and I feel more confident to do so".

The girls often perform small skits and plays highlighting issues such as-early marriage, domestic violence and abuse and the effect of alcoholism and ways to deal with these problems. In addition, the Udaan curriculum adopted for life skills education included several success stories presenting positive role models and empowerment to the girls. As shared by one of the girls, "Udaan helped me to take informed decisions and support other girls in my village. Another mentions that, "I now have the confidence to face challenges better and deal with the unfair practices going on in my life."

Health and Medical Care: The girls get a wholesome diet in the school, the menu for which is centrally decided by the KGBV organization at district level. The girls' requests for snacks or items from their local cuisine are also catered to. The diet is well planned, balanced and nutritious with milk, eggs, meat, and cottage cheese forming an important part of it. During the interviews, most girls viewed it as a major incentive to stay away from home.

Interestingly, the teachers report that soon after they come to KGBV, the girls start to look healthier. They share that, "Often when parents come to meet their daughters, after the first few months of enrolment, they find the girls looking cleaner and healthier and so they want to take them back home immediately, since they feel they would now be able to get a good match for them". Routine health check-ups are organized by the health department and medicines are provided accordingly. A health card is maintained for each girl to record growth in terms of height and weight and to monitor their overall health.

A major limitation is that the school is located in the farthest blocks of the district and that too away from the main road where there are no transport facilities. The teachers report that, "one night, a

girl suddenly complained of a severe stomachache and there was no transport available. After much request the warden could manage to get an auto-rickshaw and took the girl to the hospital.” The teachers express the need for a full time nurse and ambulance on call in the premises, in case of any emergency.

6. Enabling Factors for Girls

An analysis of the programme components and experiences of children discussed above, have led to a visible empowerment of girls, especially in comparison to the new entrants in grade 6 with the senior students. It highlights specific factors which have contributed significantly towards the empowerment of girls in KGBV, Potka. These include:

Availability of all basic facilities

The residential schooling at KGBV provides the girls with a wide range of facilities that tribal girls cannot afford nor have access to, in their home environment. The supplies for the girls include two sets of uniforms, sports gear, shoes, socks, toiletries to the extent that even hair oil and sanitary pads are provided. Additional facilities such as a safe environment, nutritious diet, regular exercises, leisure time activities and rest, quality education are provided to ensure all round development of the girls. These facilities not only take them away from the drudgery of their home but also provide them time for pursuing their interests. _

Education responsive to the students’ social context and needs

It was observed that the strategies, practices and processes adopted by teachers were responsive to students’ social context and needs. From language to celebration of festivals to their meal choices, the needs of the learners are always kept in mind. During the interviews the teachers appeared to be very responsive to the girls’ needs and requirements and seem to make a conscious attempt to understand their socio-cultural context. There was a visible element of compassion among teachers as they were aware of the hardships faced by their girls, and so they feel responsible for nurturing the girls, living away from their families.

As discussed earlier, our classroom observations revealed that the teachers very effectively linked the content with the girls’ own experiences in the village. Some teachers were from local tribal community and spoke the same language as their learners. This emerged as a significant facilitating factor for making the transition easier for the girls from grade 6 to the higher grades. This further emphasizes the fact that education does not and cannot happen in a vacuum, and that it is situated in the social contexts of the girls’ lives.

Use of child –centered, interactive, participatory pedagogic approach

Teachers were seen to use interactive, participatory methods of curriculum delivery to engage girls in more active learning. It was the positive and responsive pedagogic practices of teachers which made the classrooms positive learning spaces. More than one girl share the same experience that unlike the local primary school, “here all teachers teach us very well, give us a lot of love, and they encourage us to move forward.” In our classroom observations, girls were seen to be completely focused on what the teacher was communicating. They were seen asking questions freely, putting their ideas across and following their teacher’s instructions. Not a single student was seen peeping into the others’ written work, a common experience in government primary schools. This was probably also one of the key factors contributing to the good results of the KGBV girls in the annual board exams. The warden took pride in the fact that the result in KGBV is 100%. She further points out that in achieving this result, “I and my teachers perceive that hand-holding and tracking of students is important and critical to their learning and thus the success of the KGBV.”

When asked about their views on their school, the girls were vocal and freely expressed their opinions which are presented below:

Sensitive and caring teachers –making an emotional connect with students

The girls who come to the KGBV are from disadvantaged communities; they have completely different home environments and they speak entirely different languages from those used in schools. The difference is not limited to the language alone, but

My School

Has a SMART class and in that through the Internet we get a lot of information.
It is amazing....

Where we get all the facilities. The teachers take us outside the school for sports and other programs also.

I am proud of, because it is in the first position and at the top. I like that we all live together. We have so many activities in the school and they also. take us outside for other activities. Anyone who visits the school praises it and I feel very proud and happy.

I like more than my home. All the teachers are good, they teach well and explain so many different things to us lovingly.

Is managed well and has all the important facilities. That is what I like. Actually, I like everything in the school.

Teachers teach us many other things besides studies, which will help us in our daily lives, like archery, stitching, mushroom farming, woodwork, bamboo work which we like to do.



the girls have different food choices, cleanliness routines, toilet habits, ways of dressing, grooming etc. which are all informed by more urban values and practices. Most of them have either never been to a school or are drop-outs. They enroll in grade 6 with different levels of literacy, making the situation even more complex. According to the teachers, the biggest challenge, in the beginning is to socialize them into KGBV lifestyle. They come to KGBV from a completely different social context, as it's a residential program it becomes crucial that they learn to co-exist. The teacher's role in handling and taking care of girls from such backgrounds therefore becomes extremely challenging and diverse.

All that makes it more impressive is that during the interviews the teachers emerged as extremely dedicated and almost on a mission to help these girls transform their lives. Unlike teachers in regular schools, not a single teacher viewed their job as a burden. The teachers were found to be supportive of the girls in not only facing the academic challenges but they were also sensitive, caring and genuinely concerned about the overall welfare of girls. They felt responsible to their personal and professional future goals. The teachers spent an hour or so after school every day, in taking remedial teaching classes, individually for grade 6 students and in groups for the senior ones. In doing so, they often take help of the senior students. As one teacher explains that, "we realize that these girls have no support from their homes and the school environment is new for them too. We try to make them comfortable by using their language, explaining what is taught over and over again if required, and spending extra time with them." A key factor that has possibly worked to motivate the teachers was the faith that these girls have the ability to learn, and should therefore, be provided all the support they need to meet their learning needs.

One of the teachers strongly feels that, "only studies are not enough unless the education also informs them that they are equal and enables them to deal with the challenges they face in their lives." Another one says that, "their stay in the KGBV should make them confident individuals, who know their rights and are able to decide how to deal with problems in their homes and society, so that they can lead better lives". It is heartening to see that despite their extremely low salaries, long demanding

working hours and their stay away from families, the teachers are motivated. On being asked what motivates them one teacher says that, "we are here twenty four hours; we have left our families and have come to this school and these girls have become our 'small' world and the girls' welfare and education are our main mission". A teacher shares that a week ago, she had gone home to her husband and child for Diwali. Although she had few more days of leave remaining, but she could not stay back and so she returned to the school on the very next day. She told us that. "my friends at home, many of whom are regular school teachers ridiculed me by asking me as to why do I spoil my holidays for the school, but I wanted to come back to make sure everything in school was up to the standard, since some guests were coming." Such is the level of their motivation.

The girls themselves acknowledge the pivotal role their teachers play in guiding and making them good students, and supporting their future plans. The girls further narrate incidents where one or more teachers supported and encouraged them to learn and do well in studies. One girl explicitly states that the teachers "understood me and my friend's problems, especially when we were new in class 6, which was the most difficult phase for us". It was the effort of teachers that helped some girls to continue in the KGBV even when they missed their home, food and village surroundings, "especially the freedom to roam around and do what we wanted to and when we wanted to". One of the girls points out how caringly one of the teachers looked after her when she was unwell. Some of the girls state that the teachers also "encouraged us to participate in different vocational activities". One girl highlights that, "it was my teacher who motivated me to join the archery class even though I was hesitant and actually wanted to learn to dance".

When asked what a good teacher is like, they all unanimously stated that their teachers were very good at teaching; they are knowledgeable, supportive and loving. They are what they would want a good teacher to be like.

The girls firmly believe that if there is any problem the teachers are with them and that they will listen to them, support them and guide them

Voices of Girls: We think a good teacher should:

make us understand things in different ways especially if one of us finds it difficult to understand something. She should explain with a lot of love and be forgiving.

be well educated and read. While teaching she should joke and tell us stories also.

know dancing and singing besides teaching and also about the outside world so she can tell us about it.

think well of us and treat us properly. She should be able to answer all our questions and guide us in whatever we do.

not differentiate between children. and should never get angry a lot.

listen to us and mainly our problems, be loving and help us whenever we need anything.



through that situation. Girls from deprived homes in particular, need to have an emotional connect with someone who can listen to their problems and guide them further. Teachers play that part at KGBV *Potka*. The teachers also are very concerned about opportunities available to the girls after leaving school and that they should not waste their

education. As one teacher says, "we send them to an organization which offers three month courses in vocational areas free of cost so that they can become entrepreneurs". They take pride in the girls who have gone out and build their careers. This relationship builds a strong bond of trust, respect and love between the teacher and the learners.

Engagement with the parents and community: An enabler

The strong relationship between the KGBV and the School Management Committee (SMC) is also a positive factor which works in favor of the girls. All funding and other major decisions are routed through the SMC which is expected to meet once a month. The SMC comprises of parent representatives with one parent elected as the chair. The KGBV warden ensures that meetings are conducted on a regular basis, in which members are apprised about the various programmes being run, progress made and any problems faced by the school the meetings provide an opportunity for parents to come and meet the girls and to enable them to stay connected with the school. The girls are also facilitated by the teachers to make phone calls once a week, which is reassuring for both parents and their children. The meetings of the SMC give parents an opportunity to not only see the progress of their girls, but to also understand and appreciate the efforts of the teachers and the

School Management Committee and Community Engagement

The SMC comprises of 11 members and is chaired by a parent. There are 2 representatives each from the girls in the KGBV and teachers respectively. The SMC is expected to meet on a monthly basis to discuss critical issues affecting the optimal functioning of the KGBV. The SMC had met eight times between October 2016-2-17. The role of the SMC is to make major decisions about maintaining and enhancing the work of the KGBV and holistic development, learning and empowerment of girls. In the SMC meetings issues generally discussed are enrolment of girls, their learning and progress and problems encountered. Any issues related to any girl in the KGBV being forced to marry early, death of a parent, problems of drinking and /or abuse etc. are also discussed and strategies to resolve the same discussed. Use of funds and success stories are also shared by the teachers.

school management. The teachers also get an opportunity to get sensitized to and develop some understanding of the specifics of the social context from which the girls are coming. This allows for some degree of community monitoring and quality control in the school, and serves the shared goal of the school and parents towards empowering their daughters.

Convergence and networking with NGOs and corporates

The district administration had made attempts to establish linkages and create support networks with Panchayat Samitis and NGOs (*Beli Bodhan Wala* Trust, Kerala Public Trust, DBMS Trust) to build a strong support group for promoting the quality of KGBV functioning. The NGOs have provided benches, blankets and have taken on the responsibility of repairing the old school building. An interesting feature observed was the support extended to the functioning of the KGBV by corporate such as The Indian Steel & Wire Products Ltd. (ISWP), Tata Steel and Hindustan Copper Limited. A special mention needs to be made of the ISWP that has played a key role in providing materials and trainers' fees for running vocational courses such as- archery, mushroom farming, stitching and kitchen gardening. Further they have provided 20 sets of computers and training through NIIT, 100 fans and a big water purifier. The most beneficial contribution has been the monetary support provided to students selected by the local polytechnic for their further study and future employment. This, through positive role-modeling has enabled all the girls to see possibilities of a career path for themselves. Girls are motivated to study and achieve their goals with the handholding provided by ISWP and complementing of efforts by teachers in providing academic support, developing skills, helping in polytechnic education and in getting them jobs.

Enabling Factors for Teachers

Reflecting on some of the factors that motivate these teachers to work with such incredible dedication and commitment, we can draw some lessons for the larger system. As we reflect, it is important to consider that this sense of commitment becomes even more exemplary, coming as it is from a

context wherein these teachers work in conditions which are far from being favorable. These include the following:

- (a) Their salaries are much lower than those of regular teachers, ranging from Rs 10000-20000, with two of the four teachers getting Rs 20,000 after having served for as many as 7 long years. This needs to be contrasted with a starting salary of Rs 20,000 plus incentives of a regular teacher.
- (b) They stay away from families for weeks and sometimes months, even in some cases with their young children left at home with spouses or parents
- (c) They are required to attend to school matters round the clock and cannot go off duty after a scheduled time, as in the case of regular teachers.

Some enabling factors we could identify which could promote and sustain the motivation and dedication are as follows:

1. *Sense of community and societal mission among teachers, staff with children:* Being a residential programme run in a confined space away from their homes, the teachers begin to consider the school as their collective space and the students and school staff as family. This creates within them a sense of collective or community and interdependence with a common goal to educate and take care of the girls. The residential nature of the programme also allows for a closer interaction with each other and with students beyond what is officially possible otherwise. They develop a sense of collective responsibility and a societal mission to transform the lives of girls from socio-economically poor contexts.
2. *Flexibility of time and space:* Being a residential programme, it allows for considerable flexibility in terms of time, as the teachers can plan remedial learning or address personal issues of the learners, as per her convenience. With no cooking or other routine household chores to deal with, both students and teachers have ample time available for teaching-learning.
3. *Rotation of warden's position: An opportunity for leadership for all teachers:* Rotation of leadership i.e. the rotation of warden's position after every three years is an interesting practice. During the interviews some teachers were asked if there is any tension or lack of cooperation among teachers, the teachers share that, "*if we do not cooperate today, tomorrow when we become warden we will get the same treatment. So it makes sense to cooperate.*"
4. *Democratic leadership and teacher autonomy:* All the teachers unanimously acknowledged the freedom they had in deciding what to do, when to do it and how it should be done. The warden specially mentioned the autonomy she had in planning and implementing key activities, deciding the roles and responsibilities of the staff and setting student learning goals and outcomes. She also appreciated and shares that autonomy was given to the staff to appoint local part time teachers, which helped in handling the senior classes especially after the Government of Jharkhand had expanded the KGBV to 9, 10 and then further to 11 and 12. We observed that there was a practice of collective decision making as the teachers were involved in the process.
5. *Decentralization of power: Involving students in functioning of the school:* Almost all major operational responsibilities, like ensuring punctuality, maintaining cleanliness of dormitories, organizing the assembly, sports and vocational activities etc. were delegated to the Child Cabinet and monitors. Self attendance, bio metric attendance, student cabinet, assigning tasks to learners, are all excellent ways of building leadership qualities in students. It was also reported that the senior girls help in coaching their peers and the juniors to help the less proficient. Although the teachers too share the responsibilities for these activities, this mechanism provides them scaffolding in the form of student leaders. This structure therefore, has twin benefits of taking the load off the teachers and also developing leadership ability among the students.

6. Complementary role of ISWP

An interesting feature of the KGBV programme is the interdependence between the ISWP and the teachers. While the teachers seem to do their best in teaching and caring for the girls, the ISWP serves as a catalyst in that it facilitates and complements their role, not only by providing need based support for activities but more importantly by handholding and financially enabling girls to seek careers of their choice through supporting coaching for entrance exams or identifying possible avenues for future employment. With ISWP ready to share responsibility, the teachers are also feel confident to support and track the girls even beyond their graduation from the school.

7. Access to Training and Professional Development Opportunities:

The absence of this element was consistently voiced by all teachers who had the best of intentions but lacked adequate and updated professional understanding. While the CRC support is meant for elementary classes, it is more administrative in nature than academic. However, one teacher who demonstrated excellent pedagogical approach in her class described, attributed it to one CRC meeting which she had participated in. This vacuum of training and peer sharing opportunities on a larger scale is felt strongly by all teachers. The program officer has tried to fill this gap by creating a WhatsApp group for sharing.

Supportive supervision and mentoring

Leadership, mentorship and a problem solving attitude at the administrative level is key to enhancing teacher motivation. Observations and interactions with the administrative officials of the KGBV at Jamshedpur as well as the programme officer, who travelled with us, indicated the importance of a congenial and collaborative relationship for getting the best out of the functionaries in any enterprise. A significant example of that is the decentralized decision-making, to an extent that wardens can select part time teachers as per the need of the school, without any official interference

Supportive supervision and monitoring

The quality of education in the KGBV is specifically monitored by the key education officials in the district namely- DEO, BEO and CRP. The progress of the KGBV is shared by the warden in the monthly district level review meeting. The district officials in turn report to the state. In the meeting, the focus was more on the administrative issues and goals, rather than academic aspects. All the regular teachers share that the CRP visited the school regularly, checked the enrolment, retention and discussed issues with the warden. However, the support they required in actual teaching-learning was missing. They expressed the need for academic support in teaching different subjects especially English, and in the use of TLM

is. Supervisors need to be friends, philosopher and guide and be willing to go an extra mile for the teachers in the similar manner in which the teachers need to relate to the girls. A teacher shares an example where she was keen to support coaching for a student for entrance to a professional course and she asked for leave to be able to take the girl herself and arrange for her stay in Patna in her own home. She was not only given permission by the administrative officer but was also appreciated for working beyond the call of duty.

A web of supportive relationships

The common thread running across all components which make for an effective and successful programme, is the web of supportive relationships observed, encouraging hand holding and leading by example. The cordial, caring, consistent and collaborative relationships between administrative staff officials and teachers, between teachers and students, between teachers themselves, with other support staff members, and between the school and partners like ISWP, all rest on a common vision and mission of ensuring empowerment to the girls under their care. As one officer says "the challenges are tremendous but believing they can do it and making them believe that, is the key".

**KASTURBA GANDHI BALIKA
VIDYALAYA (KGBV), TASWARIYA**



KASTURBA GANDHI BALIKA VIDYALAYA (KGBV), TASWARIYA

1. Learning to Be – Stories of Empowerment from KGBV Taswariya

i) Kamala's Story

We were introduced to *Kamala* (name changed), on our visit to Ajmer in February of 2018. She is a resident of *Topa* village, situated in the *Kekri* block of Ajmer district, in the State of Rajasthan. She lives there, with her parents and siblings. Both of her parents are farm laborers. *Kamala* is the youngest of six siblings; five sisters and one brother. Presently, *Kamala* is a student of class nine in a school in *Kalera Kanwalji*, *Kamala* was initially enrolled in the local primary school. *Kamala's* village is 20 kilometers away from KGBV, *Taswariya*. Her parents came to know about the KGBV and its facilities from other villagers and enrolled their second daughter in it. Experiencing the multiple benefits the girls were getting there, in terms of safety, security good food, clothes, and all their basic requirements, they got their other daughters enrolled in the same KGBV. *Kamala* shares that, "the good food, a proper place to sleep in and most importantly the fact that there was no need for the girls to walk a long distance to reach school, were facilities that my parents could never have been able to provide their children". *Kamala* further says that, "If my parents had not come to know about the KGBV, we would have perhaps dropped out of school after completing primary school education".

When *Kamala* joined the KGBV in class 6, she was not very happy to be there. It took her some time to settle down. In the beginning she used to feel very lonely and she missed her home, she says that, "but then slowly I got used to of the school and started liking everything that we did there. I

especially liked the *sandhya vandana* (evening prayers), games and dramas. The other girls at KGBV also helped me adjust, they never left me alone and the teachers were always there to help me whenever I needed anything". As compared to the school in her village, she was in a more secure and comfortable environment. She also enjoyed the exposure she used to get there; she says that, "Besides classroom discussions, so many activities, such as writing poems and scripts and participating in plays, in *bal-sabhas* and in the *Meena Manch*, were organized there". Now that she is in another school, she says that, "in my new school only classroom teaching-learning takes place. I miss *Taswariya* a lot, because we used to participate in different activities, conducted by the teachers as well as the *NGO Sir*. All the girls worked on different projects related to issues that we face at home like child marriage, abuse etc". She wistfully muses that, "I wish that KGBV could continue class twelve". *Kamala's* parents are also very happy with the KGBV results of the class eight board examinations. In the past five years, *Kamala* has motivated five other girls from *Topa* village to apply to and enroll in the KGBV.

As we were reaching the end of our interview, *Kamala* indulges in some self reflection, she says that, "the KGBV has really changed me; I have gained a lot of confidence. I can now talk to others and I do not feel scared of going anywhere alone because of the training I got in self-defense. I am also aware of different social welfare schemes, my rights and the world outside school." She further shares that, "when others praise me for my writing and acting talent, I feel that I have really achieved something and that I am capable of doing things. My hesitation to talk to people has now completely gone away." *Kamala* aims to perform well in class

twelve board examinations. She is determined to achieve something in life. She shares that she wants to take up a job, so that she is not a financial burden on her parents. She wants to be self-reliant so that she can live her life on her own terms. She feels that, “after joining KGBV *Taswariya* my life has completely changed for the better.”

ii. *Sharada's story*

We met *Sharada* (name changed) in the Nursing College in Ajmer, where she is doing a Diploma in Nursing. Hailing from a farmer's family, *Sharada* has one brother and two sisters. The family lives in village *Devli Tonk*. In 2005, when *Sharada* was only six years old, her parents married her off. A victim of child marriage, she says “this was the accepted practice in my village.” As per the custom it is only after the *gauna* that the child bride goes on to live in the groom's house, the *gauna* is done after the girl has reached puberty. Until her *gauna*, *Sharada* continued to stay at her parents' home. She was keen on studying, but there was no school in her village. So she was sent to stay with her father's sister to attend school till class 6. Her parents heard about KGBV *Taswariya* from some friends and her father, who was very fond of *Sharada* and supported her aspirations, agreed to enroll her into KGBV. For her, getting into KGBV *Taswariya* was “like a dream come true. The facilities, teachers, studies, and food everything was so good. We also had the choice to participate in so many interesting activities and there was self-defence training too. The teachers were very loving and were always there to help us”.

KGBV *Taswariya* is only till class 7 so *Sharada* lived in the hostel in *Khadeka* and passed out from the local secondary school. Reflecting back on her life in the secondary school she shared that it was very difficult to adjust there. In KGBV *Taswariya* all the students and teachers were like a big family. Apart from the school there were so many activities that were planned for the girls, they played games, learned judo, dancing, music and theatre and so much more. Unlike *Taswariya*, at *Khadeka*, learning means reading-writing assignments only. *Sharada* feels that there is a huge difference between the teachers of these two schools. The girls at *Khadeka* school blindly accept things that they are told, even

if it is not correct. They never question or challenge the information. She wonders, “how can they accept it? I cannot and I frankly say what I want to, as I am not scared; but they are. *Taswariya* has made me the way I am.”

Sharada shares that the Diploma in Nursing costs her Rs 1600/- per month which is a large amount for her parents, so she says that, “I got my father to check with my in-laws if they can pay for my education? They say they can pay my fees on one condition that I do their bidding. But I am clear that now I cannot surrender my independence, so I refused. My father and brother have now arranged my fees. I have also decided not to go live with my husband. I have also told my father to arrange for a divorce. I will marry whosoever I want to. Once this Diploma is over, I will see what to do, but getting a job is very important.”

Although *Sharada* was excited to share her story, she concludes that, “All the training we got in the KGBV showed me that one has to face life and the challenges it poses. I shared all my problems with Warden Madam, even more than my mother. She was wonderful as she always listened to me and gave me good advice. She helped me in taking important decisions; she also encourages me to not tolerate injustice and to raise my voice against it. I have learned everything from her- I am what I am today because of my school and my teachers”.

Kamala and *Sharada* are two of the many girls passed out of KGBV, *Taswariya*. They come from socially disadvantaged families of *Gujjar* or *Meena* communities. Some of the girls that we have met during our visit were barely literate when they joined the KGBV *Taswariya* in class six. With the education received at KGBV *Taswariya*, they are clearly experiencing a transformation in their lives and personalities, which was otherwise impossible for them to achieve. Like *Kamala* and *Sharada*, all the other girls that we had met during our visit, are enabled, empowered and ready to embark on life's journey with optimism and hope.

2. The Challenging Social Context

The interactions that we had, with the headmistress, warden and teachers, helped us to understand that most of the girls in the KGBV *Taswariya* belong to communities notified as scheduled caste (SC) or scheduled tribes (ST). Almost all the girls come from families living below the poverty line with an income less than Rs 3600 per month. Child marriage is a common custom among these communities and therefore, by the time these girls come to KGBV, many of them are already married. In this society one also sees a strong preference for sons, compounded with social evils like alcoholism, domestic violence and sexual abuse; all prevalent in communities living in these villages. The teachers and girls informed us that all these situations work towards obstructing girls' access to quality education and completing elementary education, by creating risk to their personal security. The situation is further aggravated by the lack of information about the potential opportunities that may be available for them outside their homes. Their lives are primarily caught up in the warp of existing societal norms, power structures and traditions. They spend their days grazing cattle and doing household chores. This constrained life leads to low self esteem in these girls, which is quite visible in them when they come into the KGBV. During our visit, some parents discussed that traditionally, their communities do not perceive, education of girls to be a priority. However, a shift is now visible and more girls have started to go to school. Provision of free books, cycles and other facilities by the government further encourages the parents to send their girls to schools.

Many girls, who enroll in KGBV in class 6, and who have completed primary education in the local school, continue to speak in their local language i.e. Marwari, with very little exposure to Hindi - the medium of instruction in school. According to the teachers at KGBV *Taswariya*, this creates a gap in communication and hinders instructions in the beginning. But gradually, through the bridge programme and other activities they become more comfortable with Hindi. During our visit we also met girls who had completed their first term and were in the second term, and we observed that they had no problem speaking, reading or writing in Hindi.

3. Life at KGBV Taswariya: A major shift for the girls

A day in KGBV *Taswariya*, begins early. Girls wake up around 5.30 am. After performing their morning chores the girls go to the ground for physical exercises and yoga. The warden asked the class eight girls to wake up an hour earlier in the last term of the year, they were provided milk as the warden says "they have to appear in a board examination soon and they need the nourishment to study hard." A team of girls has been formed to take responsibility for different aspects of the school programme such as cleaning the dormitories and lavatories, look at overall cleanliness of the school premises, maintenance of records, conducting assembly and taking care of other academic and non-academic aspects. The teachers only oversee or guide their work and as the warden shares, "one group is given the responsibility for oversight

KGBV *Taswariya*

The KGBV school and hostel are situated in one double storied building, provided by the Government of Rajasthan (GoR). It had a well maintained boundary wall. The ground floor housed the office of the Head Teacher, classrooms (one each for classes 6, 7 and 8), a fairly large activity room which was full of materials made by some of the girls and sewing machines used for tailoring. The toilets, a small kitchen and store were also located on the same level. The dormitories, one for each of the three classes were located on the first floor. Every girl was provided bedding and a mattress a proper bed along with uniform and other essential toiletries (soap, dental materials etc). However, though all the facilities were available it was observed that the school building required repairs and maintenance as the walls were not in a very good condition with paint peeling off, cracks etc. We were told that this condition exists as the KGBV does not get any funds for repairs and maintenance.

and the other checks their work. This sharing and monitoring the work lessens our burden, but more importantly it also makes the girls more responsible and inculcates leadership skills in them.”

After physical exercises and yoga the girls return to their dormitories where they get some light refreshment like tea, biscuits and toast. Then the girls get dressed in their uniforms, clean up the dormitories and by 9.00 am they are ready for the school assembly. The assembly is led by the girl from the cabinet. Assembly includes reading of news, sharing of good thoughts followed by a prayer. By 9.15 am the girls settle down their respective classes. In between the classes they get a break for breakfast and later for lunch. A nutritionally balanced menu has been prepared for each day and made available to all KGBVs by the district authorities. School can make minor alterations to the menu, as per local tastes and special requests of the girls. In the school, classes get over by 3.40pm after that girls get a brief rest period which is then followed by vocational course of their choice, which include stitching, painting, music etc. After the tea-break it is time for the evening of sports which include self defense exercises, gymnastics, volleyball, judo etc. A sumptuous dinner menu is prepared for the girls at KGBV according to which, food is served in the evening. After the dinner the girls go into their dormitories and spend time reading books (including picture books, of class six, for new readers) available in their class libraries, organizing *Meena Manch* activities which include planning and practice of plays, skits, songs, dance etc. and in many cases attending remedial classes. Peer teaching-learning is encouraged among senior girls.

Our interactions with some of the girls revealed that a lot has changed for the girls after they had enrolled in *Taswariya*. Even those girls who had gone to their local village schools perceived that studying in KGBV was very different from their village school. One of the girls shared that, “we do so much more here besides studies, which is all we did in my previous school. We take part in dance, plays and competitions and enjoy ourselves. I never knew I could do so much”. It was clear from the smiling faces of the girls and their active participation in the daily school activities that they felt safe there and enjoyed their stay at KGBV in *Taswariya*.

A teacher shares with us, “when they come to the school they are unaware of hygienic practices. They do not know how to use a sanitary towel or flush a toilet. We have helped them adopt healthy habits and maintain basic hygiene.” The girls we interacted with believe that they had changed a lot, had learned new things, and have become more aware about the world around. They believe that after coming to KGBV, they have become capable of looking after themselves. Some quotes from the girls below are illustrative of this impact:

“Self -defense training and our discussions with the warden in the evenings on different issues made me very confident. I was scared to talk or say anything but now I can look after myself and I know my rights and will fight for it if I have to. First I thought girls were only supposed to get married and take care of their homes. I now want to become something in life and work”. (A class 6 student)

About 30 parents that we had interacted with, during a parents’ meeting at the KGBV, further corroborated the data on positive impact of KGBV on girls. They were unanimous in saying that KGBV was effective in transforming the lives of their girls. Since it was a residential school it provided safety and security to their girls. Some point out that despite having a school in their villages; they wanted to send their daughters to KGBV at *Taswariya*. Some quotes from the parents, reflecting their views about the school, are presented below:

Changing Reactions and Perceptions

An old woman, a grandmother of a class 7 student, is all smiles as she proudly narrates the story, in the parents’ meeting:

“my 15 year old nati (granddaughter) studies here. Another older granddaughter was getting married so her parents and grandfather and I says let’s get this one married as well. She heard us say this and says to us that she will make one phone call to the police and get all of us arrested for child marriage.” Her grandfather was very angry, but I laughed.”

"My child has learned to talk properly. Earlier she would hesitate to speak; now she confidently says what she wants to. She has also learned manners. She knows when to say 'thank you', 'sorry', etc."

"When my daughter comes home in holiday she says that, "I want to go back to the KGBV, I like the school and we do so many things there which are interesting and enjoyable."

"The teachers are good and all the basic facilities are available. The school provides a secure environment for a girl, which is important. The hostel and school are located in the same premise which is a good thing as our girls do not have to travel a long distance to reach school. Also they don't have to do household chores".

"All the girls who live here –they learn from each other."

During the meeting, parents demanded that the school be extended to class 12 so that the girls can complete their schooling there.

4. A Glimpse of a KGBV Classroom

We sat unobtrusively, at the back of the classroom, and observed three classes. In order to get a sense of what the teaching and classroom practices were like, we observed for two periods in class 6 and one in class 8. As it was the end of the academic year, largely revision work was being done in the class. Teachers were helping girls revise what they had learned. The school has allocated specific rooms for classes 6, 7 and 8. The classrooms that we had visited were spacious and well ventilated; they were fairly well lit with natural light. Each room was comfortable for a class of 40 to 50 students. While desks were available in two classes, in class 6, during the Sanskrit period, the girls were sitting on a mat. All the classrooms had functional blackboards; a few charts on different topics were also pasted on the walls. Apart from the charts there was hardly any teaching-learning material like models, maps or laboratory equipment except some visible in the activity room. During a class, the regular teachers were observed to stand in front of the class and teach, using the board and textbooks.

They communicated well with the girls, encouraged them to respond in the class and helped them become interactive. The medium of instruction was Hindi.

An interesting difference observed between class 6 and 8 was the nature of interaction among students. In class 6 the girls were freely responding to the questions asked by the teacher, but they did not actively ask any questions or shared their views. Also, the teacher did not make any efforts to prod them. However, on one instance one girl did point out that the teacher had missed out one item in what was being revised. In class 8, on the other hand, girls were seen to be completely focused on the classroom discussion, they were asking questions freely, they were able to put their ideas across without any hesitation and were also following instructions given by their teacher. This difference may perhaps be an indication of the initial hesitation with which girls come into class 6 and the subsequent progress they make over the next three years, in terms of their expression and development of self-confidence, due to the 'socialization' process they undergo at the KGBV. In our interaction with the girls from classes 6 and 8 revealed that they were happy and satisfied; they understood what was being taught and enjoyed their studies. The girls were determined to do well in their board exams and continue their studies further.

According to the teachers the credit for such interactive and participatory classrooms goes to the guidance that they have received from the NGO, *Sandhan*. Resource persons from *Sandhan* visit KGBV once a month and provide mentoring to the teachers, through actual demonstration of good practices and hand holding. One of the teachers shared that, "we have now all become capable" The class teacher of class 6 proudly shares that "even the weakest student of my class can now answer." The resources and support provided by *Sandhan* and the classroom processes observed under their guidance were probably the key factors contributing to the good results of the KGBV girls in the board exams. As the head-teacher and warden had also shares with us, "100% girls pass out which we are so proud of, but even more interesting is that not only are our girls doing well in

the board exams and have set goals that they want to achieve, but the impact of the KGBV continues beyond those enrolled in the KGBV, as these girls are motivating other girls in their villages to study and join the KGBVs.”

Another positive factor contributing to the academic success of the girls is the development of an entry-level, *condensed bridge programme by Sandhan* for class 6 girls. These entrants are a mix of never enrolled and drop outs girls who are not be able to cope up with the prescribed syllabus of class 6. After their enrolment to the school girls give a pre-test. Depending on the competence of the girls (judged by the pre-test), they are admitted in appropriate classes or in the bridge course. This course is run between the months of July and December of each academic year. The aim of this programme is to equip the girls with basic foundational skills and language familiarity up-to grade 5. We had visited the KGBV in February, so we were unable to observe the course being run but the feedback from teachers and students indicate it was very useful.

5. Moving beyond Classrooms to a more wholesome education: Building self regulation and leadership in the girls

A common feedback received from the girls, across classes, was that they appreciate the KGBV primarily because unlike the other primary school, it offers them a range of co-curricular activities. They also attribute their newly gained self-confidence and sense of enablement to these activities, which they enjoy and through which they discover their latent talents. The major advantage of a residential programme is the time available for these activities which cannot be accommodated into a day school routine. Some of these activities include self-defense training, critical dialogue, *Meena Manch* activities and training in beauty culture and tailoring

Self-Defense Training: One evening, during our visit, we had observed a class of self-defense. The Physical Education teacher was training the girls to respond in a situation of physical assault. Thick mats had been laid out in the school grounds and a

few girls first demonstrated and then practiced the movements shown by the teacher. One could see the excitement and interest that the girls had for this activity. KGBV alumni that we had interviewed later especially mentioned this activity as very useful. They narrated incidents where they had successfully employed it to protect themselves in situations of potential sexual harassment.

This particularly popular activity is organized for the girls in collaboration with the Police Department in all KGBVs in the state. The aim of this training is to enhance the girls’ ability to defend themselves in situations of threat. The self-defense training also enables girls to understand prerequisites for a healthy and fit body, including nutritious diet, exercising and maintaining personal hygiene etc. During the physical education classes girls also learn about bodily changes during adolescence; general issues among adolescent age group; potential risks to girls’ safety and security, and possible ways to respond physically to protect themselves in case of socially odd or unacceptable behavior. State trained Physical Education Teachers (PETs) are trained for this by master trainers who have earlier been prepared in partnership with the Rajasthan Police Academy. This training is conducted in two phases of 7 days each.

Vocational training in tailoring, painting and beauty culture: During our observations of tailoring class a full display of the girls’ creations was set-up in the activity room. The school has sewing machines and the girls who had opted for tailoring classes were busy stitching and sewing baby clothes on the day of our observation, and as they completed a dress they brought it to us to show their achievement.

Meena Manch: An Empowering platform for building and nurturing life skills: Another activity that was highlighted by all the teachers, girls, and state and district officials as very impactful was the *Meena Manch* (also called the Forum). *Meena Manch* or Forum, which is inspired by the UNICEF’s animated series called *Meena*. The aim of *Meena Manch* is to promote rights of the girl child. Started in the year 2011-12, *Meena Manch* is constituted of girls studying in classes 6, 7 and 8 in each school and KGBVs in the state of Rajasthan since 2011-12.

The activities of this forum aim to develop life skills among the girls, develop the confidence of the girls, create awareness in the community on social issues and challenges long standing gender biased traditional practices viz. child marriage, dowry system etc. it also motivates parents of dropout and never enrolled girls to send their daughters to school.

The 26 girls, who form the *Taswariya Meena Manch*, take lead in organizing and executing different activities both inside the school and outside of it. They organize the enrollment drives, group discussion on various gender and children related issues, manage *Meena Vachnalya* (reading library), track student attendance, provide peer support to other girls and hold self esteem building activities, etc. To support and guide these girls a female teacher from the school, known as *Sugamkarta* is deputed at the school level who are given orientation about the working of the *Meena Manch*. The Gender coordinator who oversees the administration of KGBVs in Ajmer district, shared that, "inter-school *Meena Sammelans* are regularly organized at the block, district and ultimately at the state level. These *sammelans* aim to provide a platform to girls from different *Meena Manch* to showcase what they have learned through role plays, skits, dance, posters etc. They showcase their understanding in gender related issues, share their efforts and experiences and display their talents that they have identified after becoming members of the *Meena Manch*."

Some of the thoughts shared by the girls on *Meena Manch* are quoted below:

During our visit to one such *Meena Sammelan* was organized at the block level in which KGBV *Taswariya* had also participated. In this event 15 schools had participated. It was interesting to observe that boys too had joined in from most of the schools that participated. Every school put up performances of song, dance, play, poetry recital etc. revolving around the theme of gender. KGBV *Taswariya* girls presented a graceful dance performance and a skit on child marriage. All the performances were highly appreciated and prizes were given to the first three by the Block Education Officer (BEO). The school where the event was hosted also put up an exhibition showcasing the work of students of all the participating schools which included artwork, models, slogans and poems on issues faced by girls.

We could see that *Meena Manch* activities are very popular among the *Taswariya* girls, since it provides them with opportunities to participate in skits, role plays, drama, creative writing, art projects etc. The Head Teacher and the warden shared with us that *Meena Manch* has contributed immensely in transforming the initially shy girls into confident, bold and rationally thinking individuals. They are able to relate the gender related issues being raised through the *Meena Manch* to their own lived experiences and they write stories or role plays on that basis those experiences. Animated *Meena* books in which a girl Meena is the central character, have also provided an exposure to the girls on social issues. They have learned different ways of drawing, painting, techniques of coloring from the book. Interactions with girls in KGBV and feedback

The Meena Manch Experience

"When I joined in class VI I was not very happy as I missed my home. Then I started reading the Meena books and liked them so much and today I feel happy that I am here in class VIII." (Student from class VIII)

"The process of enacting the Meena story often does not need any prompting from teachers and this is what amazes me. The girls enjoy planning, scripting and doing the role plays too since they are familiar with these situations. After that they discuss issues with me" (Teacher)

"I feel happy to be associated with Meena Manch in my school. Initially I did not have the confidence to express my thoughts even among my friends. But now I feel confident enough to express my views in the group." (Student from VIII).

on the *Meena Manch* have made it clear that these activities are not for recreational purpose only. They have actually contributed towards improving the articulation and expression of the KGBV girls. When the girls enact the stories through role plays, they improvise dialogues and express their own thoughts. Sometimes they use Hindi as their chosen medium of expression and sometimes they use their local language for expressing themselves.

Critical Dialogue: A Tool for Empowerment:

This activity is interestingly an outcome of inter-institutional sharing. Critical dialogue is an activity conceptualized by Dr Urvashi Sehgal, the Director of Study Hall in Lucknow (UP) who initiated it in Prerna, an afternoon programme for working girls from the urban slums (See Case Study 3). Based on the success of this activity in Prerna and subsequently in some KGBVs supported by her organization, she has now introduced it in Rajasthan, in consultation with Rajasthan state government. She has trained teachers and wardens as resource persons who will train other teachers in a cascade mode. The warden of KGBV *Taswariya* is one of these resource persons. She has trained other teachers in it and is currently conducting these sessions informally with the students. But she is also working towards giving it a more organized formal structure. Typically the activity involves organizing discussion sessions once a week on some social themes or issues related to gender which the girls have encountered or can encounter. The girls collectively analyze it and reflect upon its different aspects demerits and then arrive at conclusion. The warden currently conducts it with groups of girls, generally from class 8, in which she initiates the discussion and encourage the girls to debate on practices of discrimination and oppression that they face in their homes particularly domestic violence, abuse, child marriage, child labor amongst other topics. The warden believes that it has helped inform girls about the social issues and made them become more confident and empowered individuals. The girls who had participated in these sessions believed that this forum has made them discuss many issues which had never been talked about before in their families and villagers. They can now challenge oppressive practices, questioning the occurrence

of such things and try to find out ways to resolve them. The impact of these sessions was discernible in some interviews we had with the present students and alumni who attributed their self confidence and progressive views to the discussions they had had with the warden.

Bal-Sansad

The warden also shared that the school has a *Bal-Sansad* or a Child's Cabinet in which girls are elected at various cabinet positions. This is another platform where girls have an opportunity to learn leadership skills as they engage with issues emerging in the running of the school, take responsibility for various activities, are required to take decisions on their own and manage and organize different activities. This builds their self-confidence, leadership skills, communication skills and informs them about various issues affecting them in their daily lives. Interestingly, the warden shared with us that she has assigned names of girls who had passed out of *Taswariya* and who have done well for themselves to different rooms in the school to inspire and motivate other girls to strive and do their best. She says she got this idea from a headmistress of another school who had inspired her and who she considers as a mentor

Health and Medical Care

Monthly health check-ups of the girls are conducted to monitor their health and wellness. A health card is also maintained by teachers for each girl which records their height, weight and other health details. On the second day of our visit, we were able to observe the monthly health check-up being carried out by the visiting doctor at KGBV, *Taswariya*. This service is provided through convergence with the Health Department. The teachers also expressed a need for a vehicle to take students to the hospital, in case of an emergency. They shared that whenever there was an emergency the regular teachers who lived on the school campus had to call a local vehicle. The school is located away from the main road and public transport availability is therefore an issue. But the doctor has informed us that by dialing '104' or '108' a vehicle can be sent to the KGBV.

6. Enabling Factors for Girls

The educational experience for the girls in KGBV *Taswariya* may be best described in a single word as 'transformational'. What are the major factors actually contribute to this experience and impact at KGBV? As we reflect on our own observations and understanding of the processes taking place at KGBV *Taswariya*, we can identify some distinct factors which are discussed below:

Caring and Sensitive Teachers –An Emotional Connect

As mentioned earlier, the girls who come to KGBV are from disadvantaged, poor communities with low levels of literacy. Most of them have either never been to a school or are drop-outs, making the situation even more complex. The warden, Head Teacher and all the other teachers we interviewed shared a common perspective that guides them in their work. They empathize with the challenge that these girls face when they leave their homes, learn to adjust to a completely new place and unfamiliar ways of doing things in their daily lives like bathing, using toilets, eating and dressing etc. In class 6, the new entrants especially miss their parents and home. They also have to get used to of everything in the KGBV- management, timetable, different food, studies and related activities". The teachers consciously try their best to ensure that the girls are 'hand- held' to the extent possible and provided a safe, secure environment, where they feel respected and valued and also learn to value each other.

We observed that almost all teachers know their students well and seem familiar with their family backgrounds. They are aware of the strengths and challenges of almost every girl. This is made possible by the residential nature of the KGBV schools which provides a 24-hour association between the teachers and their students creating a sense of a 'one large family'. The teachers at KGBV *Taswariya* were sensitive, caring and genuinely concerned about the welfare of girls. They were responsive to not only their educational needs and problems, but also to their personal goals. The teachers did not only help the girls in their studies

but also helping them develop skills to deal with personal issues and problems, plan their careers and live a better quality life. As one of the girls aptly put it, their support to the girls was, "like a mother, another says more than what they did for their own children".

All the girls that we had interacted with, acknowledged and appreciated the pivotal role their teachers played in guiding and grooming them, especially the warden. They share that their teachers "supported and encouraged them to learn and do well in studies". As mentioned earlier, the warden gets up early at 5 a.m.to ensure class 8 girls get hot milk when they get up, so that they can study with concentration. Some girls explicitly state that the teacher, "understand us and are always there to help us with everything including our problems". One girl shares that, "when I came to the school in class 6, which was the most difficult period for us, warden madam loved us and she always supported us". It was simply the effort on the part of the teachers that helped girls continue in the KGBV even when they missed their homes, food and village surroundings. Girls say that, "especially, we were given the freedom to roam around and do what we wanted to and when we wanted." Some of the girls share that, "the teachers also encouraged us to participate in different activities like self-defence, stitching and beauty culture. One girl highlights that, "it was my teacher who motivated me to write poems and take part in drama, even though I was hesitant and very shy to talk in front of other girls."

We gave the girls a short exercise. We gave them a sheet of paper and asked them to write what, according to them, make a good teacher. Some of their responses are quoted below:

Voices of class VIII Girls: A good teacher is:

Like we have here who inspire and motivate us to study and a chance to improve. I have learned to participate in everything, my thinking has changed, because of my teachers.

One who will not let children miss their homes or our mothers. The teachers here are like that they are very good to us. one who treats all the children in the same way, even the weak ones and thinks of us like their own children.

Is like the teachers we have here they explain things to us nicely, treat us lovingly and talk to us affectionately.

Is a person who loves and cares for their students. They should also be well informed, knowledgeable and like the subject they teach. Our teachers here are like this so we are happy!

I think a good teacher is like Nandini ma'am because she has taught us so many different things and activities. She teaches well, has good qualities and we try to learn from her and be like her.

One who should explain the way a mother explains to her children, not get angry or beat the students. She should be able to answer all our questions and guide us.



Ensuring Responsive Education with Basic Facilities

The residential schooling facility of the KGBV provides a wide range of free facilities that the girls cannot have access to in their villages and in their homes. Facilities such as a clean and safe environment, nutritious daily diet, clean clothes and shoes, books and stationery, opportunities for exercise, leisure time activities and quality formal schooling, are all basic and necessary to their optimal growth and all round development. It is a major advantage of KGBV, over their local village schools, that the hostel and school are located in the same premises and the girls are not required to walk long distances or cover risky terrains.

Facilities Provided in KGBV Taswariya

- Complete residential facilities.
- Complete residential facilities.
- Facility of dormitories with electricity, water, toilets and bathrooms.
- A weekly menu chart providing nutritious meals to all the girls
- Stipend for each student deposited into the girls' bank account.
- Vocational training in stitching and beauty culture,
- Library books for all students.
- Self-Defense Training (Judo) for all girls.
- Complete school uniform (including shoes and winter garments) for all students.
- Organizing of sports and cultural programmes and celebration of important days.
- Meena Manch

A number of girls emphasize that if the hostel had not been there they would have dropped out after class 5 and not continued their education. This view was also echoed by the Head Teacher, warden and other teachers who believe that, "if the hostel facility is not provided to the students then they will not come". This facility becomes even more attractive and conducive for learning because it keeps the girls away from household chores and responsibilities, which would otherwise consume a

lot of their time and energy. Many parents mention this as a major gain, they say that "at home the girls cannot study because they have to do all these chores like grazing cattle, getting wood for fuel, cooking, water filling etc. Spared of all these chores, they will certainly learn so much better".

In addition, vocational courses and co-curricular activities like self-defense training, stitching, beauty culture, *bal-sabha*, critical dialogue, *Meena-Manch* provide the required impetus for their empowerment and critical skill development. Residential schooling provides a lot of time for girls to engage in multiple activities, thereby promoting team work, leadership, boosts their confidence, develops decision-making, skills, and improves communication among others.

The warden showed us account register which maintains the record of a maintenance fee and a stipend which goes into each girl's respective bank accounts. So, in addition to the basic facilities, security and comfort, there is also financial incentive provided to the girls. A consolidated amount is given every month to each girl along with supplementary TLM, stationery and other educational material. When she graduates from class 8, each student also gets a fixed amount of money. With all needs taken care of, this becomes an income for the girls which they can use later to further their studies.

The parents were extremely appreciative of all that was being given to their children. The reason they were most happy was because their girls did not have to commute to school. One parent states that, "Now we have nothing to worry about as everything is located in one building and my child is secure".

It was also observed that the teaching strategies employed by teachers were responsive to students' social context and individual needs. Teachers respond to girls' needs and requirements by trying to understand their socio-cultural context and backgrounds, social norms and personal problems. The approach to initially use the students' home language smoothen the transition to school language, the development and use of a bridge programme to address the diverse entry levels, the attitude of patience, care and concern for each student demonstrated by teachers, all add up to create a responsive environment. This builds a

strong bond of trust, respect and love between the teacher and her students. The girls clearly believe that if there is any problem the teachers are with them, they will listen to them, support them and

guide them till the very end. This has given the girls a lot of confidence and motivation to do well in their lives. This is also illustrated in the quotes of the girls presented below:

My school is a place which:

I love and also all the teachers as they have given us a lot of love, more than their own children. This is because they knew we have left our homes and staying her. I have found a new family here.

I like all the games and competitions that we participate in. We had studies in our village school but not so many different and interesting activities. All of us are taught to protect ourselves so I have become confident.

Teaches us so many new things which is fun. I enjoy doing everything and now want to participate in all the activities. At the beginning I was shy and hesitant. This is all because of the school.

Has so many facilities like a library with nice books to read, projects to do, self-defence training and also discussing different issues. I also like the food and the fact that the school is so clean.

Is so different from my home. At home I did what I wanted, slept, ate, played whenever I wished. Here I have become disciplined as there is a routine, lovely activities and studies also.

Has improved my life and made it much better. It has given me the opportunity to learn so many new and interesting things besides studies. My thinking has changed after coming here. I have become confident to do things as we participate in so many activities and competitions.



Multiplier Effect: Change Agents beyond the school

Some girls from the KGBV motivate, encourage and support other girls in their villages to apply for admission to the KGBV. They also strongly advocate against child marriage, domestic violence and other issues that girls and women are facing and support other girls, facing issues related to their right to education, freedom, security and safety.

The KGBV has four teachers with the Urdu teacher's post lying vacant. Out of the four teachers three are from the government and one from a private placement agency. In addition, there are two Lok Jumbish teachers. The duties of the warden and Head Teacher are taken care of by two different staff members. The teachers were not satisfied with the amount of salary they were receiving. There is a big difference between the remuneration of permanent and temporary teachers. We were informed that on an average a permanent teacher gets a monthly salary ranging between Rs. 19,000/- to 26000/- whereas temporary/contractual teachers get between Rs. 7000/- to Rs. 12,000/- and no salary for the vacation months. The regular teachers get 45 days vacation.

V. What works for Teachers?

Like Potka, KGBV, Taswariya also, provides an incredible setting to research on what works for teachers? What is it that makes them so completely dedicated to the girls under their care, to protect them, encourage them, inspire them, teach them and guide them, to take pride in the girls' big and small achievements and to give their twenty four hours to this assignment day after day, year after year and work and live together as one family? This becomes even more remarkable when it is juxtaposed with the work conditions for these teachers, which according to conventional wisdom, are not only unsatisfactory but are actually adverse. They live away from their families, often from their own young children, in the residential school located almost in wilderness and away from the towns with very poor road and phone connectivity. They do not have separate residential accommodation but live with the girls in their dormitories, get salaries that in many cases are significantly lower than regular teachers and some have contractual jobs with very few leaves and no guarantee of continuation. Yet they demonstrate this exemplary dedication. We attempted an analysis below of the factors that together work to result in incredibly positive outcome.

(a) A Sense of a 'Collective' Mission

During the interviews, the teachers shared with us that it is not a selective group which comes to work in the KGBV with this sense of 'mission'. Their reasons for joining are varied, but primarily related to getting employment or for some other personal reasons. A contract teacher told us that she wanted to get away from a hostile family environment and so she joined KGBV; another teacher had been

working in an NGO and had become over age for regular employment in the government; a regular teacher who came as the headmistress shared that she came in response to an incentive offered by the government to the teachers that if they complete four years of a difficult posting they will become eligible for a posting in their home town. Similar reasons were given by other teachers as well. Therefore, we conclude that the sense of collective mission that we had witnessed develops after they are in the setting of the KGBV. What is it that leads to this commitment?

- i. *A sense of 'collective' or community:* Again our interviews indicate a consistent response from the teachers that in a residential school, they are away from families and other distractions, they engage day and night with the girls and other supporting staff. They live together and they eat together. As one teacher put it, the school thus, "becomes our world" or as another two say that "our family". This sense of a "collective" was evident in many ways. We observed that one teacher's infant was being collectively 'cared for' and she was familiar and responsive to all the other teachers. Every time the teacher was in class others were taking responsibility of taking care of the infant. On our second day visit, there was a great deal of concern and discussion among the teachers, since the infant was not well. Again, we were told that many teachers do not have adequate leave provision, so they pitch in for each other as and when required, if one has to take some time off. The warden, an experienced teacher, had been compelled to file a case against the government to get herself reinstated in her contractual position since the rules were not permitting that. Nobody including the administrative officials was holding this against her, as it would be in any other similar situation; on the contrary they were all supportive of this step.
- ii. *Sense of a social mission and feelings of self worth:* All the four teachers interviewed, share that for them this school is a 'mission', "The parents of these girls leave them in our care because they trust us. How can we not feel responsible and betray their trust?" What perhaps drives this sense of mission within

the collective is the realization, shared by one teacher, "although this assignment is difficult, when we consider their multiple challenges of poverty, discrimination, exploitation, illiteracy our own challenge become almost miniscule. The trust with which they come, gives us a sense of purpose to do whatever we can to help them transform their lives." This is reflected in the concern for the girls, not only for the time they are in the KGBV but also for what they would be doing once they graduate, and guiding them to ensure they do not retreat to where they came from. Possibly this also gives the teachers a sense of self worth unlike many teachers in day schools who treat their vocation as 'mere jobs' and not as a mission of educating children.

- iii. *Total attention to the school:* A possible factor favoring the sense of dedication and mission could also be that in a residential set up, the teachers are free from other routine responsibilities like household chores and other daily family responsibilities. This factor works for the teachers, just as much as it works for the girls, so that there is no other diversion from this mission. They can give it their total attention.
- iv. *Visible indicators of progress:* This motivation to help and guide the girls as a responsibility is perhaps further accentuated, with the baseline being very low, progress is much more steadier and visible. For example, the girls come with a language deficit but in a few months they begin to speak Hindi. Their behavior, grooming, mannerisms, accommodation to the school culture shows subtle yet steady change as reported by the teachers and possibly these indicators contribute to sustain the motivation and optimism of the teachers. Teachers can 'see' themselves making a difference in terms of their mission.

(b) Democratic leadership and teacher autonomy

Our interview with the headmistress clearly reflected her democratic yet principled stance on her role as a leader. She had recently been awarded by the Lion's Club and was nominated for an award by her department for her leadership qualities. Deconstructing this role for us, she told us she believes in participatory decision-making.

She involves all teachers and the Child Cabinet where required in all decisions that are taken for the school at her level through monthly meetings. Every morning after Assembly, before teachers go to class, she makes it a point to meet them in her office to listen to their concerns or share ideas with them. She told us she does not meet any teacher individually for any issue like personal grievance, leave requirement etc. She meets teachers as a collective to ensure transparency. She lays a great deal of emphasis on this aspect. She also told us that, she maintains a close rapport with students so that if there is any issue with teachers she gets to know through them, and she works towards the resolution collectively.

The headmistress delegates work easily and all the regular teachers confirmed this by sharing how they have freedom to decide what to do, when to do it and how it should be done. The warden specially mentioned the autonomy she had in planning and implementing key activities, deciding the roles and responsibilities of the staff and students as well as in setting learning goals and outcomes. The headmistress emphasized transparency but also a democratic attitude, stemming from a certain self assurance, she encouraged teachers to be accountable in terms of punctuality and regularity, yet allows for flexibility as per teachers' needs. If a teacher has a problem and needs leave or an outside part time teacher is required to leave early due to a family issue, she always shows consideration. This approach was observed in the two days that we spent in the school, in the behavior of both headmistress and the teachers. We noted that she had no issues with the warden, who had been in that school for a longer period and so she has a more central role in describing the school to us. The headmistress also gave due credit to specific teachers for achievements shared with us. The teachers are very appreciative of this attitude and quality of leadership in their headmistress. They feel that she leads by example in terms of what she expects from teachers, particularly in their approach towards the girls.

(c) Close connect with parents and community

Promoting and mobilizing the community's active involvement is an aspect viewed as critical by the KGBV scheme and also by teachers working in the

KGBV. The School Management Committee (SMC) headed by a parent is viewed as integral to the successful functioning of the KGBV. We were told that the budget and any major expenditure have to be passed by the SMC. The strong relationship and connect between the KGBV and parents of the girls studying there is possibly a significant factor influencing the smooth functioning of the KGBV. The participation of parents is viewed as critical, important and necessary by the teachers for girl empowerment and their holistic development, as the girls will ultimately return to the same social context. As one teacher states, "parents need to understand, support and value the education of their girls, this is very important". The headmistress ensures that meetings are conducted on a regular basis, in which parent members are apprised about the school, school events, changes in the scheme or routine, school progress and challenges faced by the school. These meetings bring in a sense of accountability in the school and teachers towards the parents.

(d) NGO partnership and support

KGBV *Taswariya* has had a very close collaboration with an NGO *Sandhan*, who was commissioned by Save the Children to provide academic support to the KGBV *Taswariya*. In the absence of any regular training provisions in KGBVs, the resource persons from *Sandhan* have been providing consistent support and academic guidance through monthly visits to the school. Their focus is on teacher quality and according to the headmistress they have been coming to the school every month and during their visit they provide demonstration lessons and solve teachers' academic problems. Additionally, they contributed through a curriculum for Life Skills Education and gender issues, a bridge program for class 6 entrants, a theatre workshop and multiple other interventions to improve teacher quality and quality of classroom processes. The basic aim was to promote creativity through music, dance, drawing and theatre as part of the curriculum through demonstration. In addition, efforts were also made to bring out the use of multiple texts and library as a part of this entire exercise. We gathered that before weaving in Life Skill Education and gender issues in the overall curriculum of the KGBV, *Sandhan* representatives tried to understand

the girls' background, identify their strengths and what they could do and were interested in, assessed their learning levels in a systematic manner and only then did they evolve a multi-level teaching strategy which was thus very contextualized. Their on-site support have worked towards enhancing teacher motivation, there is presence of someone who appreciates as well as guides, and can be turned to in case of any difficulties. According to the teachers, it is a significant support and they believe they have gained a lot from this association. Their five year contract has recently ended, but the impact is still visible and spoken about.

(e) Web of supportive and caring relationships

A very potent factor that perhaps contributes to the teachers' sense of commitment and mission to help these girls transform their lives for the better is the web of supportive relationships which is evident down the hierarchy from the district level to the level of teachers and supportive staff in the school.

There is a sense of a common mission and a common vision for the girls, to provide them an enabling and caring environment through a wholesome education. This common vision translates into a supportive and positive administration at the district level, and this attitude seems to percolate through all levels including the teachers. The programme officer for the KGBVs at the district level, who accompanied us on both days, effortlessly mingled

with the teachers and displayed no bureaucratic air usually seen in the administration. She told us that she has set up a WhatsApp group of all teachers at the district level across the KGBVs for the purpose of sharing ideas, achievements and innovations. The warden showed us some videos posted on the group by the different KGBV teachers. The warden also informed us about the monthly meeting organized at the district level and in every meeting she says that, "the ADPC Sir asks us all what new initiative have you taken? This is very inspiring and we get motivated to try new things and share." She gave the example of assigning names of successful girls who graduated from KGBV Taswariya to the KGBV hostel rooms to inspire the girls, which was appreciated by the audience. A monthly meeting of this kind can have a more positive impact as compared to the usual penalty based monitoring adopted by most administrators. Forum like these that facilitate sharing can also be motivating and inspiring for the teachers who otherwise typically function in complete isolation, within their respective classrooms.

In Conclusion

Despite several limitations, the KGBV programme is commendable; it is an exemplar in teacher motivation and commitment, leading to a positive transformation in the lives of the girls who come to study KGBV. This is particularly commendable given the difficult socio-economic contexts from which these girls come. While the factors identified above for this positive outcome and impact emerge from the specifics of the structure and nature of the particular school, including its residential character, and may therefore not be easily replicable in its entirety, principles discussed earlier may be derived from the above analysis which can have relevance for the larger system, particularly for teachers who have to engage with girls education in difficult contexts.

Administrative System

The quality of education in the KGBV is specifically monitored by the key education officials in the district namely- DEO, ADPC, and SSA functionaries working for Gender. The progress of the KGBV is shared by the HM or warden in the monthly district level review meeting. The district officials then further report to the state. The focus in the meetings was reported to be related more to administrative issues and goals etc. rather than academic aspects. Despite the support provided by the district officials the teachers shared that it would help if they could get more regular support in actual teaching-learning of different subjects.

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PRERNA GIRLS SCHOOL STUDY HALL FOUNDATION, LUCKNOW

A Case Study

1. Introduction

From Subjugation to Self Esteem: Two Journeys in Empowerment

- i. *Sharada* (name changed) lives very close to the Prerna School with her parents, two brothers and two sisters. Her mother works as a helper in Prerna and her father works in a local dairy. Some years back her father became an alcoholic, which compelled the other members of the family members to move out of the house and stay with the grandmother. It was in 2008, when they were undergoing considerable financial difficulty, that a neighbour told them about the Prerna School. Her mother joined the school as a helper and *Sharada* enrolled in as a student in class 2. She had to pay a paltry fee of Rs.30 to Rs 50 per month.

Reflecting back on her initial days at the school, *Sharada* reminisced, “when I joined Prerna, I was very was not very smart, I was afraid to talk to others or share my opinion. But then gradually I realized that the school is not only about ‘study-study-study’, we also did a lot of activities. We danced, sang and took part in concerts”. What she liked most about the school were the teachers, as they were like “a friend and guide. They are always there for us. We can share anything with them, which I do not do with my own parents. They understand and recognize our talents and believe that we to can do many things. They keep on encouraging and motivating us”.

Sharada identifies the ‘critical dialogue’ sessions as the most important and most interesting aspect of the curriculum at Prerna. *Sharada* said that, “These sessions are conducted every

Saturday on any a particular topic. Sometimes we also prepare a play on the topic.” Her reason for liking this session was that, “many problems we face in society and in our own lives are discussed there. We learn how to address different and difficult issues which in turn make me confident. This has completely changed my way of thinking. The school and teachers have made us the way we are today.” She compares herself with her other friends, who are going to other schools in that area. She said that, “they are not aware of so many things and it is almost impossible for them to take action against any injustice; unlike us they get scared easily”.

Recently, *Sharada* has been made the ‘Head Girl’ of the school. She is very confident about performing her new duties. She is polite and well turned out teenager, who excels in sports. She enjoys playing basket -ball and cricket. She has also participated in the state and national level competitions; she pays equal attention to her studies.

- ii. *Neeru* (name changed) lived in one of the slums of Lucknow, not very far from the school. She lived there with her parents, three sisters and one brother. She joined Prerna in class 6, but was taken out of school in class 9, to get her married. She was married off, by her parents, in 2009. They had promised to her that the husband’s family will allow her to appear for annual examinations. But on the day of her examination the husband’s family hid her practical note book, which she had to submit for evaluation in the examination. She said she was very upset but somehow she managed to get out of the house and appeared for the examination. After hearing her story, the school gave her a waiver for her practical book, which

she could not submit. Her husband turned out to be an alcoholic and he abused her often. She remained in this abusive marriage for nearly five years. Frustrated with the ill treatment she received, she re-joined the school in 2014. While taking care of her two -year old daughter, she completed class 12. She filled up the form on her own and prepared for the exams without anybody's knowledge. She fights her tears as she recalls her agony; she said that, "It was a very, very difficult time for me. Principal Madam and some of my teachers in the school, supported and encouraged me to go on despite all odds, and to complete my schooling. Sahni madam's words keeps me motivated through the time of distress. She had said to me that there is no age for studying, if you want to really do it'. She was also the person told me that if I will put up with this *atyachaar* (persecution) then I will be a party to it". After 2014, her life has changed for the better. She attributes whatever she has achieved today to the teachers in Prerna in general and to the Principal in particular. She said that, "It I their continuous support and encouragement, against all odds, which made me feel that I can do anything and nothing is impossible".

While still working in the school, *Neeru* is pursuing a Bachelors' Degree Program. She cooks in the morning and has also been helping the Principal with her administrative duties in the office for the last four years, for which she is separately paid; she is thus, able to earn reasonably well. She shared with us that her daughter is also studying in the preparatory class at the Study Hall. Her in-laws have been pressurizing her to give them everything that she earns, but she told them firmly, that, "there is no question of giving my earnings to you. I will never do that" She aspires to enrol into the Nursery Teacher's Training (NTT) Course at the Foundation and wants to become a school teacher.

These are stories of just two of the many girls who have overcome their problems and challenged societal norms to make a better life for themselves. Their education at Prerna Girls School, a pioneering initiative of The Study Hall Foundation (SHEF), in Gomti Nagar, of Lucknow city in the state of Uttar Pradesh, has a huge contribution towards empowerment of these girls.

2. Prerna Girls School: Its Genesis and Aims

Prerna Girls' School, which is one of the several units sponsored by SHEF, aims to provide education based on the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) curriculum to girls from the neighbouring urban slums, who work to support their families. This school, which is run in the afternoon shift to facilitate girls who work in the forenoon, functions from the same premises in which The Study Hall, an elite co-educational school functions in the forenoon shift, thus ensuring optimal utilisation of the infrastructure and facilities. We were told that 55 percent of the enrolled girls in Prerna work as domestic help. Ms Urvashi Sahni, the founder of SHEF, primarily has the vision to provide not only quality education but more importantly empower the girls by using critical feminist pedagogy so that they are enabled to examine the existing gendered power structures. She is of the view, that just providing access to education or by developing literacy and numeracy skills, will not lead to empowerment. She said that, "gender equality cannot happen if the education does not make girls' empowerment and gender equality a central focus." (Sahni, 2018).

The school, which was established in 2003, is located in an area where elite residences exist side-by-side with low-income shacks, constituting an urban slum. The Principal of Prerna shared that, when the school was set up, there were only 80 girls and 2 teachers. She had joined Prerna School as a Science teacher. In 2006 she became the Principal of the school since the numbers had increased to 250. Initially, it had classes from pre-school to class 5 and the teachers paid home- visits in the neighbouring slums to get the girls enrolled. From 80 girls in 2003, the school presently has 880 students enrolled, with an average of 35 students in each class and 16 teachers. The drop-out rate according to the Principal is only 3 to 4 percent.

The Study Hall Foundation

Study Hall School: An English medium co-educational secondary school affiliated to the national CBSE board.

Perna Girls School & Perna Boys School: Both schools are the pioneering efforts of the SHEF which focus on education of the underprivileged children.

Digital Study Hall (DSH): The outreach and research wing of SHEF focuses on production of video content to disseminate best practices in classroom teaching.

Aarohini Initiative: Aarohini Initiative is a teachers training program that imbues teachers with the mindset and tools to spread the Critical Feminist Pedagogy to the girls and mobilize their communities as to effectively create long term change.

India's Daughter Campaign (IDC): IDC is an annual campaign which engages teachers, students, civil society and girls' education leaders in the discussion on the importance of providing a safe space for girls to learn. The campaign is aimed at collaborating with government representatives, civil society leaders and nonprofits in the state of Uttar Pradesh (India) to put forward a united front against child marriage.

Development Of Self Through Interaction - DOSTI: An integrated initiative for children with special needs, which started in 2005.

Vidyasthali School: This is a co-educational school established in 2005 with an aim to bring quality education to rural areas.

Center for Learning (CFL): Students that have diverse interests like sports, arts, music and are focused on building a career and purpose in life around these genres, are the one who come to CFL. In addition, slow learners with mild learning disabilities are also supported, with special focus on activity based learning.

Non-formal Education Centers (NECs): These are hubs of transformative efforts. Located in and around Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), the centers educate and equip out-of-school children by pacing their learning with an aim to transition them to formal schooling.

The Study Hall College: Expanding our universe of care, SHEF has extended its arms upwards into higher education this year. The Study Hall College, a high quality undergraduate degree college, is affiliated to The Lucknow University

Nursery and Primary Teachers' Training (NPTT): Started in 2015, this program is designed for those interested in acquiring skills to successfully become a skilled school teacher for the preschool and primary level.

The school has provided 300 cycles, to the students who come from a longer distance, to facilitate their participation. In addition to this, a free bus service has been provided the girls from an orphanage, to help them access education at Prerna. Education is however not provided free to all; there is a minimum school fee which the Principal told us is, “considered a commitment fee, based on the belief that anything that comes free is not valued that much; but if they pay however small the amount is, the person paying it, makes a commitment and is more likely to feel more responsible and respected.”. For some girls who are not able to pay for the uniform etc. There are opportunities to work in the school for four hours after 9 a.m. For the work, the girls paid in money and they get uniform and books at subsidized rates. At the time of our visit, we were told that 25 such girls were working at the school.

The school is headed by the Principal and assisted by a Vice-Principal and they are responsible for recruiting teachers, monitoring and mentoring them, admitting students, managing daily operations of the school, planning and organizing of school meetings. The management style is democratic, collaborative and consultative in nature, which places the needs of the girl students at the centre of the organizational structure. The Director of the school provides the academic leadership and mentorship.

The teachers are all graduates, but not necessarily trained in education. They have all volunteered to come and teach the girls in the afternoon and thus bring with them a certain level of social commitment. As part of the induction process, they are given an initial orientation to the school’s mission and all new teachers are made to observe senior classes of good teachers as a demonstration of good practice for the first week, as a part of their initial training. They also prepare lesson plans which are checked by the Principal. A two days special orientation is also given to them on ‘critical pedagogy’ by Dr Sahni herself with a focus on relationships and on supporting a ‘universe of care’ or caring at all levels as per the espoused philosophy of the school.

The school runs classes from preparatory to 8. The school follows the UP Board syllabus and thereafter prepares the girls for class 10 and 12 of the National

Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) examinations. The Principal explained that the school aims at providing a “truly transformative education” with the objective of “raising girls’ expectations and consciousness, enabling them to engage in critical and creative thought”. She believes that “it is important to enable the students to describe their reality, critically examine and analyze it, reflect, criticize, debate, inquire and negotiate it, to transform their lives in an equitable manner”. The NIOS curriculum provides the required freedom, flexibility and time to teachers and girls to work at these broader curricular goals of helping them develop life skills, and not let education be limited to skills of literacy and numeracy.

3. The Prerna Students: Social and Family Context

Like *Sharada* and *Neeru*, most of the girls who are enrolled in Prerna, belong to marginalised communities, many belong to the constitutional categories of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). They live in the neighbouring slums around the school, with a little more than 40% of their co-habitants living in thatched huts and temporary homes, without access to basic amenities such as sanitation, electricity and clean drinking water. Most of the girls who come to Prerna, generally work as domestic help and are first-generation learners, as their parents are non-literate or have limited education. As the Prerna web site describes

“All girls at Prerna have scary and inspiring stories. These girls have brutal home lives. Lives, that are hard, violent, abusive, powerless and very poor. Many of these girls are not touched at home, except to be beaten. Their fault is being female, lower caste and poor. Not much further you can fall in the universal power ladder. They have no control over their lives, their earnings and their bodies. Yet they engage in their studies, come to school regularly and put in the work they need to do. This is their hope to get a new life... to fulfil a dream that they have dared to have. There are many more such strong girls cleaning someone else’s home and dishes, supporting an alcoholic father and getting married off at 13.”

Thus, living in slums, these girls grow up in a grim, complex home environment where early marriage, domestic violence and sexual abuse is prevalent and accepted as the norm, often by families themselves. In addition, the burden of household work and sibling care are other prominent challenges faced by them. Most girls are subjected to the structural violence inherent in caste and poverty ridden, patriarchal communities and are therefore 'at risk' because of the context from which they come.

Some narratives of the girls, whom Prerna succeeded in rehabilitating and thus, saving from this reality, provide a glimpse into their lives at home. *Savita* (name changed) narrated her story, she said that, "I came to Prerna on my own. I was the eldest among three siblings. My father used to beat my mother. He left her and went away. My mother too went away to the village. Left with my siblings to fend for ourselves, I turned to a neighbourhood 'Dadi ji' (grandmother) who became our guardian and supported me. I took up a room on rent, and worked in nearby houses to support our education. My two siblings are studying in Prerna and I have given intermediate examination from there. I am doing graduation along with working as a tele-monitor at the Foundation. I feel that I have achieved something on my own and that I can do so much more, to make my own career and support my siblings".

Bijwanti (name changed), another girl from a neighbouring state, narrates her story to us. She says that, "My father was a labourer. My father worked in Lucknow, so my mother, my two sisters and I lived there with him. I was studying in Prerna, where I excelled in studies and so was appreciated by my teachers. I was hopeful of doing well in my life. Then suddenly one day my father was murdered, and with no source of earning, we were forced to go back to our state. There, my elder brother harassed us all and made us work as labourers. He burned my books and he would not allow me to study. We were so unhappy, that I persuaded my mother to escape from there, and come back to Lucknow, with my sisters. My mother agreed to this. We came back to Lucknow with no money in our pockets. All I had was trust in the School, that it would help me, and so we came straight to meet the Principal Madam. She, along with other

teachers, gave us rations for the first few days till we got work and we found a shack to stay. We enrolled in Prerna once again. I am good at studies and now I work in a house as domestic help in the morning and come to study in the afternoon. My mother works as a helper in Prerna. I am looking forward to studying further and becoming a teacher."

4. A Glimpse into a Day at Prerna School

The school runs from 1.30 pm to 5.30 pm in the afternoon, on all weekdays. During our visit we observed that most of the students walked to the school or came on cycles from their homes, wearing school uniforms. The day started with an Assembly led by the Principal, who recited a prayer which was repeated by all the students. Students then read newspaper headlines, recited poems or presented small skits or speeches. Then they all went to their respective classes. We observed that the girls were very happy at the school and had a very busy day. They were occupied with lot of activities, both outside and inside the classrooms. In the later part of the day students were seen participating in games, drama, music, martial arts and other co-curricular activities. There were six periods with a break in between during which the younger girls are served nutritious high-protein, mid-day meal. The meal is served by the older girls, and it is provided free of cost to the student. This meal is sponsored by DiDi's, another unit of SHEF.

We had the opportunity to sit at the back of the classes and observe the classroom processes. We observed a preparatory class, class 8 and class 10 of Prerna. The preparatory class was a multi-age group of children above five years of age, who had been out of school. There were 37 children in all and the teacher was teaching them English. The teacher was following a whole class approach, she was using a bilingual mode, with children seated in rows and working primarily on the blackboard. Children were very responsive and proactively interacting in the class. It was a revision class so the students knew most of what was being taught. The teacher said that she does not necessarily plan her classes, but has a broad sense of what she is expected to do.

Class 8 was again a very interactive class. The teacher was doing revision of the topics done earlier, and there was a visible rapport between the teacher and students. They seemed to be comfortable, enjoying the class and sharing their learning. The teacher was making special efforts to encourage those students who were having difficulties in understanding the concepts. She was telling them to study hard. 10 students of class 12 were discussing the topic of job satisfaction in the Political Science class, with special reference to choice of jobs and eligibility criteria. Once again the classroom processes were very interactive, with a focus on discussion. There was very little lecturing or reading from a textbook, and since most of the girls were working, there was a clear effort to relate the topic to their own lives. This enabled the girls to examine their own work situations and come up with personal experiences, making the entire classroom activity very meaningful and relevant for them. However, the teaching arrangement being in rows, some girls, the quieter ones, who were sitting at the back, were not adequately involved in the discussion.

5. Enabling Factors for Girls

a) Convenient School Timings Facilitate Participation

A significant factor facilitating girls' education, as conveyed through the Prerna experience, is the school timings. The afternoon shift allows the girls to work and supplement their respective family income and also fulfil their own dreams. Both the teachers and students emphasized that the timings was a major factor which influenced enrolment and retention of girls in the school. All the girls we spoke to were happy with these timings as it suited them well, "It was very convenient. We can work and earn money for the family and also complete our education from a good school." As also mentioned earlier, a low dropout rate of the school is the evidence of its success,

b) Low school fee and provision of financial support makes education affordable

It was quite clear from the narratives of the girls, the nominal school fees of Rs.100 and Rs.250 per

month for those studying in the elementary and secondary classes respectively, was found to be very affordable by them. At the same time, need based scholarships were provided to those who could not afford the fee. In addition, the Principal informed us that a scholarship of Rs. 5,000 is awarded to those students who finish class 12 successfully, without getting married, and intend to continue their studies by enrolling into a college degree programme. A scholarship of Rs. 20,000 is also awarded to Prerna alumnae who gain admission to a master's programme. Interest-free loans are also provided to students, who secure admission in an unaffordable MBA programme. Sahni (2018) writes that, "Prerna not only enhances social capital by providing financial support, but also opens up access to middle-class networks, which are often off limits to poor, lower-caste families." At the end of each year, the school also holds a formal convocation ceremony to honour the girls who graduate from grade 10 and grade 12, and also for girls who complete their Bachelor or Master degrees.

c) Provision of basic facilities and services caters to multiple needs

Good quality infrastructure of Study Hall, with its large well furnished classes, laboratories, open grounds etc are all available to the Prerna students in the afternoon. In addition to that, a healthy mid-day meal is provided to all children up to class 8, free of cost. These facilities encourage girls to enrol at the school and continue their education there. Arrangements are made to take care of the health needs of children. Periodic dental, medical and eye check-ups are organized for students. Medical-aid fund is also maintained to provide support to students when they suffer from any serious illness.

In addition to education, vocational training is provided to the girls from class 9. We were informed that every year, 25 girls get vocational training. The students thus, get the opportunity to intern in the science and computer laboratories, or assist at the reception desk, and library for 3 hours in the morning. The students are given Rs.1500 to Rs.3000 stipend per month. Career counselling is provided to the learners through a mentoring process, with the aim of helping them build a better life and plan ways to achieve their goals.

d) Bridge Course for Never Enrolled and Drop-outs enables learning

An important feature of the school, especially for those girls who have either never been to school or dropped out at some time, is the provision of a bridge course. It was interesting to note that the bridge course is managed and run by a few students, under the guidance of the Principal. Those girls who had gone through the course found it to be, "very beneficial, useful, and an important factor in staying in the school". This equipped them with the competences required to follow the school curriculum later on. The teachers informed us that the school had developed the material for conducting the bridge course on 2 levels. Level 1 covers the course of classes I to III, whereas level 2 covers classes IV and V. After this, the students are put in an accelerated learning programme, in which they are mainstreamed into age-appropriate classes.

e) A Flexible and need based curriculum that foster a 'Universe of Care'

Perna Girls School is affiliated with the UP State Board of Examination and thus, follows their syllabus upto class 8. In the early grades the curriculum focuses on reading, writing, and numeracy skills. Hindi and English are the first and second languages, respectively. Curriculum is enriched with sports, martial arts, music, art and a strong focus on drama. Empowerment classes are also conducted from class 3. Computer classes are provided from class 4. However, considering the constraints faced by the girls at home and the fact that many of them work in the morning hours, after class 8, the school has opted for the National Open School curriculum, which has a flexible examination pattern, where the girls get to learn at their own pace. They get a number of chances to appear for the examinations. The Principal and the representatives of the SHEF gave this rationale for opting for a need based curriculum. At the secondary stage the girls are encouraged to use the internet, make digital movies and use the electronic medium to express themselves and expand their connections with others in the world.

Teachers were seen to use pedagogic processes that are engaging, interactive, participatory and

activity-based. The focus was on girls' learning, within and outside of the classrooms. Teaching thus, included many activities like games, role-play and drama, with a mix of formal and informal performances. We were told that the school also got the students to engage in critical literacy, through journal writing, script and poetry writing on issues related to gender. There was evidence of age-appropriate feminist stories, poetry and plays by students.

The teachers also made detailed social profiles of students, based on their interviews with students and parents, thereby enabling all teachers to give special attention to the specific learning needs of the girls. We observed that teachers were cognizant of every girl's background and they showed genuine empathy towards their learners. One of the teachers we interviewed felt that, "it is important to respect the girls and build a trusting relationship with them. They must feel positive about their own identity." Another teacher emphasized that "we have to and we do respond to things going on in their lives. We show them that we care and are always there to guide them, but the choices and decisions they make are theirs." This was further corroborated by the girls we had later spoken to. One of the girls shared that, "it is easy for us to share our problems with our teachers. This helps us to acquire the necessary information about many things and helps us in finding ways of facing a particular challenge. Often when we intervene in the community, we are not listened to and we fall back on the support of our teachers, which is always available to us." As often mentioned by the Perna Principal and teachers, "we all work collectively towards ensuring a 'universe of care'".

f) A gendered, rights-based curriculum, critical feminist pedagogy and critical dialogue transforms and empowers girls

A special feature of Perna school's curriculum is its dominant emphasis on a right- based curriculum, with a focus on gender equity. A conscious attempt is made, to provide a course on gender related issue that is expected to contribute to the girls' empowerment. This course is based on needs, arising in their lives while living in the urban slums. This objective is addressed by the weekly classes of *Critical Dialogue*, which is part

of their supportive pedagogy. This component is introduced in the school curriculum from class 6. As emphasized by Sahni (2018), "The goal of this class is to help the girls deconstruct and then reconstruct their patriarchal subjectivities and enable them to relocate themselves in a mentally reordered world". In this class of critical dialogue, which is scheduled every Saturday, the teachers conduct focused discussions on issues that affect the lives of the girls such as, child marriage, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and specific issues like menstruation. As part of empowerment classes, the students also interview adults and adolescents in their community on various topics, carry out processions etc which are put up in the form of a report or play.

The Principal of Perna has been part of the school for 13 years; she shared that, "when I had joined the school, I just used to focus on teaching the subjects. Then I slowly realised we were not really doing much to improve the lives of these girls, and help them to deal with their real-life problems. So I started talking to the teachers and we decided to understand the girl's better in terms of their backgrounds, issues and needs. Then we started the discussion on different topics that affect their lives and so, we shifted our focus from only 'learning' to their lives and ways of empowering them".

Critical Feminist Pedagogy

According to the Principal, the school's critical feminist pedagogy is inspired by Paulo Freire's idea of critical pedagogy and motivated by the goal of gender equality. The aim is to encourage the girls and other subordinate groups to learn to critically examine and understand the social and political conditions of their lives, the systemic causes of their oppression and collectively find ways of strengthening themselves, resisting forces of domination and transforming their lives. It is defined as a pedagogical practice with the goal of raising girls' critical consciousness regarding oppressive social conditions and norms, patriarchal power structures and consequent gender relations that impact their lives.

She further explained that the 'critical feminist pedagogy' is integrated into the school curriculum through different activities such as critical dialogues, drama and critical literacy. The aim is to make students aware that they have a right to equality and can and should be responsible for deciding what they want to do with their lives, so as to free themselves from the oppressive social practices and expectations." However, the Principal conceded that, "actually putting all this into practice is not easy; it is a slow learning process even for the teachers."

Critical Dialogue: We observed a critical dialogue session being conducted with ten class 12 girls. The theme was "rituals in the family". The discussion included how the rituals emerge in a society and how nobody questions their need and how these then become an inseparable part of a culture. The class started with an activity in which, the girls were divided into two teams and were asked to stand in an uncomfortable position. This activity aimed to highlight the experience of following rituals, including our unquestioned compliance, role of power structures in establishing those rituals, etc. The theme of rituals was discussed in detail and an effort was made to link it to other social attitudes and practices related to clothes, freedom, decision-making, marriage, etc. Girls were seen to participate actively in the activity. The message was clear to the girls that they need to question and discuss everyday practices. They should not accept any social practice or attitude passively, especially if when it is discriminates against women.

Over the years, the use of critical dialogue, as an empowering tool, has been extended to other educational institutions, such as Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan etc. Study Hall Foundation provides them training and technical support.

The critical dialogues classes were organised are in the form of discussions which teachers facilitate amongst groups of students on issues that directly or indirectly affect their lives. The dialogues aimed at making girls critically aware of their social and political reality, focusing on various aspects of their wellbeing such as issues of child marriage, domestic

Voices of Girls – How they have changed because of Prerna?

"Prerna has taught us a lot. Education is given in every school and so are certificates when the student passes, but here something extra is given. You are somebody here. The teachers not only teach but also guide us, tell us about our rights and also what is right and what is wrong. The teachers are more like friends and always there to help us when we need." (class XII student)

"This school is different. We were told about our aims, what we can do and what I like is that we also do social work and help others like us. We discuss our problems in groups. It was so interesting when we conducted door to door visits and spoke to families about issues like child marriage, importance of educating their girls and motivating girls who are not studying to join schools". (class XI student)

"We share our personal problems here; we can also do our jobs in the morning because the school timing is convenient. The fees are also less. The school goes beyond giving bookish knowledge, as we do a lot of practical work and many things related to our own lives are discussed. My thinking has changed about so many things in life; it has really expanded." (class IX student)

"My parents were very strict as they did not want me to go anywhere before or after school and also not after 6pm in the evening. To school and back. No school trips, parties or going with friends. I was very sad and upset and did not know what to do. It was Urvashi madam who told us how to talk to them and convince them through reasoning. Now they allow." (Class VIII student)

I always had to do what I was told by my parents. After coming to Prerna I was told about my rights and I started talking, which for me was a big change. I have learnt from our critical dialogue discussions and other activities the way to get things done is to reason out and explain with examples and not rebel. (Class VIII student)

We need more schools like this, because we get an education that is according to our capacity and how to use different information with guidance of our teachers. My personality is developed because of so many different activities, especially sports. (Class VIII student)

"The critical dialogue sessions along with our expressing and sharing the difficult issues we face through drawings, role plays, dramas and literary projects have given me and my friends that opportunity and ways to look into our own lives, discuss and reflect, on what is happening in our lives critically, by ourselves and with my friends and teachers. This helps us a lot to understand and also deal with such issues. Another one shared that- my mother after seeing a play on child marriage done by our girls in school cancelled my elder sister's marriage. Most of the girls were of the opinion that there are some issues that are tough to handle and deal with and it is difficult to change people's views easily. (Class 12 student)

violence, and sexual abuse amongst others. The approach adopted was participatory, with students learning to question established traditions, practices and social norms independently, give voice to their thoughts, express their views, using their own experience and feelings as a valid source of knowledge. The teacher's role is that of a facilitator, where she asks probing questions, thereby enabling girls' to reflect, think and question.

The teachers had shared that in addition to the use of critical dialogue, some arts projects were also taken up, which serve to be an effective means of enabling girls. By drawing images on paper or through dramatization in class they share their myriad fears about being girls. It further, helped them to discuss issues, reflect on their own lives and the underlying social-cultural factors governing their lives in their society. A teacher clarified that, "these dialogues and activities are meant to result in promoting greater understanding about different issues and the development of voice and agency in girls, resulting in action." The teacher who facilitated one such session which we attended, told us that, the discussion "focuses on power structures in a patriarchal society, issues that emerge out of them and the effect it has on the lives of the girls."

The student's responses corroborated that as well. They felt that the dialogues helped them to become well informed. It encourages them to understand, share, reflect on and ultimately challenge, resist and overcome many conventional notions and practices prevalent in society related to masculinity and femininity. As put very succinctly by one of the girls, "critical dialogue has completely changed my thinking about so many important issues of my life. We get to know a lot, we think better, reflect, analyse and then decide what to do. There is no textbook language used; it is practical stuff all related to our lives. Because of these discussions most of us have opened up and talk freely about issues like menstruation or being beaten by father. We discuss things without feeling embarrassed." (class 12 student)

6. Enabling Factors for Teachers

Most of the 16 teachers working in Prerna are graduates. Most of them were home-maker with children. They have the urge to do something meaningful for society. The afternoon shift is a boon for them as well, since they can fulfil their household responsibilities in the forenoon. Interestingly, the school is open to recruiting teachers without academic qualifications, as the school believes in training the teachers 'on the job' in its own philosophy and vision. Thus, Prerna provides continuous training to teachers by way of workshops, with a strong focus on gender training and critical feminist pedagogy. In particular, the focus is on getting teachers to view and treat the girls with respect, to understand their life conditions with sympathy and empathy, without looking down upon them or underestimating their capabilities.

The teachers are initially given 3 day training, and then this is followed up with thrice a week meetings with the Principal, during which she discusses challenges they may be facing. A senior teacher is designated as a mentor for every new teacher and the two are expected to meet every month, or as and when required. There is also continuous mentoring by the Principal and when by the Director, which is valued by the teachers, "as it helps us use critical dialogue and engage with girls on different ideas and issues."

Some of the teachers shared that, over the years, they have grown, changed, developed and benefitted in many ways under the umbrella of the SHEF, as it provides the required support and inputs to them in realizing the vision and goals of the school. The Foundation has created an ecosystem according to them wherein every unit continuously supports each other. What are the key factors that enable the teachers to play the role expected of them so effectively? We try to identify a few from our short visit to Prerna school.

a) On the Job Capacity Building and Mentoring of Teachers

'On the job' training and mentoring provided to all new teachers, has been found to be very effective in enabling them to function well as teachers in the Prerna context. It is derived from the school's own philosophy and commitment towards gender equity and critical feminist pedagogy. The focus of these capacity building programs and mentoring is on changing the mind set and attitude of teachers and enabling them to adopt

the philosophy of the school in their classroom transaction. This is done through information sharing and discussions on gender related issues, such as domestic violence, abuse, early marriage etc.

Observation of classes by senior teachers is also an effective training strategy; it provides opportunities for modelling teacher behaviour. In addition, leadership training was being provided by Ms. Sahni, which involved teachers to work on projects, self-appraisal, presentations and discussions and on actually demonstrating pedagogies to be used in the classroom. The teachers acknowledged that easy access to the Principal is a big support.

b) Teacher autonomy – A facilitating factor

A significant factor highlighted by the teachers on 'What Works for Teachers' was 'teacher autonomy' and the degree of flexibility available to them. A facilitating factor for teachers is the NIOS curriculum, which is flexible, so it does not impose on them the pressure of completing the syllabus, as is the case with regular teachers. This provides them the space and time to work on building relationships with the students, getting to know each student and engaging them in critical discussions and dialogue. Each teacher has the freedom to adopt her own pace and approach towards transaction of the curriculum, while retaining the focus of the school's philosophy on engaging children in critical thinking and reflection on gender issues.

c) Universe of care - A web of close and caring relationships

In the course of our visit, we repeatedly heard the phrase '*universe of care*', which is part of the core philosophy of the Prerna School and Study Hall Foundation. The idea of '*universe of care*' is that each individual is expected to care for others, each unit for other units and each individual is responsible for the other. The Principal shared that the teachers consistently support each other. One teacher had to undergo major surgery but she was avoiding it, since she had no one to take care of her. The other teachers got to know about this issue and they took up the responsibility of accompanying her and supporting her during the surgery and through the recovery. The Principal provides an open house access to all teachers and girls, if and

when they want to come in and discuss an issue. This was visible to us while we were interviewing her. The teachers in turn have regular dialogues with the girls, share their own problems with the girls to encourage them to gain their confidence and confide in them. Teachers enabled the girls to help find solutions to their problems. They give them freedom and opportunity to share anything with them. They say that, "Every effort is made to encourage the development of teacher-student bond. The teacher said, "Needs to be cool and patient and always lively and smiling. There should be no space for corporal punishment".

According to the teachers, the capacity building programs in Prerna place the greatest importance on developing a strong teacher-student relationship. A bond, based on mutual respect, responsiveness, acceptance, empathetic understanding and care for the girls,, should guide their work as an educator. The students called their teachers '*aunty*' and teachers calling the seniors '*aunty*' as well.. This removes the traditional hierarchical distance between teachers and students and also between colleagues. The Principal and other teaching staff believe that the culture of care and the feeling of connectedness they have with the girls, is one of the major factors responsible for the success of Prerna in terms of retention, completion, transition of girls and their achieving the desired learning outcomes.

The teachers were also quite clear about what their goals were, and what they wanted to do for the girls. One teacher said that, "the girls should be educated but more importantly they should be able to lead a better quality of life on their own terms". The Principal added that the teachers learn about their students' personal lives through the critical dialogue sessions and they also share their own personal experiences wherever they feel it fits and would be useful. The girls and teachers are thus in a way co-constructors of the 'knowledge, which guides them to work towards living their lives to the fullest.

d) Familiarity with the girls' social background and community engagement sensitizes the teachers

The teachers visit the families of the girls. Sometimes they take they accompany the students

home. They visit their community to create social awareness, address specific challenges faced by the girls during their work with the community, and also, to encourage other out of school girls to enrol in the school. The Principal shared with us that they especially visited the girl's families at the time of establishment the school. Teachers at that time conducted visits to the slum areas near the school, motivating parents to send their children to Prerna and emphasizing the importance and value of education for their girls. She said that, "It was difficult and not at all easy to persuade the parents to send their daughters to our school so we had to make a number of visits; and even then only a few did. Today there is a demand from the parents to increase for the number of seats." Teachers shared that, "even today we visit the homes whenever it is required. When the girls have any problems then we talk to each student individually and if the problem cannot be resolved, we go to the mentor."

The teachers were also found to be monitoring their students' learning and attendance very closely. The importance given to attendance monitoring was highlighted by the Principal who elaborated upon the measures taken to ensure regular attendance. She said that, "if any student is absent for more than two or three days, the concerned teacher calls the parents to inquire. She also asks the girls who live nearby, to find out why the student is absent, and if required the teacher visits the home of the student". The teachers also help and guide the girls in pursuing further studies, finding worthwhile jobs and becoming economically independent.

d) Clear vision and a sense of purpose- A larger goal of empowerment

There is a clear and visible social gap between the teachers and their students, so the teachers are constantly mentored to ensure that there is no bias or discrimination in their interactions with the girls. Teachers are encouraged, "to be constantly on the learning mode and they say "it's the children who empower us". The teachers had the sense of a social mission and commitment to teaching and developing confident individual capable of critical thinking, questioning traditional roles and attitudes and of freeing themselves from oppression. Following indicators are used to assess the empowerment of students: development of a

'voice', ability to resist child marriage, transition to higher education, ability to speak out against discriminatory social norms, advocate against domestic violence, ability to find employment and participate in decisions regarding their marriage.

e) Community partnership – Disseminating the vision

It is acknowledged that the girls cannot be 'empowered' without trying to also address and reform their social contexts. Taking the parents and families along is critical to the girls' empowerment. So the parents of new students are given an orientation about the school goals, its philosophy of empowerment and its right-based approach to education. The school works closely with parents, community organizations (local women's group), child helpline (regional child protection organization) and government organizations like the local police and therefore, local community is part of the organizational structure of the school. Parents are invited for various workshops to discuss issues like, absenteeism, irregular attendance, gender discrimination, child marriage, domestic violence, sexual abuse, etc. Workshops are organized with the support of community organizations like child protection services, women rights organisation (*Suraksha*) and local police. Due to the prevalent traditional, patriarchal attitudes of parents this becomes more challenging than engaging with girls. A greater and more sustained effort is required to change their notions, at this stage of their lives.. On occasions when the girls have tried to intervene in their community matters like life beating or child marriage, they have been rebuffed. The girls then had to seek the teachers' help to re-intervene and that made a difference. Thus, the girls' reliance and confidence in the teachers is also a plus factor in framing the teachers' level of commitment in a reciprocal manner.

f) Responsive need based curriculum transaction and effective mentoring scaffolds

The teachers' priorities, as conveyed to them by the management, are clear to them, teachers reiterated that, " for us, following the syllabus and getting girls to achieve learning outcomes is not the only or the most important thing in our job; we would rather, like to see the girls happy, motivated

and keen to learn. We want to see them become confident human beings. While teaching, we try to use context specific materials and examples from their lives to illustrate concepts and provide information. I think this is necessary and critical so that the girls understand better, and obviously will then learn faster and more easily.”

Perna’s activity-based curriculum, also provides a lot of scope to use drama and other cultural activities as powerful pedagogical resources. This helps in increasing the active participation of teachers and students, thereby reducing the gap between them. Teachers feel that, “We have slowly become conscious about the importance of developing an ethics of care which is based on respecting and responding to students’ needs and issues, both formally and informally. To realize this, the facility for us of being continuously mentored and being able to share experiences with other teachers helps us a lot.”

Not only were they effectively mentored but the teachers themselves saw their own role as that of, “mentors, counsellors, guides and even someone the girls can confide in and as someone with whom the girls can share their problems and innermost feelings”. As one of them explained that, “going beyond the traditional role of the teacher was possible only because we were oriented to this kind of philosophy and continuously mentored by others, particularly the Principal, and also as we were given the freedom and autonomy to do as we wished by the Principal.” Thus, even though the teacher clearly has the authoritative role in the classroom, the attentive, listening and responsive pedagogic stance of the teacher makes the classroom more participatory and democratic (Sahni, 2018).

In Conclusion

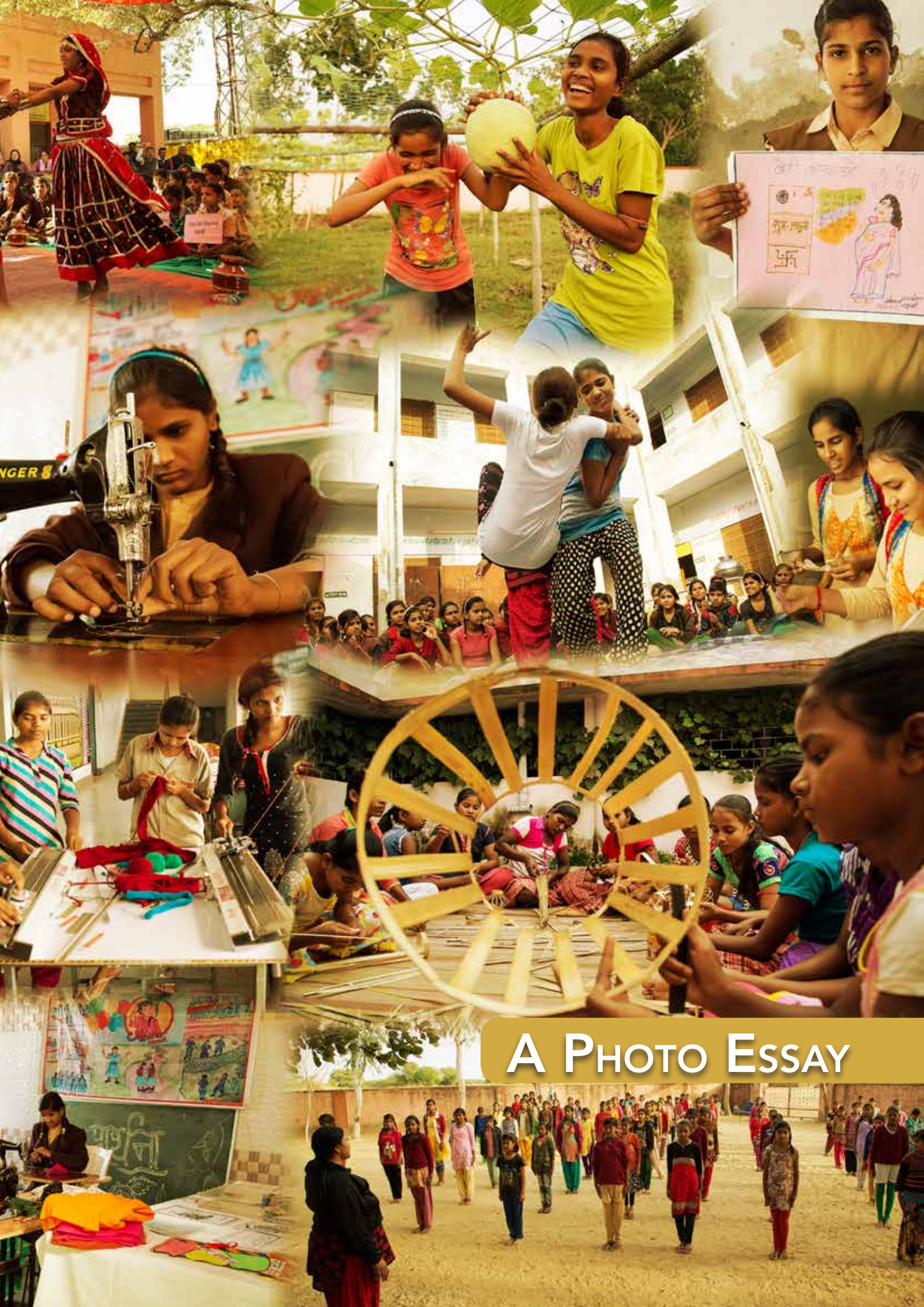
Perna school, case study gives a very powerful message of care, enablement and empowerment of girls, situated within a non-negotiable respect for each of them as individuals in their own right, who must find their voice and place in society. It also conveys the message that it is not just ensuring literacy and numeracy that is required to transform the girls as empowered individuals, but a much broader vision for them of education that must rest on the “critical feminist pedagogy and critical dialogue” which makes the girls confident enough to question traditional views and practices that are discriminatory for them and thus emerge stronger and truly educated.

The teachers shared that a few students even got a one year scholarship from the U.S. Government to attend a community college in California. Further, one of the alumni of Perna supported her older sister to get out of a very abusive marriage and handled all court proceedings and paper work herself. They reported that the school had enabled them to survive the unholy combination of poverty and gender, to stay and complete school and emerge empowered (Sahni, 2018, p. 30). The progress made by girls had also brought about change in their household atmosphere, as some of the fathers were found to be reducing their drinking and abusive behaviour as they want to live up to the respect earned by the children for their family (Sahni, 2018, p. 26).

Impact of Prerna on the Lives of Students

- **Enrolment:** From 30 girls in 2003 the enrolment has increased to 1000 girls in 2017.
- **Attendance:** The average attendance in the school is 83.6%, compared to the state average of 54.7 % (at elementary level) and a national average of 71.1%.
- **Drop-out Rate:** Across the classes, the overall student drop-out rate between 2014 and 2016 was less than 8.14%
- **Learning Outcomes:** Across the classes, 96.9% students achieve grade-level learning and transition to the next grade. Prerna girls have achieved a 100 % pass record in both secondary and senior secondary levels, in every year except one – as against the national NIOS average of 50% and 43% respectively.
- **Life Outcomes:** 97.4% of the girls have transitioned to higher education. 9% have transitioned to a Master's program. 52.2% of graduates are employed. The average age at marriage of Prerna alumnae is 21.5 years and only one of them got married before 18.
- **Building Feminist Consciousness:** In a survey conducted by Prerna, students reported the following:
 - 65% said they had as much free mobility as their brother and 88% said they had the right to be as educated as their brothers.
 - 68% knew the legal age for marriage, for both boys and girls; 76% knew there was a law against child marriage.
 - 59% said they had an equal right as their brothers to the family wealth and property.
 - 56% said they would resist if they were forced into early marriage by their families.
 - 91% specified the age at which they would want to get married, averaging 23 years.
 - 86% planned to go to college and 80% said they had plans for their future careers.





A PHOTO ESSAY





CRITICAL REFLECTIONS FROM THE CASE STUDIES

Enablers and Barriers

Empowerment is the core of this research. Empowerment of adolescent girls studying in schools selected for the research as well as of the teachers who teach these girls. Insights have clearly emerged from the three powerful case studies that have been described in the previous sections.

To begin with, we will unearth what worked for the girls and then go on to reflect on what worked for the teachers as they all took this journey together towards empowerment.

The three case studies focused on the adolescent girls who belong to deprived, disadvantaged communities and families. The two KGBVs, *Potka* and *Taswariya*, are government residential programs for girls in tribal and rural areas respectively, whereas *Perna* is a day school started by a private organization for disadvantaged girls living in the urban slums of a big city, which is also the state capital. While they differ in the type of management, target group of girls being catered to, location and focus of the program, the review reveals that there are some factors common to all three school contexts, but also some specific factors applicable to each of them.

Girls' Empowerment

What really supported girls' empowerment was that they enrolled in, participated and completed the educational programs successfully. This was possible due to factors categorized as follows:

1. Access
2. Social
3. Quality
4. Life skills

1. Access

i. Provision of basic facilities

The most striking aspect of the KGBV residential schooling program which was found to motivate and enable girls to enroll, continue and complete their studies was the provision of basic facilities. The programs in *Potka* and *Taswariya*, provide a wide range of basic facilities that the girls' families cannot afford nor can have access to in their villages and home environment. According to the girls, the main attraction for the girls to enroll and subsequently continue in KGBV was the free hostel facility and all the benefits that come with it. Every girl is provided with uniform, bedding (a mattress and a bed) and other essential toiletries (soap, dental hygiene products, etc.). A number of girls emphasized that, if the hostel had not been there, they would not have been able to access education and nor would their parents have sent them to study. This was also echoed by the head teacher, warden and other teachers as one said that, "if the hostel facility is stopped, the students will not come."

The residential school provides them a clean and safe environment, nutritious daily diet, opportunities for exercise, leisure time activities and rest, quality formal schooling, which are all basic and necessary for their growth and all round development. In both the KGBVs, parents were extremely appreciative of all that was being given to their children and the reason they were very happy was because their girls, "did not have to commute to school from home" as some of them were previously doing in their villages. As one old man simply put it, "Now we have nothing to worry about as everything is located in one building and my child is secure."

Another related factor is the periodic health check-ups and medical care which is provided to girls through convergence with the Health Department. A health card is maintained for each girl to record their growth in terms of height and weight. Their health is monitored on a regular basis by teachers. All the teachers expressed the need for a vehicle in case of emergencies. If there is a medical emergency, in the absence of a vehicle, teachers have to call local vehicles to transport students to the health facility.

The KGBV scheme also provides the girls a maintenance fee and a stipend which goes into their bank accounts. A consolidated amount is given every month to each one of them along with supplementary teaching-learning material (TLM), stationery and other material. An amount is also given to each student when they pass out.

In the Perna day school, girls did not live in the institution's premises; they came there every day in the afternoon for a few hours. The school provides a free of cost, nutritious mid-day meal to all children up to class 8, which was considered an important factor and was liked by the girls. The school has also made arrangements for taking care of the health needs of children through periodic dental, medical and eye check-ups. In addition, medical-aid fund is also maintained to provide support to students when they suffer from any serious illness.

Another important element is the vocational training provided from class 9. Two of the girls who had passed out shared that every year, 25 girls get admitted to the vocational training. An opportunity is given to students to intern in the science and computer laboratories, assist at the reception desk, and help out in the library for three hours every morning. The students are given stipend ranging from Rs.1500 to Rs.3000 per month. Career counseling is provided regularly through a mentoring process with the aim of building each girl's aspiration for a better life and helping her plan ways to achieve them.

ii. Convenient school timings

Need based school timings in Perna have enabled girls to enroll and finish their school education while working. The school runs from 1.30 pm to

5.30pm in the afternoon. All the girls were happy with the timings as it, "suited them. Timings were very convenient; we can work to earn money for the family and at the same time complete studies in a good school." Another factor was free of cost nutritious food served to the girls which was sponsored by DiDi's.

iii. Making education affordable through financial support

At Perna, there is a nominal school fee of Rs.100 (elementary classes) and Rs.250 (secondary classes) per month. Need based scholarships were also provided to those who could not afford the fee. A scholarship of Rs. 5,000 is also awarded to those students who finish class 12 successfully, without getting married, and intend to continue higher education. If any of the Perna alumnae gain admission to a Master's programme a scholarship of Rs. 20,000 is awarded to them. Interest free loans are also provided to students, who secure admission in an MBA programme. These are all motivating factors for girls to pursue higher studies and a career.

iv. Provision of condensed bridge course

Girls joining the two KGBVs have either never enrolled in a school or are drop outs. In order to prepare them for the syllabus being transacted in regular classes at the elementary level, KGBV *Taswariya* has a provision of a condensed bridge course. After the enrolment formalities are completed the girls are take a pre-test. Based on their performance in the pre-test girls are admitted either to appropriate classes or to the bridge course if there is a need to develop subject specific competencies. This course runs for 4-5 months and then girls are gradually girls are mainstreamed into appropriate classes. In *Potka* the teachers conduct remedial classes after or before school hours for those girls who are not up to the mark. These initiatives were found to be useful and beneficial by the girls.

At the Perna school there was a provision of a bridge course which was managed by the students under the guidance of the Principal. Those girls who had gone through the course found it to be very beneficial, useful, and an important factor in staying on in the school. This prepared them better

to engage with the school curriculum. Learners felt more confident to engage with the syllabus and curricular demands. Once the girls, who are lagging behind, complete the bridge course, they are placed in an accelerated learning programme, and they are finally mainstreamed into age-appropriate classes.

v. A web of supportive relationships: Home away from home

The girls who come to the KGBV are from disadvantaged communities with completely different home environments and they mostly speak in their home languages. Most of them have either never been to a school or are drop-outs, who joined KGBV in class 6 with differing literacy levels, making the situation even more complex. The warden, head-teacher and all the teachers try their best to ensure that the girls are provided a safe, secure environment, where they are respected and valued.

Across the three institutions, the girls acknowledged the pivotal role their teachers have played in guiding and making them good students, and supporting their future plans. Students from all three schools unanimously shared that their teachers were very good at teaching, caring, supportive, and genuinely concerned about their well being. Students believed that their teachers had all the necessary qualities of a good teacher. It was essentially, the effort on the part of the teachers that helped some girls to continue in the KGBVs even when they missed their homes, food and village surroundings. The teachers were found to be helping the girls in not only studying well but developing their skills to deal with personal issues and problems, plan their future careers and have a better quality of life.

Some of the girls stated that the teachers also encouraged them to participate in different activities like self-defense, stitching and beauty culture. One girl said that, it was her teacher who motivated her to write poems and take part in dramas even though she was hesitant to talk in front of other girls.

According to teachers, the biggest challenge for them was to socialize the girls to life at school. The

difference is not only in terms of language but also in terms of food, cleanliness, toilet habits, personal hygiene, ways of dressing, grooming etc. which are all informed by more urban values and practices. Thus, they support the girls in developing food habits, learning to use toilet, maintain proper hygiene and follow socially acceptable behavior. The teacher's role in handling and taking care of girls from such backgrounds is noteworthy.

The older girls in *Potka* and in *Perna* shared that their teachers were very concerned about the fact that they should get appropriate opportunities after leaving school to pursue further studies and careers, and that they should not waste their education.

2. Social

i Community and Parental Support

The strong relationship and connect between the KGBVs and their respective School Management Committees (SMCs) is a positive variable influencing the smooth functioning of the KGBV, which is absolutely necessary for girl child empowerment and their holistic development. Parental and community support is critical if girls are to complete their education, pursue further studies and careers.

The KGBV management ensures that the SMC includes parent representatives who are concerned and aware of their girls' needs and requirements. The SMC is led by one parent elected as the chair. The KGBV warden organizes the meetings which are conducted on a regular basis. In these meetings members are apprised about the program, progress and any problems faced by the school. Major decisions including funding are routed through the SMC which is expected to meet once a month. The meetings provide the platform for some degree of community monitoring and quality control of the school by parent representatives and for teachers to get sensitized to and develop an understanding of the specifics of the social context from which the girls are coming.

3. Quality

i. Responsive Need based Education

The supportive attitude and continuous guidance provided by teachers in all three school settings has boosted the confidence and motivation levels of the girls to complete their education and move ahead in their lives on their chosen path. Establishing an emotional connection with someone in the school who can listen to their problems and guide them is critical and it is the teachers who play that part. In both the KGBV settings, the girls were appreciative about the special effort made by teachers to understand their home backgrounds, problems and lifestyle. This built a strong bond of trust, respect and love between the teachers and the students. The girls were generally of firm belief that if they face any problem the teachers are with them, will listen to them, support them and guide them till the very end. In *Potka*, girls belonged to tribal communities, the teachers' loving and caring attitude and concern went a long way in their adjustment to the totally new school environment. It also helped that, a few teachers were from their own tribal communities and spoke their language.

The way classes are conducted by teachers, is one of the key factors contributing to effective learning by the girls, and the good results achieved by students in both the KGBVs and Prerna school too. The strategies, practices and processes adopted by teachers were responsive to students' social needs. Teachers used interactive, participatory methods of teaching-learning. It was the positive responsive pedagogic strategies like, listening carefully to what students had to say, encouraging them to talk about their experiences and lives, encouraging questioning, pair and group work along with discussion which transformed the classrooms into positive learning spaces.

ii. An empowering gender- focused curriculum

Prerna Girls School follows the Uttar Pradesh state mandated syllabus. The curriculum is enriched with sports, martial arts, music, art and a strong focus on drama. An interesting feature of the curriculum is the integration of gender equality and empowerment from class 3. A conscious attempt has been made to provide a course on gender studies that would lead to girls' empowerment, based on the needs of the

students and their lives in the urban slums. As part of empowerment classes, the students interviewed adults and adolescents in their community on various topics, which is put in the form of a report or play.

Right based empowerment component is incorporated in the school curriculum from class 4, based on which empowerment classes are held once a week. The teachers who conduct focused discussions on various issues such as, child marriage, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and specific issues like menstruation.

Girls studying at the secondary level shared that they were encouraged to use the internet, make digital movies and use the electronic medium. This helps them to express themselves better and expand their connection with the world outside their school.

iii. Critical Feminist Pedagogy

In Prerna school, the critical feminist pedagogy is followed. It is defined as a pedagogical practice with the goal of raising girls' critical consciousness regarding oppressive social conditions and norms, patriarchal power structures and consequent gender relations that impact their lives. The Principal of the school explained that, the critical feminist pedagogy is integrated into the school curriculum through different activities such as critical dialogues, drama and critical literacy. The aim is to make students aware that they have a right to equality and they can, and should be responsible for deciding what they want to do in their lives and to free them from the oppressive social practices and expectations. But she said that putting this into practice was not easy. It was a slow learning process even for the teachers. The critical feminist pedagogy is based on the ideology that subordinate groups must learn to critically examine and understand the social and political conditions of their lives, the systemic causes of their oppression, and collectively find out ways of strengthening themselves, resisting forces of domination and transforming their lives.

Teachers use pedagogic practices and processes that are engaging, interactive, participatory and activity-based to facilitate learning of the girls within and beyond the classrooms. Teaching thus includes

activities, like games, role-play and drama. The students engage in critical literacy which includes journal, script and poetry writing on issues related to gender. There are age-appropriate feminist stories, poetry and plays.

iv. Flexible Examination System

The flexible examination pattern of the National Open School (NIOS) is followed at the Prerna school which is another factor that girls find convenient and suitable. Considering their life and work pattern this provides them the flexibility to appear in the exams at their own pace and as per their convenience.

4. Life Skills

i. Boosting life skills Development through Partnerships with Corporate and Civil Society

KGBV School- Corporate / Civil society partnerships ensure holistic development of girls and their empowerment along with possibilities of future employment. Public private partnership is a viable mode of providing support to girls culminating in their future employment. A number of vocational courses are made available to the girls, from which they can choose to participate in after the formal school hours. This is supplemented by career counseling that is provided to girls in their senior classes. These initiatives serve the dual purpose of helping the girls to make appropriate choices about their future careers as well as prepare them for it. Parents are also counseled on a regular basis to motivate their daughters and support their pursuit of higher studies, ITI trainings and career choices.

The district administration also makes attempts to establish linkages and create support networks with *Panchayat Samitis* and NGOs (*Beli Bodhan Wala* Trust, Kerala Public Trust, DBMS Trust) to build a strong support group for promoting the quality of KGBV functioning. The NGOs have provided benches, blankets and taken on the responsibility of repairing the old school building. An interesting feature observed was the support extended to girls in *Potka* by corporate such as the Indian Steel & Wire Products Ltd. (ISWP), Tata Steel and Hindustan Copper Limited. A special mention needs to be made of the ISWP that has played a key role in providing materials and trainers' fees for running

vocational courses such as archery, mushroom farming, stitching and kitchen gardening. Further they have provided 20 sets of computers and training through NIIT, 100 fans and a big water purifier. The most beneficial contribution has been the support extended to students selected by the polytechnic for their further study and future employment. Exposure to different vocational activities has enabled girls to see possibilities of a career path for themselves and be positive role models.

In KGBV *Taswariya*, the girls as well as all the teachers spoke highly about the work undertaken by *Sandhan*, an NGO in Rajasthan which was supported by Save the Children. *Sandhan's* main philosophy is that 'additionalities' are required to optimize the outcomes of the KGBV scheme. Before weaving in Life Skill Education (LSE) and gender issues in the overall curriculum of the KGBV the *Sandhan* representative tried to understand the girls' background, identified their strengths and what they could do. They made efforts to know about the girls' interests, systematically assess their learning levels and after that they evolved a multi-level teaching strategy. Periodic on-site support was provided by one *Sandhan* staff member to the KGBV every month. The basic aim was to promote creativity through music, dance, drawing and theatre. This included concerted efforts to motivate teachers and girls to explore new possibilities. Their basic approach is being realized through specific strategies such as: activating the *Meena Manch*, use of the library, promoting student centered teaching learning processes and promoting creativity through the arts, crafts and newsletters, systematizing games and organizing exposure visits for girls.

ii. Multiple Strategies for Life Skill Development

All three schools organize and conduct a variety of activities to provide situations and opportunities for every girl child's holistic skill development and empowerment. Some of the strategies adopted by the schools are highlighted below.

a. Self-defense training for girls

Since 2014-15, an interesting and beneficial activity being conducted in all the KGBVs of Rajasthan is the training imparted to girls in self-defense techniques.



The aim is enable the girls to protect themselves and take care of themselves in emergency situations. This training enables girls to understand the risks, strength of their body, importance of a healthy body, and possible responses in critical situations.

In order to ensure physical and psychological training of girls, female Physical Education Teachers (PETs) are trained by master trainers, in partnership with the Rajasthan Police Academy. Vocational training in tailoring and beauty culture, are also made available to girls.

b. Bal-Sansad

Bal-Sansad or child's cabinet which is a platform where girls discuss different issues, take decisions and try to manage and organize different things in the school. This builds their confidence, leadership abilities, communication skills and knowledge about various issues affecting them in their daily lives.

c. Legal Literacy Club: An empowering platform

The legal literacy classes conducted by one of the teachers include open debate and discussion. It was a forum which informed them about their rights, and issues like equality, superstitions, harmful societal practices, forms of abuse, etc. This platform aimed to promote critical thinking, reflection, experience sharing. It makes them conscious of the existing oppressive social norms, gender relations, and power structures.

d. *Meena Manch*: A platform for building and nurturing life skills

Another platform that was highlighted by all the teachers, girls, and state and district officials to be an empowering mechanism was the *Meena Manch*. These manchs have been inspired by the animation series of 'Meena' produced by UNICEF. It aimed to promote rights of the girl child. By involving girls, studying in classes 6-8, of selected schools of the state, the *Meena Manchs* aims is to enhance life skills, build confidence of the girls, create awareness in the community on the social issues viz. child marriage, dowry system etc. and motivate parents to send their daughters to school. For this purpose, many activities are conducted.

The *Manch* is a platform for nurturing and strengthening the life skills among girls. Issues are raised, discussed and sometimes enacted in front of others.. During the role plays girls link up their issues with the existing social scenario and reflect on what needs to be done to address them. They discuss different aspects of the issue at hand.. The *Meena Manch* had demonstrated a powerful impact on girls, eliciting their participation and positively shaping their attitude and behavior by transforming them into confident, bold thinking individuals. They are capable of relating the issues being raised through the *Meena Manch* with their own personal experiences. This process has been further strengthened by the *Meena* books, which have provided an exposure to the girls to ways of drawing, painting, use of colors and aesthetics at large. These activities have actually impacted the expression of girls.

As a result of the *Meena Manch* activities girls had taken on leadership in different activities such as: enrollment drives, group discussion on various gender and children related issues, managing *Meena Vachnalya* (reading library), tracking attendance, etc. To guide the girls, a person known as *Sugamkarta* is deputed at the school level to orient them about the working of *Meena Manch*.

In all the three settings competitions are periodically organized to provide opportunities to girls to take part and thus build their confidence and self-esteem. Important days are celebrated such as: Annual Sports Day and Annual Day. The Morning Assembly is led by girls and others take part in different activities in front of the whole school.

e. Critical Dialogue

One of the key features of the Prerna and *Taswariya* school programs, particularly the former was the use of critical dialogue which aims to empower girls in different ways. It helps girls become critically aware of their social and political reality, focusing on various aspects of their safety and wellbeing. The approach encourages the learners to think about and question established traditions, practices and social norms. Learners are asked to voice to their thoughts, express their concerns and feelings. The teacher's role was simply that of a facilitator, asking probing questions thereby enabling girls' to think and question.

The students felt that the dialogues have helped them to become well informed individuals who are capable of understanding their social reality. The reflection on their life and nuances issues surrounding it helps the girls gain multiple perspectives on the issue which in turns helps them in finding ways to address them.

The use of art projects was also found to be an effective means for learners to depict their fears of being girls. Using drawing and drama girls can express different issues, which are further interpreted and discussed by their peers and teachers in the classes. Learners learn to reflect on their lives and the underlying cultural and social conditions and power structures that subjugate some.

The girls from *Taswariya* who had participated in these sessions perceived that this forum had led to discussion on many issues which had never been talked about before with their families and villagers. Further teachers facilitated their thinking and reflection on how the issues could be resolved and dealt with, and more importantly questioning why these things happen. The sessions had led to girls becoming informed, confident and empowered individuals.

Teacher's empowerment

The four factors elaborated above, provided the thrust to empower the girls and were operationalized primarily by the teachers across all the three case studies. It is thus, most important to understand how the teachers were motivated and enabled to work with dedication and commitment as is highlighted in the previous section. They have been working in difficult school contexts where the work conditions are not favorable for the teacher especially those working the KGBVs. They live away from their families, often from their own young children, in the residential school complex located almost in wilderness, away from the towns with very poor road and phone connectivity. They do not have separate residential accommodation, they live with the girls in their dormitories, get salaries in many cases significantly lower than regular teachers and some have contractual jobs with very little leave provision which are not guaranteed to continue.

All the case studies reflected that the teachers were empowered to protect, encourage, inspire, teach and guide the girls under their care, take pride in the girls' achievements and give all their to work. This was possible due to the following factors:

1. Enabling school system
2. Professional support
3. Supportive communities

1. Enabling school system

i. Flexibility of time and space

The very nature of the residential programme in the KGBVs and the adoption of the NIOS system of evaluation in *Perna* allows teachers considerable flexibility in realizing learning outcomes and conducting various activities that directly or indirectly lead to empowering girls. The KGBV set up provides teachers the space to address and deal with students' remedial learning and cater to their personal needs. With no cooking or other routine household chores to be done by either, there is ample time available for realizing both learning and life outcomes.

ii. Teacher autonomy and democratic leadership

All the teachers across the three institutions appreciated the freedom they had in deciding their own course of action. Both the wardens specially pointed at the autonomy they had in planning and implementing key activities, deciding the roles and responsibilities of the staff and student learning goals and outcomes. The *Potka* warden highlighted the autonomy enjoyed by the staff to appoint local part time teachers, which helped in handling the senior classes especially after the Government of Jharkhand (GoJ) had expanded classes from class 8 to 10, and then further from 11 to 12. An interesting practice noted in KGBV *Potka*, was the rotation of the warden's position every three years which led to every teacher taking on a leadership role. This also led to enhanced team work, better cooperation between the staff and all the teachers taking on various roles and responsibilities.

The *Taswariya* warden highlighted the total support she got from the head teacher and other teachers in managing the girls and also in conducting

critical activities like the *Meena Manch*, critical dialogues and vocational courses. A practice of collective decision making was observed in all three institutions as all the teachers were involved in the process. The head teacher involved all teachers and the children's cabinet in decision-making of the school. She promotes transparency and believes in discussing issues with every teacher every morning after the assembly.

iii. Sense of a collective and family

The residential school program of the KGBVs provides girls an environment which is conducive to learning and that promotes their all-round development. The role of the teacher in residential schools is not restricted to teaching-learning, but it extends to support and nurture girls who are living away from their families. The teachers consider the school as their own collective space, a large family constituted of other teachers, support staff and students. This creates within them a sense of collective or community and interdependence with a shared vision and goals. Possibly it is the residential nature of the program which also allows for much closer interaction between teachers and between teachers and students. This leads to a sense of collective responsibility and a societal mission to transform the lives of the girls.

The teachers who come to work in the KGBV join for varied reasons, like getting employment wanting to get away from a hostile family environment. The sense of 'collective mission', develops only once they are within the setting of the KGBV.

In two of the case studies – KGBV *Potka* and *Taswariya*, teachers shared that their schools being residential, necessarily keeps them away from their families and other distractions. They live and eat together with other teachers and students. The teachers help each other in times of crisis.

iv. Sense of a social mission

There was also a sense of social mission that emerged. The teachers understand that the parents have left their daughters in their care because they trust them. So they feel responsible towards the girls. The teachers were also empathetic towards the girls who continue to learn despite facing multiple

challenges of poverty, discrimination, exploitation, illiteracy. This is reflected in their concern for the girls, not only for the time they are in the school, but even after that. Possibly this also gives the teachers a sense of self-worth unlike many teachers in day schools who treat their vocation as just a means of livelihood.

The wardens in both the KGBVs specifically highlighted that retention of those girls from the remotest villages, especially those belonging to the most backward tribes in *Potka* presented a major challenge. The girls come with a language deficit but in a few months they begin to speak Hindi. Their behavior, grooming, accommodation to the school culture shows subtle yet rapid change as reported by the teachers and possibly these indicators contribute to sustain the motivation and optimism of the teachers since they can 'see' themselves being able to make a difference in terms of their mission.

v. Reduction in teachers' workload through decentralization of responsibilities to students

Almost all major operational responsibilities, like ensuring punctuality, maintaining cleanliness of dormitories, organizing the assembly, the sports and vocational activities etc. were decentralized to the monitors and the children's cabinet in the two KGBVs. Self-attendance, bio metric attendance, student cabinet, responsibility for chores are all effective ways of building leadership qualities in students. Senior girls helping juniors or peer coaching to help the less proficient was also reported by students. The teachers have a role in performing these activities, but they get support from student leaders. This takes the load off the teachers and also helps develop leadership ability among the students. Some of these activities were also seen to be practiced in *Perna* school.

vi. Building and activating support systems within the school

In *Perna* besides the support extended by SHEF, within the school itself the Principal had promoted and developed a strong supportive culture between teachers, students, students-teachers, Principal – teachers, which emerged as an important variable in enabling teachers to deliver quality education. This

culture of mentoring and support had particularly helped new teachers to understand the philosophy and practices leading to changes in their attitudes, beliefs and ways of functioning in alignment with the critical feminist pedagogy approach. The exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences between teachers helped them in supporting, enriching and improving the lives of the girls. The strong teacher-student relationships essentially based on care and concern has also gone a long way in empowerment of girls. This encourages and motivates the girls to think, question, reflect and act as they know their teachers are always there to guide and support them.

2. Professional support

i. Capacity building of teachers

Capacity building of all teachers working in Prerna is viewed as essential by SHEF for the understanding and effective transaction of the critical feminist pedagogy and in generating a critical dialogue. All the teachers in Prerna have been oriented through *Aarohini* program, a two-day workshop organized by SHEF. The focus of all the capacity building programs is on changing the mind set and attitude of teachers and adopting the philosophy of the school in their classroom transaction. They are also provided a lot of information and discussions take place on gender issues such as domestic violence, abuse, early marriage etc. The teachers also observe how the senior teachers take their classes. The Principal informed us that in the past four years, leadership training was provided by the Founder herself which involved an approach where teachers worked on projects, made presentations, participated in discussions and actually demonstrated pedagogies to be used.

In order to ensure that gender sensitive and responsive curriculum and pedagogy is practiced at all times, it is equally necessary to acquaint teachers with the lives of girls. It is crucial that the teachers are supportive, sensitive and responsive to the learners. Teachers are provided with information on various issues affecting the lives of girls, they devise ways to help the girls to resolve them. Training teachers to become advocates of girl's rights and effectively communicate the same with the local community is important too.

Capacity building is further strengthened through a system of teacher mentoring in which the Principal plays a key role along with the SHEF staff. The teachers are mentored continuously by Principal and director, which is valued by the teachers as it helps them use critical dialogue and provides them with ideas and information to the girls on different issue. Mentoring provides a feedback and guidance to ensure that they are actually moving in the right direction. Some of the teachers shared that, over the years, they have grown, changed, developed under the umbrella of the Study Hall Education Foundation (SHEF) as it provides the support and inputs to them in realizing the vision and goals of the school. The Foundation has created an ecosystem wherein every unit supports each other

In total contrast, there was a complete absence of a systematic capacity building process in the two KGBVs which was consistently voiced by all teachers. They had joined with the best of intentions but lacked adequate and updated professional understanding and periodic academic support. While the CRC support did exist in *Potka* for elementary classes, it is more administrative than academic in nature. This vacuum of training and peer sharing opportunities on a larger scale was felt strongly by all teachers. The Program Officer has tried to fill this gap by creating a WhatsApp group for sharing which is an enabling mechanism, no doubt. In *Taswariya*, the handholding and academic guidance provided by *Sandhan* filled this void effectively.

ii. Enriched curriculum including gender equity and empowerment

Empowerment of girls, calls for an education that informs, exposes and enables them to make decisions. They should believe that they are an integral part of the school curriculum, and not an add-on, which is practiced in Prerna by teachers. The curriculum focuses on development of life skills, vocational and computer training and gender equity, through critical feminist pedagogy and critical dialogue. The use of the latter in both Prerna and KGBV *Taswariya*, further encouraged and boosted the motivation and confidence of girls in becoming independent, reflective and action oriented citizens, thereby enabling them to live a more productive and better quality life.

Transacting such a curriculum significantly improves teacher's interaction with girls on relevant issues and concerns related to gender equality. Learning outcomes in terms of girls' mastery of grade level content in different disciplines is viewed as important but an equal focus is given by teachers on understanding, equality, power and social structures, making informed choices and effective decisions-making. Education thus leads to transformation of their lives and liberating their minds.

Conversations with teachers from all the institutions clearly highlighted that they perceived their role as not only that of teachers, but mentors, counselors, guides and even someone the girls can confide in, and share their problems and innermost feelings with.

All teachers were of the view that they were doing much more than just teaching, which was possible due to the gender responsive curriculum of the school. It made the girls aware of the way the society works. They are enabled to make important decisions, to respect themselves and get respect from others. The curriculum informs them about their rights and prepares to fight for the same if so required.

Supportive supervision and monitoring

Supportive periodic supervision and a problem solving attitude at the district administrative level is key to enhancing teacher motivation. Observations and interactions with the administrative officials of the KGBV at Jamshedpur, as well as the Programme Officer (PO) indicated the importance of a congenial and collaborative relationship for getting the best out of the teachers in the two KGBVs.

In Prerna, the support provided by the Study Hall Education Foundation (SHEF), was highlighted by the Principal and teachers as one of the most important factors contributing to the success of the girl's education program. Teachers are supported through a number of activities like orientation and continuous capacity building programs, Buddy project, mentoring and monitoring of what is happening in the school by SHEF trainers and other staff. The Study Hall staff and the Prerna teachers work together in pairs, once a month,

which they refer to as 'buddy strategy', where they share ideas, strategies and problems with each other. In the morning they are at Study hall and in the afternoon at Prerna. In addition, the Principal trains her teachers from time to time on the syllabus and curriculum being followed at different levels of education. This is supplemented by continuous mentoring.

iii. Adhyapika Manch : A platform for teacher support

A unique innovative support mechanism that was pointed out by the teachers in KGBV *Taswariya* is the *Adhyapika Manch*. This is a unique intervention which provides a platform for teachers to articulate and discuss their problems issues and discuss strategies being used for empowerment of girls, in the state of Rajasthan. This forum for female leadership meets once in every four months. The KGBV teachers expressed their appreciation of this *Manch* and how it had helped them in resolving their concerns and issues related to the girls studying in *Taswariya* in different ways.

In the forum, the core members identify problem areas of their fellow teachers and accordingly organize capacity building workshops. Resource persons are invited to facilitate the workshops. The most common examples of initiatives of this forum

Supportive supervision and monitoring

The quality of education in the KGBV is specifically monitored by the key education officials in the district namely- DEO BEO and CRP. The progress of the KGBV is shared by the warden in the monthly district level review meeting. The district officials then further report to the state. The focus in the meetings was reported to be related more to administrative issues and goals etc. rather than academic aspects. All the regular teachers shared that the CRP visited the school regularly, checked the enrolment retention and discussed issues with the warden. However, the support they required in actual teaching-learning was missing. They all expressed the need for academic support in teaching different subjects especially English, use of TLM

as shared by the head teacher and other teachers are towards education of girls, empowering themselves and other female teachers, stopping child marriages, bringing girls back to school, addressing social biases around physical and mental health, counseling of girls, self- defense training, community dialogues, admission of out of school girls, etc. These different initiatives taken by the female leaders in the *Adhyapika Manch* have reportedly led to changes in girls, parents and larger society in many ways., all contributing to the empowerment of girls.

3. Supportive communities

i. School -community connect

Across the three schools, teachers shared that the strong relationship exists between them and parents of the girls studying in their respective schools. It was an important factor influencing the enrolment, retention and holistic development of their students. Realizing the importance of this connection, teachers focus on strengthening the bond between them and girl's parents as well as the SMC members. Once the girls are enrolled, parents are encouraged to meet their wards once a month, and if felt necessary issues related to any girl such as- early marriage, ill health, homesickness, alcoholism in family or domestic abuse etc. are also discussed and strategies are evolved to resolve them are discussed. Meetings are organized with parents and School Management Committee (SMC) members on a periodic basis. In these meetings teachers and the warden apprise the parents about their wards, their progress, and functioning of the school.

The School Management Committee (SMC), headed by a parent, is viewed by teachers as integral to the successful functioning of the KGBV, as the budget and major expenditure has to be passed by the SMC. The strong relationship and connect between the KGBV and parents is possibly a significant factor influencing the smooth functioning of the KGBV.

In Prerna, all the new parents are given an orientation on the school goals, its philosophy and its right-based approach to education. Parents are also invited to the school to participate in various

workshops organized to update them on children related issues. Gender-sensitisation workshops are conducted for parents and counseling is undertaken by teachers on absenteeism, irregular attendance and other social issues like as child marriage, domestic violence, sexual abuse, etc. Such workshops are organized with the support of community organizations like child protection services, women rights' organization (*Suraksha*) and local police. The local community is part of the organizational structure as the school closely works with parents, community organizations (local women's group), child helpline (regional child protection organization) and government organization (local police), etc.

ii. Boosting girls learning and empowerment through CSR and PPP initiatives

Partnerships between the schools and corporate sector and other voluntary organizations were an integral part of functioning in all the three in all the three institutions. These partnerships enabled teachers in ensuring the empowerment and holistic development of girls along with possibilities of future employment.

The *Potka* case study, in particular, highlights the advantage of PPP as a viable mode of providing support to girls. While the teachers in *Potka* seem to do their best in teaching and caring for the girls, the ISWP served as a catalyst in that it complemented their role, by providing need based support for different vocational activities, and financially enabling girls to seek careers of their own choice. This was promoted through coaching girls for entrance exams, career counseling, and providing financial support. With ISWP ready to share responsibility, the teachers were also motivated to monitor girls' progress well beyond graduation. The teachers supported this by counseling parents on a regular basis to motivate their daughters and support their pursuit of higher studies, ITI trainings and career choices.

On the other hand, KGBV *Taswariya* had a very close collaboration with an NGO *Sandhan*, who was commissioned by Save the Children to provide the school with the necessary academic support. In the absence of any regular training provisions

in KGBVs, once a month a resource person from *Sandhan* was provided academic guidance by demonstrating lessons and providing solutions for issue raised by the teachers..

Additionally, *Sandhan* also contributed towards Life Skills Education (LSE) focusing on gender issues, a bridge program for class 6 entrants, a theatre workshop and multiple other interventions are conceptualized to improve teacher quality and quality of classroom processes. A number of activities are organized involving art forms like music, dance, drawing and theatre thereby promoting creativity amongst the students. In addition, efforts were also made to bring to center stage the use of multiple texts and library as a part of this entire exercise. They evolved a multi-level teaching strategy based on understanding the girl's background and learning levels. Their association and efforts have worked towards motivating teachers by providing regular on-site support which is a significant support and the teachers believe that they have gained a lot from this association.

iii. A web of supportive relationships

The common thread running across all components which make for an effective and successful girl empowerment program through education is the web of supportive relationships which was inspiring, and encouraging. The cordial, caring, consistent and collaborative relationships between administrative officials and teachers, between teachers and students, between teachers and teachers, between the school and other partners rests on a common vision and mission of ensuring empowerment of the girls in their care. There is a sense of a common mission for the girls, to provide them with an enabling environment through a wholesome education. This common vision translates into a supportive and positive administration, and this attitude seems to percolate through all levels down the administrative chain.

WHAT WORKS FOR TEACHERS

Lessons for the Larger System

It is believed that, “teachers are not only implementers but also the architects of change” (OECD, 2011). The role of a teacher becomes more significant in the context of girls’ education and empowerment, where there is a tremendous possibility for women teachers to contribute in a number of ways and help their students overcome challenges of marginalization, discrimination and subordination (Kirk, 2008). By acting upon gendered ideologies, embedded in educational institutions and family structures, teachers can initiate long lasting changes in gender roles, relations and expectations (Stromquist, 1988). But are all women teachers able to really succeed in this role? And if and when they do, what are the factors that facilitate and enable this outcome?

We embarked upon this qualitative research, designed in an exploratory mode, with the primary objective of trying to gain insight into the above question i.e. what motivates and empowers women teachers to be able to contribute as ‘effective agents’ of social change? Our interest was, in particular, to study what are the factors that enable the teachers to make a positive difference in the lives of young adolescent girls in their care, at a stage when the girls’ identities are shaping up and their future roles, responsibilities and chances in life getting determined.

Any discussion, on research on this theme, must be situated in the social context in which it is being conducted. Girls across socio-economic groups continue to face gender based discrimination, which is visible in the declining sex ratio, growing malnutrition, lower school-enrolment ratios, higher drop-out rates, early marriages, and incidence of domestic violence, under-age pregnancy, unsafe motherhood and increasing incidences of sexual abuse. This objective has particular relevance

in the more socially disadvantaged contexts in which majority of the girls in India are growing up. Ineffective and poor access to and use of information, an unfavorable social and economic climate of deprivation, a dominance of patriarchal attitudes, and limited understanding and knowledge of their own rights and entitlements, together limit girl’s ability to effectively negotiate their positions and participate in institutions, organizations and interest groups.

This issue of discrimination increases manifold in 21.9 per cent of India’s population, which lives below poverty line (Census of India, 2011). Our selected sample of three educational programmes consists of two residential schools; one for tribal girls and another for scheduled caste girls, and afternoon school for working girls from urban slums. The sample purposively selected from known educational provisions for this ‘most deprived category’. This consideration stemmed from the expectation that these extreme sites of disadvantage will enable us to observe the challenges that girls face every day. The objective was to understand their expectations from their teachers and to also the ability of the teachers to develop confidence, capability, motivation, and decision making skills, in their students. The idea was to observe how teachers enable girls to take advantage of the opportunities around them, and to assert their choices and rights from a position of empowerment. An attempt has been made to find out the factors that enable the teachers to contribute to this process of transformation.

It is argued that, for teachers to play an empowering role for their students, it is essential that the teachers are empowered themselves. Concentrating solely on educating girls will therefore not result in empowered women unless teachers are themselves

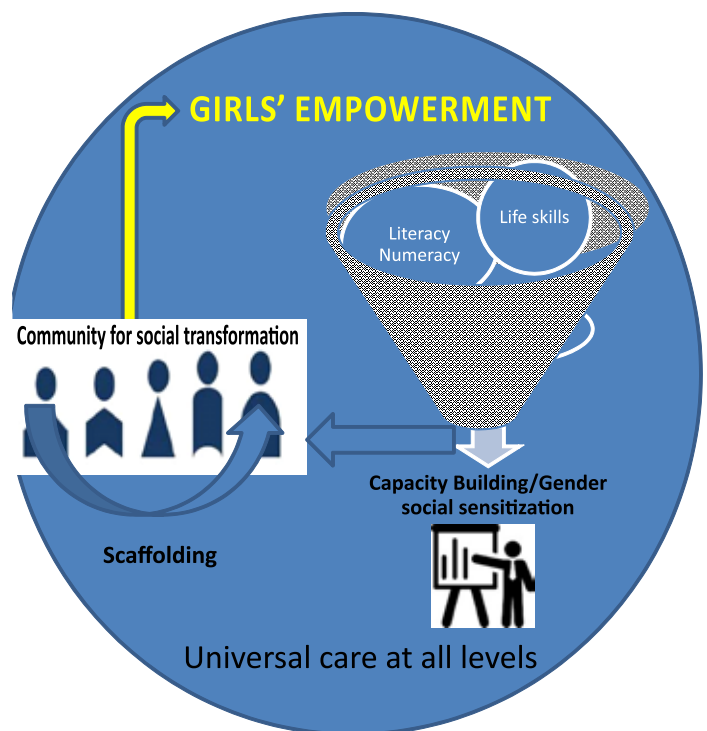
skilled and made promoters of gender equality (Marcus & Page, 2016). Reflections, from the three case studies presented earlier, clearly provide evidence based insights that respond to the above questions. They indicate **specific seven principles**, discussed below, that can facilitate teacher empowerment and agency.

1. *Creating a sense of a community, engaged in a common mission of social transformation.*

Empowerment of girls depends upon the commitment, enthusiasm, creativity and skills exhibited by teachers (UNICEF, 2007). According to Michael G. Fullan (1993), “teaching at its core is a moral profession. Many teachers begin their careers with a sense that their work is socially meaningful and will yield great personal satisfaction. This dissipates however as the inevitable difficulties of teaching come up, along with personal issues and vulnerabilities, as well as social pressures and values, to engender a sense of frustration and force a reassessment of possibilities of the job and the investment one wants to make in it”(Fullan, 1993). This, according to him, often leads to a ‘sense of inconsequentiality’ that accompanies a teacher’s career. Enhancing motivation of teachers at a systemic level thus, remains a major challenge across countries.

While teacher incentives, higher wages, better facilities, better qualifications and better training make a positive contribution to a teachers’ motivation and sense of commitment, our case studies indicate that these factors may not necessarily be the most imperative. On the other hand, reviving the sense, for teachers and educational administrators, of a larger social purpose, of working towards helping girls in their care overcome gender related limitations, challenging existing patriarchal attitudes and beliefs and developing the strength and confidence to work towards changing these in society can be very fulfilling for the teachers. This process also reflects on the autonomy, power and agency of the teacher. Teacher development programmes and teacher management processes therefore, need to shift focus from mere pedagogical skills or disciplining measures, to evoking a sense of larger purpose and a social mission.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES



2. *Moving beyond literacy and numeracy: Expanding the vision of education*

An interesting learning from the three case studies is that, among the girls the perceived value of learning of vocational skills, sports or confidence building critical dialogue sessions was observed to be much higher than that of learning to read and write. This is possibly because the students are able to experience the gains more tangibly in the case of the former and link these directly to the betterment of their own lives. Evidently, the multiple domains of education within the school curriculum also allow for greater scope for teachers to interact with and nurture the girls’ personalities.

The findings of the study raise the systemic issue of teacher accountability. What should teachers be accountable for? Do we want improved levels of learning at the cost of wider educational outcomes? This revives the frequently debated philosophical stance of differentiating between ‘schooling’ and ‘education’, wherein cognitive learning levels are given more importance over social and emotional life skills and social outcomes. While ‘schooling’ is typically reflected as the process of drilling information into

students, what Paulo Freire (1973) refers to as 'banking' or making deposits of knowledge into children's minds, the emphasis of teachers is also much more on syllabus completion which promotes rote learning. This ignores the broader educational outcomes, which move beyond academic skills to what Illeris (2002) refers to as, "the cultivation of learning as a cognitive, emotional and social activity", or referred to in common parlance as life skills, which have more significance in determining individual capability and competence in life than classroom lectures..

3. *Translating the larger educational vision into an empowering curriculum: Introducing a capability and critical feminist pedagogical approach.*

The most significant take away from the case studies was the visible impact observed on the girls' self-esteem and confidence, along with their sense of optimism in being able to exercise their own agency in determining their life's choices in the future. This was possible because of the mentoring, and support they received from their teachers. A capabilities approach thus differs from the conventional focus on achievement of basic goods as the end goal, as it expands towards capabilities and related freedom that are more processes than ends in themselves and that determine how opportunities are used to develop actual well-being (Sen, 1999). Sen also suggests four categories of personal and social conditions that affect one's choices and ability to achieve well-being viz. personal attributes, physical environment, social climate and relational perspectives. This approach needs to be supported and strengthened, particularly in the case of girls' education, with a critical feminist perspective that argues that one's agency or the ability to analyze, decide and act on decisions as a girl or woman is enacted in relation to structures, norms and ideologies about gender relations. (Maslak, 2008; Kabeer, 1999; 2001). This perspective that the feminist political economy, challenges neo-liberal economic models that focus on the market economy, growth and accumulation towards a perspective that focuses more on human needs and well-being (Rai & Waylen, 2014).

Evidence of this combination and complementarity of perspectives was clearly observed in the case

studies. The curriculum ensured opportunities for making choices and decisions through the range of activities offered across domains; in its focus on all round development including physical health and well being; in the intensive teacher student interactions within and outside classrooms and through a very stimulating discussion activity referred to as 'critical dialogue'. This discussion activity, through examples or situations that were readily identifiable by the girls, was observed to evoke active engagement, critical thinking and reflection on alternative definitions and codification of sociological aspects. These activities and interactions between teachers and students were consciously planned in ways "to challenge the existing power structures and relations" (Freire, 1970). A key element of this pedagogy is the need for teachers to be familiar and insightful of the social reality from which the girls are coming, so that they are able to situate in the context of their learner.

4. *Ensuring social and gender sensitivity in teachers: Key to a transformative approach to education.*

To prepare teachers who can play an empowering role for female students it is important for them to be empowered. Concentrating solely on educating girls will not result in empowered women unless teachers are themselves skilled and made promoters of gender equality (Marcus & Page, 2016). Stacki (2002) asserts, women teachers in order to be true role models and to pass on the value of gender equity to girls, must themselves be able to consciously deconstruct and reconstruct their own roles. The teachers can then touch the lives of girls in a number of ways and help them overcome challenges of marginalization, discrimination and subordination (Kirk, 2006). On the other hand, negative role models can easily perpetuate prevailing gender and social stereotypes.

Given that the three schools selected for the study were specifically designed for adolescent girls living in difficult circumstances, gender sensitivity in the teachers was integral to the design. While in one school there was provision for planned teacher preparation, in the other two there was more informal communication and a sense of a common social mission. The teachers often shared their own experiences and challenges with girls to sensitize

them and to encourage them to bring their issues into the open. There were clear cases of teachers, who had themselves, overcome oppression, mentioned as the most inspiring teacher. The teacher development programmes need to give due priority to this area of sensitization, along with the training of all levels of administration and school management, including School Management Committee (SMC) members, who need to ensure a supportive environment for the teachers.

5. *Enabling space for critical dialogue, reflection sharing and mentoring by teachers through rationalizing curriculum load and ensuring teachers' autonomy.*

A major factor that stands out in providing the time and space for dialogic and interactive pedagogy with the girls is the flexibility and lack of pressure on teachers for syllabus completion. This is made possible by adopting systems such as the National Open School (NIOS) courses and the facility of extended hours available in the residential schools. These, along with a positive management perspective, based on trust in teachers and encouragement of teacher autonomy, allows teachers to pace their own teaching-learning processes to accommodate a more holistic curriculum.

But it is seen that, in larger systems, the teachers' autonomy is curtailed and teachers are excluded not only from any policy making, governance and management decisions but also from planning of day to day instructional strategies. This is particularly so for women teachers. Very often the structure of the school in itself restricts the autonomy of teachers and teachers are taken for granted in their role to implement but not to create or initiate reforms.

6. *Ensuring scaffolding and on-site mentoring and professional development for teachers through effective institutional provisions in the system*

Teachers across the three case studies expressed the need for more professional support and mentoring in terms of pedagogy and classroom processes. In addition, they indicated their need for guidance in the context of handholding girls on gender related issues faced by them in their community.

It is an accepted fact that empowerment of teachers and the process of their enablement requires that

"teachers at all levels of the education system be respected and adequately remunerated, have access to training and ongoing professional development and support, including through open and distance learning, and be able to participate locally and nationally in decisions affecting their professional lives and teaching environments" (UNESCO, 2000). This requires a comprehensive teacher development strategy which could incorporate three key elements viz. developing teacher leadership, teacher learning and teacher training, through which teacher's agency can be built and strengthened.

Recently, a new concept of teacher leadership has emerged with 'teacher leadership beyond the classroom' as a philosophy is gaining prominence. This is indicative of teaching skills being increasingly recognized as an important part of school's collective power, which should be fully capitalized to bring about learning improvement among students. (Lai & Cheung, 2015) The concept emphasizes that efforts should be made to develop teachers as leaders, both inside and outside the classroom, as teachers who are able to enjoy high levels of autonomy in making instructional decisions towards more transformational leadership, focusing on changing the culture of the school and developing its capacity to bring about improvements in learning (Murphy, 2005; Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2005).

Teacher learning, in turn, also contributes to building teacher agency which entails a self-directed, active, career long process during which teachers engage in various formal and informal learning activities in line with their professional goals to adjust their knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices (Beijaard, Korthagen, & Verloop, 2007). Teacher training, i.e. the third element in this triad, refers to more institutionalized policies, procedures and provisions designed to equip teachers with knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and skills they require to perform their tasks more effectively in the classroom, school and wider community. An on-site mentoring provision should also be there for the teachers. However, in terms of engaging teachers in these processes, as Batra (2005) emphasizes that, "teachers' agency can be built when teachers are in the space to use their creativity in classrooms and deal with the challenges that they encounter, rather than just making them listeners in the training sessions".

7. *Fostering a universe of care and nurturing relationships*

A critical facilitating factor, that was conspicuously evident across the three programs was, what one of the schools referred to as, 'building a, universe of care'. It is crucial to develop this 'universe of care' at all level, from senior management to school heads to teachers, students and the supporting staff. This non-hierarchical relationship, built on trust, value and compassion was seen to create a sense of pride and ownership of the school programme and the desire articulated by almost all teachers to contribute to making the school programme a success. In the larger system, this aspect is conspicuous by its absence. Even though teachers are only a part of the school system, they constitute arguably the most visible part. However, they remain an ignored aspect, since teachers occupy positions lower down the hierarchy as far as power, autonomy and decision making is concerned. Further, various aspects of the society, be it religion, modernity, politics or class structure influence the schooling processes, the role and potential, and the challenges faced by teachers. Such power structures directly influence the ability of teachers to teach, bring about change and influence change and indirectly affect student outcomes, particularly of girls (Sunny, 2011). The vision for empowered teachers should therefore be, "investing teachers with the right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach" (Bolin, 1989). The moot question is - are we attracting the best talent and preparing them adequately to play this role?

Enhancing value by building effective partnerships with corporate and civil society

Each of the three case studies highlight the key contributions possible through partnerships with corporate and NGOs in terms of enhancing the quality and scope of school's provisions through academic support, co-curricular activities and career possibilities. With the current expansion of the availability of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds, or public private partnerships (PPP), these should not be mobilized merely for infrastructure support, as is conventionally seen.

Instead, possibilities could be explored to enhance opportunities for the students, from disadvantaged sections of the community, to improve their life chances through skill development, preparation for career trajectories or sports competitions as complementary to the school's core programme, would be much more valuable. Partnerships such as these can, as seen in the case studies, also serve to break the isolation of teachers which they often find themselves in, and energize and motivate them to exercise their agency better.

Proposing an amended framework for teacher empowerment

There is an increasing realization amongst reformers, development workers and feminists that education is the most significant and strongest tool that can help achieve empowerment for girls. Various policy frameworks and programs are now set in this direction, and demand creating a positive environment for girls.

While several strategies and interventions have resulted in improved access to and participation in education, this has not resulted in the empowerment of girls coming from disadvantaged communities. This is because these strategies do not necessarily and implicitly tackle social practices, gender stereotypes, attitudinal barriers and other socio-economic constraints.

Present study clearly highlights the need to nurture empowered teachers, as a prerequisite to ensure empowerment of girls. The study identifies some significant principles that encourage and promote empowerment. We conclude by trying to encapsulate these principles into an amended 'empowerment framework' for teachers, by building on the original framework proposed by Stromquist (1988) for girls. Stromquist empowerment framework constitutes of four dimensions, each important, though none alone sufficient to empower individuals:

- Cognitive - critical understanding of one's reality
- Psychological - feelings of self-esteem.
- Economic - capacity to generate independent income
- Political - awareness of power inequalities and the ability to organize and mobilize.

- We propose an amended framework for teachers, arising from the difference in positions of girls and teachers and the diverse social contexts in which our teachers are situated.

Proposed Framework

- Cognitive Dimension:** Skills related to critical thinking, analysis, reflection, creativity, articulation and problem solving.
- Psycho Social dimension:** Emotional intelligence; skills of negotiation, assertion, persuasion, decision making and self-confidence to be able to exercise one's own agency to challenge stereotypical and patriarchal social structures and practices in one's individual and immediate social space, ability to empathize with others in exploitative personal and social contexts and be positive role models.
- Economic dimension:** economic independence and career mobility
- Socio-political dimension:** awareness of social and political hierarchies, power inequalities, social diversity and disadvantage and interrelationships at a larger, systemic level and the ability to motivate, mobilize and organize activities for equitable social reform within one's social and work space.

This framework, which encapsulates the principles and modalities of empowerment, needs to inform all processes

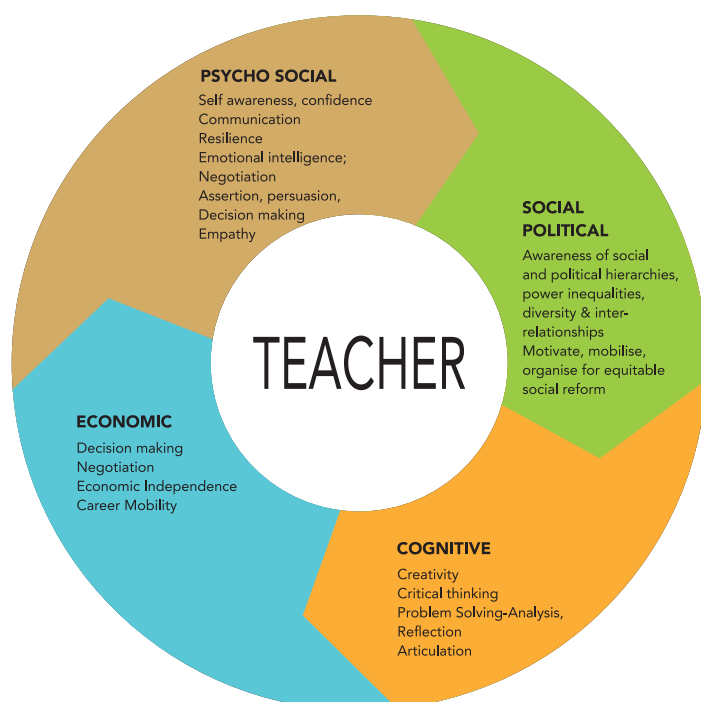
and provisions related to teachers including development of teacher leadership, teacher learning and teacher training and support initiatives, career progression, teacher forums, teacher associations, based on the principles of equity, diversity and rights within a feminist pedagogical perspective focused on life skills and critical thinking.

A key component to this process is providing teacher' access to an enabling environment that includes, well equipped classrooms, platforms for free expression, and physically, mentally and emotionally safe and secure work place. This component also attends to linking teachers to incentives and motivation aspects.

Post access, the focus for empowerment process is on equipping teachers appropriately to organize quality teaching-learning processes, that involves applying appropriate pedagogical solutions and facilitate leadership platforms. The above component also entails building core life skills in teachers.

Facilitative platforms for teachers' participation at all levels are further required to be instituted to complement the above, including for development of educational policy, curriculum development for students, for teacher education and in the area of examination reform to ensure inclusion of teachers' perspectives and experiences and enhance sense of ownership. Utilizing web based technological provisions now easily available and accessible, including social media and on line portals to create, enrich and sustain professional networks would considerably enhance outreach and be very facilitative. Involving teachers in all relevant forums will also contribute to inculcation of a sense of community and common social mission and possibly serve to reinstate the steadily declining respect for the teaching profession.

TEACHER EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK



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