

Musahar Children in Bihar

Barriers and Opportunities in Enjoying the Right to Education



**A Study by the Centre for Social
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MUSAHAR CHILDREN IN BIHAR:
BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN ENJOYING RIGHT TO EDUCATION

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Glossary

BDVS	Bihar Dalit Vikas Samithi
BMDVM	Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission
CEC	Community Education Centre
CEL	Community Education Leaders
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CWSN	Children with Special Needs
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
D-NT	De-Notified Tribe
EDCIL	Education Consultants India Ltd
EFA	Education For All
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
FYPs	Five Year Plans
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
Govt.	Government
HRD	Human Resource Development
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
INGOs	International Non Governmental Organisations
IPS	Indian Police Service
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
JNV	Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya
JRM	Joint Review Mission
KGBV	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
MDM	Mid Day Meal
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament

MS	Mahila Samakhya
NCPCR	National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIOS	National Institute of Open Schooling
OOSC	Out of School Children
PM	Prime Minister
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
REAP	Rohtas Education and Associated Programmes
REPA	Right to Education Protection Authority
RtE	Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education
SC	Scheduled Castes
SCPCR	State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights
SCR	Student-Classroom Ratio
SCSP	Scheduled Caste Sub Plan
SHG	Self Help Group
SMC	School Management Committee
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
SSS	Shoshit Seva Sangh
ST	Scheduled Tribes
Std	Standards
TS	Tola Sevaks
TSP	Tribal Sub-Plan
UN-CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UT	Union Territory
VM	Vikas Mitra
VSS	Vidyalaya Shiksha Samitis

Executive Summary

‘Musahar children in Bihar: Barriers and opportunities in enjoying Right to Education’ is a threshold study on the multiple deprivation faced by the Musahar community as a whole and the children in particular vis-à-vis their right to education.

The twenty one lakh plus Musahar community in Bihar is third largest among Dalit communities in the State and constitutes one of the poorest communities in the State as well as at the national level. Recognising chronic poverty, extreme disabilities and development inequalities, the government of Bihar constituted the Bihar MahaDalit Vikas Mission (BMDVM, Mission from now) in 2008 to give impetus to multiple strategies for improving their development. The Mission focuses on Early child hood education (ECCE) and education volunteers (tola sevaks) in their habitations to promote children’s education. Various other scaffolding strategies for providing homesteads, roads, toilets, water and sanitation are also Mission focus. While a well thought out strategy, implementation problems undermine the vision and objectives.

The Musahars face exclusion and discrimination from both general caste communities as well as other Dalit communities leading to their current visible situation of chronic poverty, landlessness, lack of assets, illiteracy, unemployment, child labour and even alcoholism. In such a context, the study brings forth the issues and strategies falling under the mandate of RtE and aims to present an overview of the dire state of affairs of the Musahar children, vis-à-vis their right to education. Even when they go to school, other children keep away from them and do not include them labeling them on the basis of their identity, food habits and poverty.

The study notes that increased availability of schools and the thrust for universal elementary education is commendable, ensuring ease of admissions to schools, but retention and learning are huge problems. Infrastructure gaps, shortage of trained teachers, lack of quality in teaching, and identity issues, such as being stigmatized as Musahars, and excluded as being dirty and unclean, low expectations and neglectful attitude of teachers, school level costs and non-availability of functional schools in some places are some reasons for failure in school retention of the Musahar children. Interaction with teachers reports that Musahar children are most irregular in school and hence, their backwardness in learning. On the other hand, children and communities assert that the irregularity among teachers is also major reason for children’s irregularity. This is indicative of the presence of some form of institutional discrimination where schools located in the Musahar tolas or where they are predominant in numbers are least endowed, teachers lack accountability, there is no monitoring and no commitment to improve the education standards for this community.

Taking note of the crucial role that parents and community play in children's education, the study found that parents and community currently have little engagement with schools and teachers and are not able to explore ways in which their children can access education. There is also disconnect between parents perception and teachers perceptions about relative roles in the education of their children. While parents consider their role as ensuring children admitted and supported to go to school, teachers expect them to provide learning support and monitoring at home, which according to the parents is the role of the school and teachers. The Members of the School Management Committees (SMCs) expressed difficulties in participation as well as in terms of addressing their children's issues through these forums, given the power relationships between other parents/schools and themselves.

Bihar has reported considerable progress in education; literacy rate increased from 47.0 percent in 2001 to 63.8 per cent in 2011 but the progress and disparity reduction on various fronts presumably lead to a 'feel good attitude' without unraveling the specific conditions of the most marginalized children, such as the Musahars. The government does not track disaggregated educational data for Musahar children in the annual school education reports creating a big gap in evolving necessary strategies for these children. Given their irregular attendance, high dropout and poor performance, specific data on their progress would help to bridge the education gap between them and other Dalit as well as General community. The study also explored the strategies and interventions of NGOs that work specifically with Musahar children and communities.

As is increasingly recognized Musahar children are constrained by lack of social access to schools than physical access. The historical and present untouchability and discrimination practices are central to learning deprivations, educational disabilities and inequalities between Musahar and other children. Government intervention plays central role in the education and other development improvements of any community. The importance of equity-inclusion measures to address these constraints in the schools and within the education administration system, be they curriculum, teacher trainings, extra-curricular activities, disaggregated data tracking etc. An equally important gap is the dearth of research and academic studies on the community.

The study helps bring out the concern and commitment as well as the effort of the community to join the mainstream seeing education of their children as key to this. It brings out the many constraints and barriers children and communities face in staying on and studying in schools. Further, it highlights the efforts of Musahar led and other organizations and their efforts at Musahar children's education. It reviews the state policies and strategies and their effectiveness in promoting Musahar children's education, particularly girl children. Given the above findings,

the study makes specific recommendations to promote the fulfillment of their right to education.

Recommendations to the State: specific to education of Musahar children:

1. Include the culture, contribution and icons of Musahar community in school curriculum and orient teachers to recognize, respect and disseminate them among all children. The initiative to name 'Dasarath Manjhi' skill development scheme is one such, others can be explored.
1. State government track and monitor Musahar children's enrollment, drop out and learning at school, block, district and state levels. Annual education data should be organized to track enrollment, drop out and learning for specific vulnerable communities as Musahars so that appropriate policy-strategy can be developed.
2. To build capacity of the tola sevaks to support children in their learning, motivate and mobilize the community. Tola sevaks to be supported to provide mentoring and career counseling to children to give them a broad brush of possibilities and opportunities in and through education.
3. State give advisory to schools that school development plans include specific strategies to promote Musahar children's access and participation in schools. SMCs are specially oriented towards this. SMC members from Musahar community are encouraged to bring up issues of the community and children in this regard.
4. State gives advisory to schools prohibiting all forms of discrimination, humiliation and exclusion of Musahar children in schools.
5. State set up a grievance redress mechanism at the school level and upwards to provide the space for children and parents to raise their issues and seek redress
6. Ensure that all Musahar children have access to anganwadis in their tolas and are provided both adequate nutrition and pre-primary education there.
7. Ensure Musahar children's physical accessibility to schools on priority basis, setting up schools within 1 and 3 kms wherever necessary, ensuring transport where needed and providing boat access in flood prone and water logged areas.
8. Ensure Musahar children's economic access to schooling by enhancing the scholarship amount and ensuring that it reaches all children regularly and on time so that economic disability does not prevent children's education.
9. Evolve specific need based schemes to promote Musahar children's education through the Scheduled Caste Sub Plan funds under the Education ministry to offset the reported costs of Rs.1000-1200/year incurred by parents on children who are studying in the government schools.

10. Ensure timely and full implementation of entitlements like scholarships, books, uniforms and additional support wherever necessary to Musahar children to ensure they access a full cycle of elementary education and can move on to class x and xii
11. In places where migration is very prevalent, residential schools are set up so that families do not withdraw and take children with them for labour.
12. Increase access and monitor the admission and retention of Musahar children in KGBVs, JNVs, residential schools and welfare hostels.
13. Youth in the community are provide skill training and support to find employment, start enterprises so that they find meaningful benefit from education and become path breakers for other children currently studying.

Recommendations to the State: scaffolding education development of Musahar children:

1. Recognise the Musahar community as a specific sub group for development efforts given their large population in the state, social exclusion and low development indicators. There is enough evidence to show that the wider society including administration practice untouchability, discrimination and social exclusion of extreme nature against them. Special focus is important to stem the tide and make development programmes work for them.
2. Track disaggregated data for Musahar children and communities in all state data gathering and analysis programmes and utilize them as the basis for planning development programmes for the community be it children, youth or adults.
3. Facilitate vikas mitras to fulfill their mandated duties. This includes capacity and skill building on one hand, liberating them from tasks that do not fall within the objectives and goals outlined in the BMDVM mandate, supporting and handholding them in the efforts to mobilize and motivate the community and be the bridges and supports they are to be.
4. Engage and support educated youth and civil society activists from the community in state development programmes to ensure they reach and benefit the community
5. Implement, monitor and regularly review the programmes under the BMDVM and make additional efforts to ensure that Musahar children, youth and community benefit from them and the development gap between them and other groups can be bridged in a time bound manner.
6. Ensure representatives from the Musahar are members of elected and statutory bodies, their voices heard and issues addressed on priority.

7. Undertake focused interventions on livelihood promotion for Musahar community through the Bihar Rural Livelihood Programme to reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and migration.
8. Create packages for the skill development of Musahar youth through the National Skill Development Mission in collaboration with the Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission.
9. Allocate, utilize and track development budgets under the BMDVM and SCSP for benefitting this community specifically towards all round development of the community to reduce development inequalities between them and others.

Recommendations to civil society organizations to strengthen and support education of Musahar children

1. Recognize Musahar community as a specific sub group that needs special development strategies and evolve specific development plan for them within the overall development strategy of the organization.
2. Identify and build partnership with civil society organizations and networks led by Musahar youth to reach development initiatives to the community more effectively.
3. Allocate specific and additional budgets within the overall budgets and programmes to meet the needs and overcome the constraints of these communities and children to accessing development.
4. Undertake studies on various issues of the community for better understanding and strategy building, as an immediate example on education: 'out of pocket expenses' for children in government schools to influence the RtE implementation.
5. Hold public education, public hearings, social audits to highlight relevant issues of the community to the public and state.
6. Take up collective advocacy on implementation under BMDVM and other specific issues at the state level.

One cannot emphasise on the need for focused strategies and interventions for the Musahar community given the chronic poverty and multiple deprivation they face. An important strategy to countering social exclusion and discrimination is building concrete strategies to promote inclusion action between Musahar and other children in schools. Bringing children together to understand and appreciate one another and diverse cultures and life-styles as well as contexts is central to such a process. The Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission is a step in this direction and it is hoped that convergent and collaboration across departments, departments and civil society organizations can be taken up with the Musahar children and youth at the centre.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Musahar community classified under Scheduled Castes (SCs) with over twenty lakh population in Bihar is among the least literate people in the State. The 2001 census reported 9.1 per cent literacy rate for the community and 1.3 percent for Musahar women, compared to 28.5 per cent among SCs and 47 per cent among General population in the State. In 2001 only 10 per cent of the children in 5-14 years age group attended school.¹ Less than one per cent of the population were graduates and above, and technically qualified women or men in the 'Musahari', the Musahar tola is scarce. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the more recent Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RtE Act, henceforth) Act report near universal enrolment at primary level in the state. Herein, it is imperative to understand how Musahar children access their right to education given their multiple deprivations and disabilities. This study is exploratory to understand from different education related stakeholders the aspirations, perspectives, opportunities and constraints that influence the Musahar children's right to education.

In the absence of data on Musahar communities, studies have projected their total population in the world (India and Nepal) to be 26,52,767 in 2001.² Of this, it is estimated that about 1.5 lakh people live in Nepal (which constitutes about 0.77 per cent of the population of Nepal) and the rest in India. In India, the community is spread across Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Tripura. Much of the knowledge about this community comes from the writings of the British ethnographers and administrators who traced their linkages to various tribes as Savari, Kols, Chattri, Ahirs, Tharu. Historically considered descendants of a tribe from the Chotanagpur region, surveys and reports of British India record them as 'semi-Hinduised tribes'³/semi-Hindooized aboriginal tribes.⁴ While 1935 census classified them as Tribes, the 1961 census classified them under Scheduled castes (SCs). The group is considered non-Aryan in origin, and their gradual journey over the past hundred and fifty years or so, from the hills to the plains, has been a graded change from the tribal roots to more Hindu influence and incorporation as outcastes and untouchables. Today they do not reflect indigenous

¹ Census Data Highlights, 2001, GOI.

² Computed by Tomy Joseph based on available population data of 1991 at 20,45,310 with growth rate of 29.1% which is the growth rate reported in Bihar in 2001

³ In 1881, W.W. Hunter described them as Semi-Hinduised tribes in 'A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. XII: Districts of Gaya and Shahabad' and 'A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. XI: Districts of Patna and Saran'.

⁴ In the Report of the Census of British India, 1881 they are mentioned as semi-Hindooized Aboriginal Tribe

traditions of subsistence and culture and have assimilated into their location as the lowest in the caste hierarchy.⁵

The community is linked to the Bhuiyas (connected with Bhumi or land) and there are debates about them having been landowners and cultivators. Historically, various occupations are attributed to them such as, watch and ward for granaries and waterways, fishing and catching crocodiles, collecting honey, collecting herbal and medicinal plants, earthwork, palki bearers, and field labourers. They are skilled in hard, earth-related work, and measuring and assessing quality of soil without any modern device for generations.⁶ They have been bonded labourers under the 'kamiauti' system, where the 'kamia' worked all his life for the same landlord, earning wages for the days that he worked and expecting assistance when needed. They lived on the landlord's land or village commons without owning it for generations. Women also became attached to the same landlord through their husbands who worked as kamias.⁷

The term Musahar (Mus– har, Mus – ahaar) is commonly understood to be 'rat taker, rat catcher, rat killer and rat eater'. However, social activists report rat eating is not limited to this community, but is prevalent even among dominant communities⁸ and it can also be bought in the market.⁹ In a society where social groups are named after their occupation (caste occupations – sonar, lohar, chamar, teli..) rather than their food habits, the naming of this community by their food habit can be attributed to a prejudiced or a political process of subjugation. G. J. Kunnath contends that the name 'Musahar' is an indication of institutional and structural violence against them.¹⁰ It communicates hidden and unconscious renderings of subjugation along with the consciousness of the Musahars getting more and more false and distorted. In this vein, Bourdieu also reiterates that naming is a form of 'symbolic violence'¹¹, accounting for all forms of coercion which are effected without physical violence and gets legitimized leading to the erosion of egalitarian power relations between groups and contributing to systematic reproduction of unequal power relations. Naming the community is thus, a powerful device of the dominant communities to keep them under their control, particularly given their skill at earthwork and tendency to do hard labour. It is also suggested by

⁵ Tomy Joseph (2007), 'The Musahars: Cultural Life of a Dalit Community in Bihar'; Ph.D Thesis submitted to University of Mumai.

⁶ Mukul Sharma (2002), *The Untouchable Present: Everyday Life of Musahars in North Bihar*, Hemant Joshi & Sanjay Kumar (ed).

⁷ Sanjay Kumar and Rafiul Ahmed (2012), 'Alternate Schooling for Children' in *School Education, Pluralism and Marginality: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Christine Sleeter et al, Orient Black Swan, New Delhi,

⁸ Discussions with Fr Nishant, who lived for over a decade with the Musahars and is currently principal of St.Xavier's College, Patna

⁹ Discussions with Sr Sudha Varghese who has lived for over two decades in the Musahar tola in Jamsaut, Danapur, Patna.

¹⁰ G J Kunnath (2002), 'Violence of Discrimination: An Ethnography of the Musahar Lifeworld', paper presented in a conference on Dalit Exploitation and Resistance, organized by the University of Goa.

¹¹ Bourdieu, Pierre (1990), *The Logic of Practice*, Cambridge: Polity Press

some that the name Musahar may have come because the group had rat as their totem symbol. It is suggested that at some point in history, this group of people may have been conquered by a group whose totem was elephant. Hence, the picture of Lord Ganesha (representing the people whose totem was elephant) seated on the rat.¹²

The subjugation is internalized as evident in some of the names given among the Musahars to their children; jangali (uncivilized/forest dweller), buddhu (stupid), sukhala (dried up one), fekanii (thrown away), jhanjhat (trouble maker), lu-taan (thief), maarni (one who kills), vipatava (brings calamity), kismaiti (dependent on luck) etc. One also recognizes that labeling is a process of creating social structure, creating rules for themselves and others to follow and are in so far, relative and contingent. They are social constructs that reflect patterns of authority and acceptance and can also be changed in the course of struggle.¹³

1.2 Musahar Community in Bihar

Bihar in India has the highest Musahar population with 21,12,136 population¹⁴ followed by about a lakh and half in Uttar Pradesh, a few thousands in West Bengal and Assam, and a few hundreds in Tripura and Orissa. Their population is spread across the state with seven districts having a lakh or more population as per the 2001 census. 5 districts had less than 10,000 people in the same census¹⁵. They are among the five major Dalit groups in Bihar, viz., Chamars (31.3%), Dusadhs (30.9%), Musahars (16.2%), Pasis (5.5%) and Dhobis (5%).¹⁶

Given their culture, Tomy Joseph (2007) has classified them as Magahiya Musahars, Tiruhuthia Musahars, Nomadic Musahars and the Slum Dweller Musahars. The Tiruhutiya Musahars live on the north of the river Ganges¹⁷ and do not part-take rats in their diet. They go by the titles of Sada, Sadaay, Rishidev, Rishiyaasan, Rishi Rikhiyaasan, Bhaاراتi, etc. They are more Hinduised and have better education and economic indicators than other Musahar communities. The Magahiya Musahars are found in the Magahii speaking areas¹⁸ and go by the title Maanjhi. They

¹² Tomy Joseph (2007), 'The Musahars: Cultural Life of a Dalit Community in Bihar'; Ph.D Thesis submitted to University of Mumai.

¹³ Geof Wood (1985), 'The Politics of Development Policy Labeling', *Journal of Social and Economic Studies (New Series)*, Vol. 1 16: Sage Publications

¹⁴ 2001 census

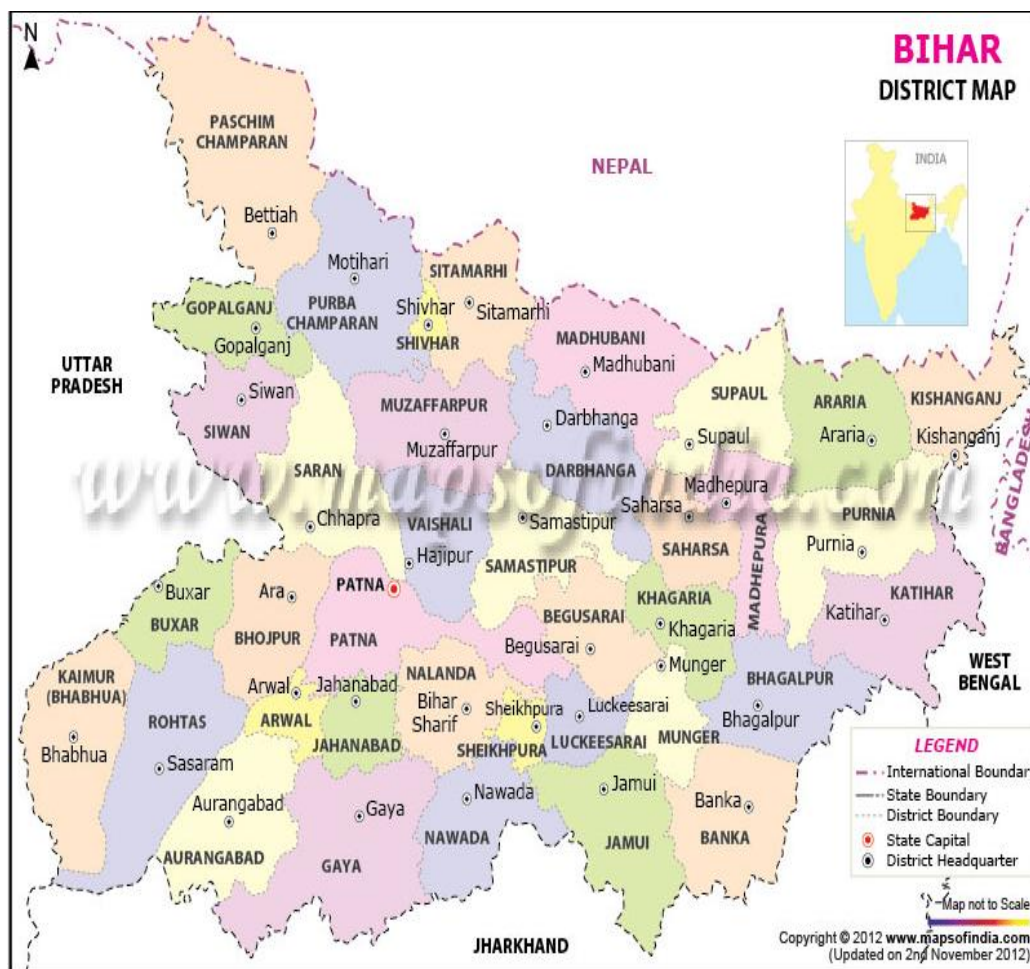
¹⁵ Purnea, Araria, Madhepura, Saharsha, Madhubani, Patna and Jamui districts have about one lakh or more population. Aurangabad, Siwan, Sheohar, Buxar, Saran have less than ten thousand with Aurangabad having just about 500 Musahar people.

¹⁶ These five groups constitute 88.9% of the Dalit population in Bihar. Both Chamars and Dusadhs have over 40 lakh population each followed by Musahars with 21 lakh population.

¹⁷ Found predominantly in Dharbhanga, Madhubani, Samastipur, Begusarai, Kagaria, Madhepura, Saharsha, Purnia, Araria, Kathihar, Kishanganj, Supal and parts of Bhagalpur.

¹⁸ Found primarily in the districts of Vaishali, Muzaffarpur, Sitamarhi, Sheohar, East and West Champaran and also more thinly spread in Gopalganj, Siwan and Chapra districts. More settled groups are found in Buxar, Kaimur and Rohtas.

exhibit many tribal characteristics and are less sanskritised than the Tiruhutia Musahars. Nomadic Musahars are small in numbers and largely found in Gaya and Bodh Gaya districts. They move from place to place making their own low huts for short times. They rear pigs, collect honey and herbal medicines from the jungles and sell them, and usually do not take up work as field labourers. Some of these nomadic communities have become more settled, where they are often suspected of crimes committed in the locality. Musahars who live in urban slums in Bihar, though not very large in numbers, are part of the large unorganized urban population engaged in construction of buildings, loadings, unloading, earth work etc. Some are also engaged in scavenging, rag picking, and brewing and selling of alcohol.



Generally, the Musahars are considered lower than the Paasiis, the Dusadhs, Dhobiis and the Chamars. In practice too, other Dalit groups look down upon the Musahars, presumably because they eat rats, frogs and rear pigs. Interestingly, the caste hierarchy is also replicated within the Musahar community where Tiruhutiya Musahars consider the Magahiya Musahars lower than them, and vice versa too. Additionally, the Musahars have also internalized the

value system of the caste system that other caste groups have allocated them, place along purity-pollution, economic and political power.

The community is predominantly rural with 98.2 per cent of them living in rural areas and 2.8 per cent in urban areas as per census of 2001. Only about 2.7 per cent Musahars own any land while 92.5 per cent are reported landless agricultural workers, 4.0 per cent as other workers, 0.8 per cent as working in household industries and the majority 97.3 per cent employed in the informal unorganized sector.¹⁹ As one of them aptly puts it, “Musahars belong to the land, but the land did not belong to them.”

Their lives are highly unstable, whereby they live on village commons or on the fields of landlord and are under perpetual threat of eviction. Poverty level among the Musahar community is high with wage work in rural areas ranging from 74 to 168 days in a year. Wages in some parts of the State is poor and reported to be as low as Rs.35 per day. Tomy Joseph (2007), in his study, computed the annual income of 229 Musahar families in three villages from different regions of the State and found the average annual income was Rs.13,635/- in Dhorha, Rs.14,250/- in Budhama Lakaraaj, and Rs.21,227/- in Tellada.²⁰ Few families in these villages make a living by alcohol brewing and earning about 100-150 rupees daily. In addition, a family may earn Rs. 2000 /- to Rs.3500/- year through livestock.²¹ The Magahiyas often rear pigs while Tiruhuthias generally rear sheep and cows. Migration is prevalent, even as far as to Delhi, Haryana, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh for various hard and earth related works for about 6-8 months a year.

Negligible number of Musahars is in government service, employed as primary school teachers, clerks and peons while some others are employed in the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme, and as cooks in Mid Day Meal (MDM). Employment as Vikas Mitra and Tola Sevak under the Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission (BMDVM), an initiative of the government to take up focused development work among more marginalized Dalit and Muslim communities, is breakthrough for the educated youth in the community. A few are employed in NGOs and in other private institutions, almost always earning about Rs. 3000-5000/- per month.

Political mobilization is evident over the past four to five decades, with Shri Mishrii Sada elected to the assembly from 1957 to 1985. He was one of the first persons to complete his matric and served in various positions as the Education and Social Welfare minister. He initiated the Musahar Seva Sangh, a state level organization of and for the development of the Musahar

¹⁹ Census 2001

²⁰ 85 families in Dorha, 101 families in Lakaraaj and 43 families in Tellada representing different regions in the state

²¹ Tomy Joseph (2007), ‘The Musahars: Cultural Life of a Dalit Community in Bihar’; Ph.D Thesis submitted to University of Mumai.

community that is spread across many districts. Smt. Bhagavatii Devi, agricultural labour and mine worker was the first Musahar woman to contest and win a seat to the Bihar assembly in 1996. She later won elections to the Lok Sabha from Gaya. She was actively engaged in promoting the development of the community. Shri Naval Kishore Bharatii won the assembly seats for four terms from 1997 to 1995. Shri Jitan Ram Manjhi is currently Social Welfare Minister. Currently there are ten Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and one Member of the Parliament (MP) elected from the Musahar community in the Bihar. Musahars were active in the Bodh Gaya land movement, 1974, under the leadership of Jay Prakash Narayan in the People's Movement for Total Revolution. In addition, there are also some visible Musahar led organizations in the State as Bihar Musahar Seva Sangh, Raashtriya Musahar Vikas Morcha, Lok Shaktii Sanghatan etc. providing state level platforms for raising rights and development issues of the community.

Over the past 3-4 decades, some committed NGOs particularly those associated with the church have taken up education and development work with the community. Prominent are Manthan, Nari Gunjan, Prabhat, Rohtas Education and Associated Programmes (REAP) etc. A few young first generation educated youth have also initiated NGOs on their own and work with their communities. Many of these organizations focus on children and women and particularly on education and awareness creation. Recognising the extreme disabilities of the Musahars and other communities that are similarly excluded and discriminated, the state government has begun a focused strategy through the Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission (BMDVM) initiated in 2008. The Mission has laid out a multi-dimensional plan for the development of the community through programmes, which includes provision of homesteads, roads, water, sanitation, ICDS centres, education volunteers, livelihood opportunities to the Musahar community and their habitations.

1.3 Musahar Children and their Right to Education

Article 46 of the Constitution stipulates that the Indian state will promote with special care the economic and educational interests of the weaker sections of the people, in particular of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and protect them from all forms of exploitation. The Constitution envisioned all children under 14 years to access education within ten years of independence. The promise is partially translated making education a fundamental enforceable legal right under Article 21 A in 2002 and translated into the Right to Education Act in 2009, implemented from April 2010. The government thus, has an obligation to not only ensure universal right to education to all children, but take special measures to enable socially marginalized children to enjoy their right to education. This is reiterated in the National Policy on Education 1986/1992, emphasising the need to remove disparities in education and create conditions for equalization in terms of access as well as successful completion of education. The

main objectives of various education initiatives undertaken by the government were on reducing gender and social disparities in education. An important aspect of this right is that education must be accessible to all, especially the most vulnerable children, in law and in fact, without discrimination.²² This right, and especially its equity component has been interpreted to mean not only equal opportunity, but also the creation of conditions in which the disadvantaged sections of society can avail of the opportunity to be educated.²³

Given the low literacy rates among Musahar community and their poor access to education, the equity and social inclusion dimensions of the RtE Act becomes extremely central. The Act stipulates the right of every child, aged 6 to 14 years to eight years quality elementary school education in the local neighbourhood. For those children who do not yet enjoy this right, the Act provides additional education support to cover the lost period of education and to enable such children to access eight years of education both inside and outside schools. The RtE Act rightly shifts the responsibility of providing schooling to the state, moving away from the earlier theories of family and child deficits. Given the existing schooling constraints in terms of poor infrastructure, lack of adequately qualified teachers, delays in disbursing books and scholarships, the absence of quality midday meals and the lack of robust school monitoring or support systems, the tasks of implementing this right for children inside schools is a herculean task. In terms of ensuring this right to the millions of children currently outside of schools, this becomes even more of a challenge.

April 2013 is a critical watershed when the central government has promised to ensure the right to elementary education in all aspects, except for meeting teacher capacity norms. The central government has conducted stock-takes for the first two years of implementation of the RtE Act in April 2011 and April 2012, which show progress in a number of areas and continuing challenges in many more. Civil society organisations also have conducted stock-taking for the same period, primarily covering the norms and standards set out in the Act's schedule (i.e. physical infrastructure, facilities and services, teaching hours, etc.), and come up with a number of challenges. The Supreme Court has also supported the process by ruling in October 2011 that the denial of the basic rights to water and toilet facilities in schools violates the right to free and compulsory education provided under the RtE Act.²⁴ These are all important first steps in monitoring the Act and promoting state accountability for its implementation. Numerous challenges to implementation remain, given the lack of clear-cut and effective enforcement and

²² CESCR, *General Comment 13: Right to Education (Article 13)*, UN Doc. E/C.12/1999/10, 1999, para 6(b).

²³ Report of the Committee on Implementation of RTE Act and the Resultant Revamp of SSA, as quoted in Department of School Education and Literacy, *Sarva Shikshya Abhiyan: Revised Framework for Implementation based on the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009*, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi, 2011, p.24.

²⁴ The Hindu, *All Government Schools must have Toilets by November-end*, 19.10.2011, available at: www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/article2550270.ece.

grievance redress mechanisms under the Act and the inadequate financial allocations for education. India still spends only 3.78 per cent of its GDP on public education,²⁵ one of the lowest percentages in the world and much less than the government's promise of 6 per cent allocation.

However, a dimension that is not sufficiently covered in stocktaking by both the government and civil society organisations is the bundle of issues that constitute equity and inclusion in schooling. **Equity in education** means that all children should have equal access to, in and through elementary education to realise their potential and aspirations.²⁶ Equity is interpreted to mean not only equal opportunity, but also the creation of *enabling conditions* in which socially excluded children can avail of the opportunity to receive an elementary education.²⁷ Equity is recognised under SSA as an integral part of the agenda of improving the quality of education. This is achieved by developing a deeper understanding of the issues contributing to exclusion and disadvantage arising from structural inequalities, the challenges children from socially excluded communities face and their subsequent specific needs. Non-discrimination is understood as a minimum, core state obligation that has immediate effect, irrespective of the availability of resources. Hence, active measures should be in place in all schools to both prevent and redress discrimination of any kind.²⁸ Equity also requires that contextualised education strategies are developed to address the deep-rooted prejudices that support social exclusion of these children.²⁹

Inclusion in education means two processes: reducing exclusion from and within education, and addressing and responding to the diversity of learning needs among students.³⁰ It is about viewing diversity and differences among students as opportunities for enriching learning, not as problems, and transforming school systems and the learning environment in order to respond to the diversity of learners. As such, it is a much broader issue than just ensuring certain excluded groups come into mainstream education.³¹ Inclusion implies understanding and addressing the specific educational needs and predicament of socially excluded children.

²⁵ World Bank, World Development Indicators, data for 2008-09, available at: www.data.worldbank.org.

²⁶ UN Girls' Education Initiative & EFA Fast Track Initiative, *Equity and Inclusion in Education*, Washington DC, 2010, p.3.

²⁷ Ministry of Human Resource Development (2010), *Report of the Committee on Implementation of The Right of Children to Free & Compulsory Education Act, 2009 and the Resultant Revamp of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, , para.12. GOI, New Delhi.

²⁸ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment 13: The Right to Education, 1999, paras 31-37.

²⁹ Ministry of Human Resource Development, *SSA Framework for Implementation based on RtE Act 2009*, New Delhi, 2011, Ch.3.

³⁰ UN Girls' Education Initiative & EFA Fast Track Initiative, *Equity and Inclusion in Education*, Washington DC, 2010, p.3.

³¹ See UNESCO Guidelines for Inclusion in Education: Ensuring Access to Education for All, Paris, 2005.

Students should be seen as active participants in learning, albeit with different capacities and abilities. Therefore, methods of appraising and monitoring their progress should be sensitive and constructive, rather than standardised and penalising those with particular learning needs. Inclusion involves examining the social and community context of these children, their school context, and the quality and inclusive nature of learning materials available to them, to devise *flexible and varied* approaches and strategies to ensure their full participation in education. It also means tailoring education to embrace diversity and benefit *all* learners, with the goal of building an equitable and inclusive society.

While state and civil society organizations sporadically raise various issues under equity and inclusion, they are not effectively pursued. Some of the more common issues are unequal provisioning for school children, discrimination and exclusion of children from certain social groups in schools, dropouts from school. The inequalities in learning outcomes, the disproportionate numbers of girls and children from Dalit/ Adivasi/ Muslim communities among the population of out-of-school children, child labour, barriers that poor and disadvantaged parents face to engage with schools, and so on.

1.4 Relevance of this Study

As can be seen, Musahar children face some of the biggest hurdles in accessing their right to education. Various disabilities of the community negatively affect their access to education despite the RtE Act and its provisions. The lack of homesteads, segregated housing, poverty, migration and the low literacy levels of parents render the home and community environment difficult for children to access and complete schooling. School conditions, in particular the lack of teaching, discrimination, neglect by teachers, poor aspirations of teachers, lack of teacher-community engagement and teacher's tendency to blame the child and family for poor retention and completion rate prohibit these children from enjoying schooling processes. The lack of disaggregated data about their enrolment, attendance and dropout rates also makes it difficult to understand their actual performance in education. Given they continue to experience considerable exclusion and discrimination both in the society and at schools one may infer that their access to education continues to be problem.

Bihar has reported considerable progress in education; literacy rate increased from 47.0 percent in 2001 to 63.8 per cent in 2011. The rate of increase is impressive even while it was the lowest in the country in 2011. The gender gap at 26.7 percentage points (2001) reduced to 20.1 percentage points in 2011. The rural urban disparity has been brought down from 28 percentage points in 2001 to 17.0 percentage points in 2011. Additionally, the annual growth rate of the SC community between 2006-07 and 2010-11 reported at 8.6 per cent is higher than

the overall annual growth rate at 2.2.³² The progress and disparity reduction on various fronts may lead to a 'feel good attitude' without unraveling the specific conditions of the most marginalized children as the Musahars. Evidently, the last mile becomes the most difficult mile and this study explores dimensions that need attention to enhance the education among Musahar children.

While enrolment rates have grown considerably, drop-out rates continues to be high particularly for SC and ST children. 38.8 per cent drop out are at primary levels, while 66.5 per cent at upper primary level and 77.6 per cent at secondary levels.³³ Given the extreme disabilities of Musahar children both at community level and in the schools, it can be presumed that their dropout rates may far outweigh their population proportions. Thus, it is imperative to study the issues embedded in their drop out and performance to augment their access to education.

Parents and community currently have little engagement with schools and teachers and are not able to explore ways in which their children can access education. Members of the School Management Committees (SMCs) expressed difficulties in participation as well as in terms of addressing their children's issues through these forums, given the power relationships between other parents/schools and themselves. There are negligible efforts in the education system to hear the voices of Musahar parents and community. This study provides some insights into mothers and SMC members' voices in this regard.

There is no disaggregated data at block/district or state level to track Musahar children in their education. In addition, while earlier anthropological studies on the community are available, there have not been studies on educational issues of the community. Some insights are available from NGO reports of their intervention to promote Musahar children's education,³⁴ efforts at promoting alternate pedagogy for Musahar children³⁵ or some media reports. However, comprehensive research studies about Musahar children and their access to education is hardly available.

In the absence of information or insights into the education issues of Musahar children and the community in public domain, this study is an initial and exploratory one to understand the perspectives of various stakeholders that influence and impact Musahar children's education. The study included interviews and discussions with children, parents, community leaders, tola

³² Economic Survey 2012-13, Govt of Bihar

³³ Dept of Education, Govt of Bihar

³⁴ Discussions with Nari Gunjan, Prabhat, READ and others during the study

³⁵ Kumar, S, Ahmed, R. (2012), 'Alternate schooling for children from the Musahar Community: An Innovative Experiment' in School Education, Pluralism and Marginality: Comparative Perspectives, (ed) Sleeter, C and others, Orient Blackswan Pvt Ltd, New Delhi.

sevaks, and NGOs to understand their aspirations, perspectives and interventions. It also held discussions with administrators and teachers.

Given the context of the RtE Act, that requires every child in the 6 to 14 years access and complete eight years of elementary education, and given the limited information available about Musahar children, this study is one of a first of its kind. The insights from this study can be used to expand the 'equity-inclusion' dimensions of RtE and develop specific strategies and methods for improving the situation of the Musahar children in education.

1.5 Objective of the Study

The overall objective of the study is to understand the current education context of Musahar children, analyse policies, strategies and interventions under RtE for the education of children from Musahar communities and to develop policy-practice strategies for improving equitable education for Musahar children and youth.

1.6 Broad Areas of Study

1. Identify different sub-groups within the Musahar communities, including gender differentials, and develop differentiated understanding on their current access to education under RtE.
2. Map the different education schemes and entitlements promoted by the government for the Musahar children, and analyse the constraints and barriers they face to access them.
3. Analyse the efficacy of current civil society organisations' strategies, engagements and experiences with Musahar children and communities, with a particular focus on education
4. Identify community leaders, civil society organisations and educated youth in the community to form a core group to promote education among Musahar children.
5. Make recommendations to develop strategic directions for enhancing equitable access to education for children and youth from Musahar communities in Bihar.

1.7 Scope of the study

The study is qualitative in nature exploring at depth experiences of Musahar children, mothers, youth and activists to understand the opportunities and barriers faced by children in accessing their right to education. The study identified four panchayats, one each from Patna, Jamui, Saharsha and Begusarai districts to represent the diverse conditions and subgroups among the Musahar community. Patna represents proximity to the state capital and urban area, Jamui is affected by left wing extremism, and Saharsha is affected by recurrent flood and water logging.

It covered Thiruhuthiya and Magahiya Musahars, the two major sub groups. To gain maximum understanding of issues as well as identify potential persons/organizations from within the community, the field study was partnered with Musahar youth and civil society organizations in all four panchayats.

1.8 Methodology

The study was conducted in the following four panchayats and included focused group discussions with children, members of the community and representatives of the school. Musahar community organizations from these areas, with considerable rapport with their communities conducted the field study in each of the panchayat. They had in-depth understanding of the community and the issues.

Panchayat	District	Organisation
Baghban panchayat Bakari block	Begusarai	Sant Kabir Seva Samiti, Mr. Hanskumar
Sabalbigha panchayat, Sikandra Block	Jamui	Paramount Global Wefare Society, Mr. Vishnudev Manjhi
Jayantipur panchayat Naubatpur block	Patna	Prabodh Samiti, Mr. Ajay kumar
Ghongepur panchayat, Mahisi block	Saharsha	Baad Peedit Jan Kalyan Samiti, Mr. Rajkumar Sada

The study gained understanding from a diverse set of stakeholders regarding Musahar children's access and progress in schools. A diverse set of tools, which included survey of literature on Musahars' access to education, data on school performance, FGDs and individual interviews, were used in the study.

The following set of tools was used in each of the four panchayats:

- a. FGD with school going children
- b. FGD with out of school children
- c. FGD with mothers
- d. Individual interview with Tola Sevaks
- e. Individual interview with teachers
- f. Interviews with SMC members
- g. School profile and observation

In addition, the study also held extensive discussions with government officials from the department of social welfare, officers of the BMDVM, NGO leaders with long years of focused work with the Musahar community, NGOs from the Musahar community and other development organizations. Data collection was done during September–November, 2012 and data analysis in November–December, 2012.

1.9 Chapterisation

The report is organized into 8 chapters. Chapter 1 provides a historical background, population distribution and socio-economic context of the community. Chapter 2 provides a framework for understanding exclusion-equity-inclusion under RtE to analyse the context of Musahar children's education along the framework. Chapter 3 presents a broad-sweep on the Musahar children's world. Chapter 4 locates Musahar children's experiences in education within the larger context of the community's literacy and education status. It enquired into children in school, children out of schools, of boys and girls. Chapter 5 reports on community perceptions and support towards Musahar children's education. It engages with mothers, youth, tola sevaks and School Management Committee (SMC) members. Chapter 6 analyses state policies and provisions and their implementation in favour of Musahar children. Chapter 7 analyses civil society organization interventions and strategies adopted by them for Musahar children's education. Chapter 8 concludes with findings and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

RtE: FRAMEWORK TO ANALYSE MUSAHAR CHILDREN'S ACCESS

Education is an empowerment right, in that it is the primary vehicle for socio-economically marginalised adults and children to lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities.³⁶ The *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009* (RtE) creates a legally enforceable entitlement to free and compulsory elementary education (EE) from 1st to 8th standards for all children aged 6-14 years. It moves the education system in the country away from an incentives- and provisions-based approach, to a rights and entitlements approach. It is understood as encompassing the admission into schools, attendance and completion of quality elementary education, as well as access to and participation in all academic and non-academic services and activities, based on the principles of equity and non-discrimination.³⁷

2.1 RtE Act in the Human Rights Frame

RtE thus provides an opportunity to examine and address in a holistic manner the multiple factors that ensure an education that facilitates each child's ability to fully develop her/his human personality. This refers to an education in keeping with constitutional values and principles as well as the objectives of education enunciated in United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) and other international human rights conventions. Children should realize their potential in terms of cognitive, emotional and creative capabilities. These factors can be grouped under four features of RtE, for which schools should have an overall monitoring and developmental strategy: (i) availability; (ii) accessibility; (iii) acceptability; and (iv) adaptability. The latter three features comprise key aspects pertaining to equity and inclusion within each school/neighbourhood.

Availability: educational facilities, personnel, services, goods and programmes must be available in sufficient quantity.

Accessibility: educational facilities and services should be accessible to everyone without discrimination. Accessibility has four overlapping dimensions:

- i) *physical accessibility* meaning that facilities and services must be within safe reach for all sections of the population;

³⁶CESCR General Comment 13: Right to Education, 1999, para.1.

³⁷Ministry of Human Resource Development, SSA Framework for Implementation based on RtE Act 2009, New Delhi, 2011, para 1.2.2.

- ii) *economic accessibility* meaning that facilities and services must be affordable for all, and whatever costs and charges involved must not compromise or threaten the realisation of other rights;
- iii) *non-discrimination* meaning that facilities and services must be accessible to all, including the most vulnerable or marginalised sections of the population, in law and in fact without discrimination; and
- iv) *information accessibility* that includes the right of everyone to seek, receive and impart information concerning the right to education.

Acceptability: the form and substance of education - including curricula, learning content, and teaching materials, methods and environments - should be of quality and culturally appropriate to all students. **Quality** refers to curricula and teaching methods that ensure that the basic learning needs³⁸ of children are met, *and* are of a quality that has meaning to the individual students, to the community, and to society at large. In other words, the purpose and content of the curriculum as well as teaching methods should be non-discriminatory and inclusive, tailored to the needs of children in different and difficult circumstances, incorporating content **appropriate** to the students' cultural, linguistic and social backgrounds, be free from stereotypical representations of various groups, and respectful of children's social, cultural and religious identities. It also means that laws, policies, strategies, programmes and measures should be formulated and implemented in a way that is acceptable to individuals and the communities involved. Consultation and participatory processes are key in this regard.

Adaptability: requires that education strategies, policies, programmes and measures should be flexible and relevant to respond to the needs of changing societies and communities, and to the needs of different students within their diverse social and cultural contexts.³⁹

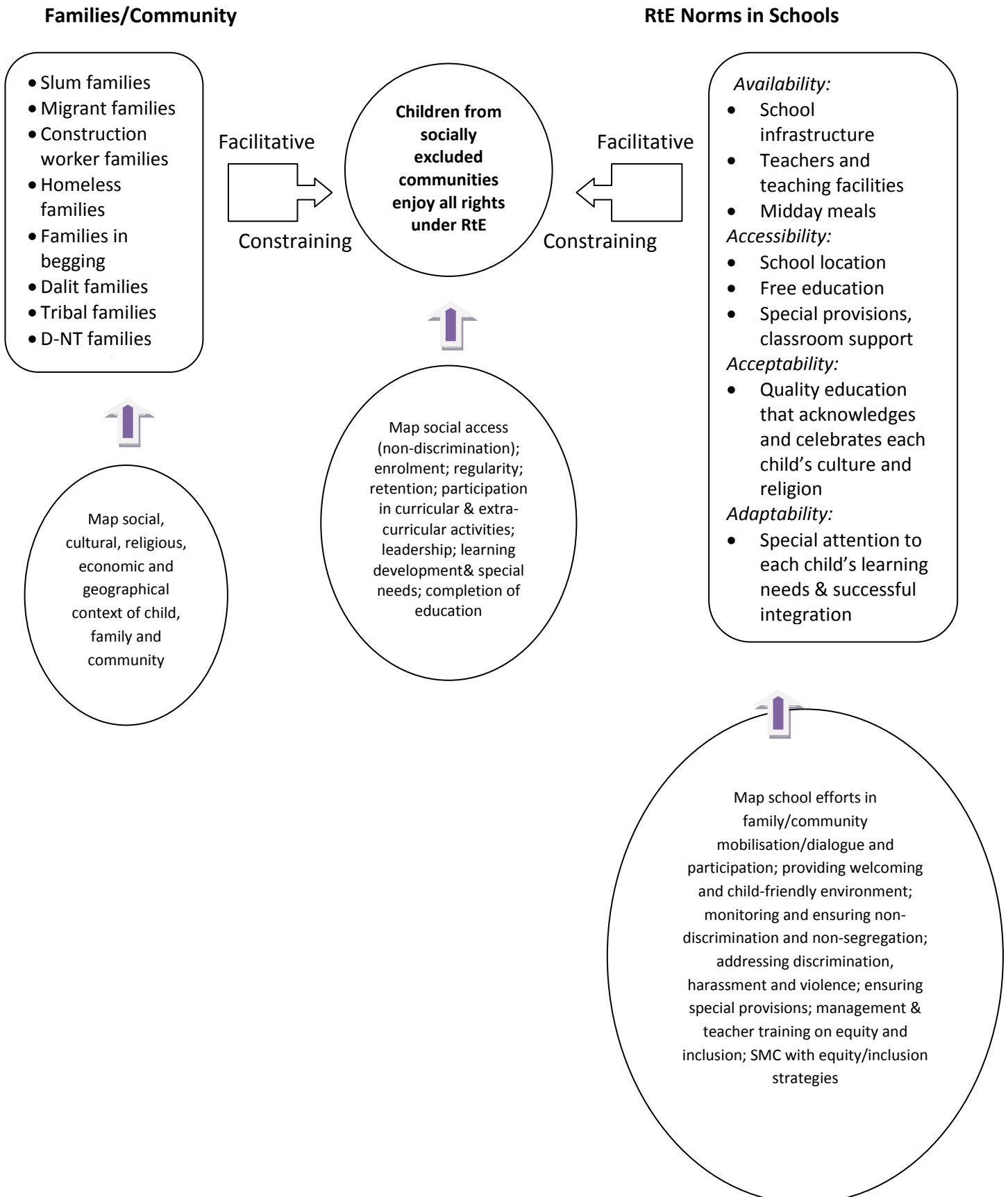
While the RtE Act, Schedule to the Act and (Central Govt.) Rules detail a number of standards under these four features, there is further scope for the elaboration of these norms and standards. Notably, provisions of the RtE Act that are not expanded include those pertaining to equity and inclusion: that is, ensuring non-discrimination, elimination of fear and mental harassment, ensuring that children are not prevented from studying owing to financial barriers, quality education, promoting inclusion, supporting diversity, etc.⁴⁰

³⁸Basic learning needs comprise: (i) *essential learning tools*: literacy, oral expression, reading and numeracy, problem solving, writing; and (ii) *basic learning content*: knowledge, skills, values, attitudes.

³⁹CESCR General Comment 13: Right to Education, 1999; Kalantriy et al., 'Enhancing Enforcement of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights Using Indicators: A Focus on the Right to Education in the ICESCR', Human Rights Quarterly 32, 2010.

⁴⁰ See Annexure

2.2 AN EQUITY AND INCLUSION FRAMEWORK in RtE



In concrete terms, education with equity and inclusion requires that:

First, children from Musahar community within a neighbourhood should be identified and their access in terms of admission, retention and completion of elementary education mapped. This social mapping should be undertaken with community involvement, as part of the process of mobilising local communities to enrol and retain their children in education. The mapping process has been proposed as the following: (i) environment building in the neighbourhood; (ii) conduct of a household survey; (iii) preparation of a map indicating different households, the number of children in each household and their participation status in school; (iv) preparation of a neighbourhood/school education register; (v) presentation of the map and analysis to the people; and (vi) preparation of a proposal for improved education facilities in the neighbourhood, which would form the basis of the School Development Plan.⁴¹

Second, the barriers they face in terms of availability, physical, economic and social accessibility, acceptability and adaptability of education should be identified through separate discussions with children, parents, community leaders, teachers and school management. This refers to barriers within the children's social (family/community), cultural, religious, economic and geographical contexts, within the school context, and any policy or programme barriers. From this, strategies for removal of such barriers should be generated for them to have equal access to, in and through elementary education.

Third, school systems and school management should be organised so that schools are child-friendly, meaning every child feels welcome, enjoys a level playing field and has the opportunity to develop to the best of her/his abilities through schooling in a healthy and safe environment. Schools should be places where the Musahar child is able to participate fully in and learn from all educational and extra-curricular activities, study good quality curricula that support equity and inclusion, have good learning outcomes, receive leadership and personality development opportunities, feel safe and secure, and feel confident to share their identity and culture/religion. In this regard, the role of the teacher is considered central, in terms of creating an equitable and inclusive environment within and outside the classroom, especially for girls.⁴² Not only should the teaching profession be inclusive and equitable, therefore, but teachers should also be equipped and motivated to support equity and inclusion in schools. This equipping process should occur through pre and in-service teacher training as well as the establishment of norms of behaviour within the school for management, teachers and

⁴¹Ministry of Human Resource Development, SSA Framework for Implementation based on RtE Act 2009, New Delhi, 2011, Ch.3.

⁴²*Report of the Committee on Implementation of The Right of Children to Free & Compulsory Education Act, 2009 and the Resultant Revamp of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi, 2010, para.12.

students. Additionally, the school curricula should be of good quality, meaning not only fulfilling the learning needs and knowledge development of children. Curricula should also be in conformity with constitutional values and rights, respect for diversity of cultures and religions, and foster children's freedom of expression.

Concept of child-friendly schools is promoted to focus on all the requirements of a school to attract, retain and facilitate children to learn in schools. This also requires the identification of *existing strategies* within schools to ensure equity and inclusion in education, and an assessment of whether and to what extent these strategies fulfil their goals. This includes strategies to guarantee that all children, including out-of-school children, are in schools, and to cater to the special needs of children from socially excluded groups. It further includes school systems to monitor/supervise school performance in terms of equity and inclusion, and to prevent or provide redress for discrimination, abuse and harassment that negatively affect a child's ability to gain an education.

Inclusive education has become synonymous with ensuring children with disabilities (special needs/CWSN) access schools. It however requires expansion to include all children who have difficulties to access schools be they social, economic or any other. Inclusive education also demands spaces be created and parents/family and community actively encouraged to participate fully in all school processes, including monitoring their child's educational progress. This includes through functional SMCs set in place in each school, with adequate representation of socially excluded communities, to become actively involved in monitoring school performance and developing plans to improve educational processes and outcomes using equity and inclusion strategies. Additionally, spaces and mechanisms should be created for students to participate and have a say in the course of their education, to identify problems and difficulties, and suggest solutions.

Inclusion of and learning by Musahar children in schools requires that schools become child friendly and inclusive promoting a culture of equity and social inclusion. It requires expansion of the equity-social inclusion frame and provisions of the Act and their rigorous monitoring. It requires continuous engagement with parents and community to incorporate additional insights and garner their support to facilitate Musahar children equal opportunities of 'access to, in and through' education.

CHAPTER 3

THE WORLD OF MUSAHAR CHILDREN

It is important to understand the world of Musahar children before analyzing their schooling and education.

Musahar children live in habitations called 'Musaharis' that, in both rural and urban areas, are segregated from other habitations of General Caste communities and Dalit communities. The habitations are by and large crowded, situated in the most disadvantageous locations be it access to road, water logging, or access to services like hospitals, banks. Being landless and tied to landlords as 'Kamaiti', the community has been devoid of even homestead, living on village common lands, lands of the landlords or on encroached lands. This has been a source of continuous threat of eviction and displacement for the community and its children. Basic services of roads, open play spaces, parks, community halls, drinking water, sanitation, electricity are poor in these habitations. Thus, Musahar children lived segregated and isolated from other communities, without basic amenities. They lived at a distance from both General Caste and Dalits and have little engagement with children outside their own communities in their habitations in rural and urban areas.

Musahar families are among the poorest in the state, their occupation being agriculture and other unorganized workers, migrant workers. Only about 2.7 per cent Musahars own any piece of land and do their own agriculture. Their annual family income may be as low as Rs. 13,635/.⁴³ Musahar children lived in poor families, without basic amenities, without access to basic services and often part-took in the family occupations. Their family conditions often did not provide them the avenues to pursue education or other development interests. Many children took up work to meet family needs and contribute to family income, some of them altogether dropping out of schools. Children expressed concern that their family needs their earnings to survive. While discussing the possibilities of resuming education, they were concerned how their families would manage without their earnings.

Migration further affects children's education. When the whole family migrates, children dropout of schools and do not attend schools in the work places. Sending or receiving States do not provide education for the migrant children though SSA and RtE outline strategies for them. Migrant children are out of schools for six to eight months in a year and lose out on schooling. They find it difficult to resume studies and cope up when they came back for short periods. In Saharsha district, families had some agriculture and maintained sheep and buffaloes. In such

⁴³ Tomy Joseph (2007), 'The Musahars: Cultural Life of a Dalit Community in Bihar', Thesis submitted to University of Mumbai.

cases, mothers sought the help of boys and girls in fetching fodder, grazing and care of animals. Boys/girls spent two hours on average supporting household work on a daily basis outside school hours. This again took away children from their school and study, got them interested in wage earning and took away their time of study and play. It also led to their engagement in adult occupations at a very young age robbing them of childhood preoccupations.

Child labour is prevalent among Musahar children. Parents often encourage children to do wage work in peak agricultural seasons, go along with them for day migration to nearby towns when work was there. Children reported that these practices got them engaged and interested in wage work, slowly taking away their interest from school and studies. A child may earn anywhere from Rs.35/- to Rs.100/- when they took up agriculture wage work, girls always earning less than boys. Boys earned as much as Rs.150/day when they take up non-agriculture casual work. However, this type of work was available only for about 10 days a month. Migration brought maximum income, boys in Delhi and Punjab earning about Rs.250-300/day and in Gujarat Rs.300-350/day. Girls did not migrate on their own, they may go with their families when they migrate.

The daily routine of a school going Musahar child included at least 2-3 hours of work at home. For boys it was grazing animals, ensuring that animals are cleaned and washed and tied safely for the evening, gathering fodder etc. For girls it included some of the above and also preparation and serving breakfast for all at home. If parents were working nearby they would take food to them in the fields after school. They also had to make the evening meal for the family. Additional work and responsibility fell on them, particularly girls if there are young children, pregnant or nursing mothers, sick people, old people or guests at home. Work added up during peak seasons, family functions and festivals too.

Alcohol consumption has been an issue in the community, with some families brewing and selling alcohol as a source of income. There is demand and even support for brewing by dominant castes, even financing. Children reported their concern about this practice. This in their opinion led to fights and quarrels between their parents, fights with other families in the tola and also violence on their mothers by the clients who come for drinking. They also reported how this disturbed the home environment and did not provide them the space or environment to study at home in the evenings. This evidently was a source of stress and anxiety for children in the homes.

It is heartening that a handful of villages like Jamsaut in Danapur had put a complete ban on alcohol brewing and consumption in the village and has been able to enforce it for over 20 years. The women in these villages were encouraged by social activists like Sr. Sudha Varghese and Fr. Philip Manthra and their young activists to make this ban possible. It was encouraging to find girls from Jamsaut village coming back with their husbands and children to live in their

maternal village considering it a better environment for their families and children. In their opinion, banning alcohol encouraged women to come together as self help group members, young people to study in the village as well as in residential schools, youth entering colleges. One of the women animators with Sr Sudha has become a teacher in the government school.

Education has come into Musahar tolas and families only recently with a handful of them completing class X. Less than 1% of the community is educated above higher/senior secondary school. While the majority of parents are non-literate, each tola today may have a handful of youth who have completed schools. However, facilitating education among the children in the Musahar tola was not easy. Mothers reported that as they go out for work in the mornings, they are not able to ensure that children went to school. When engaged in loading/ unloading and other work in the nearby towns, men from Jamui left their homes as early as 4 am. Women domestic workers in Jamui left home at 7 am. Unlike a majority of other families where there are some educated adults, these families did not have adults in a position to encourage and facilitate children to go to school. Mothers were also concerned that their children did not get any educational support at home. Despite the fact that elementary education is free, families calculated an average Rs.1200/- every year towards the cost of a child's schooling. This increased to Rs.2500/- if tuitions were included⁴⁴.

The State took little note of the conditions of the Musahar communities/children since independence. Clubbed along with other Dalit communities they were eligible for the provisions therein but for lack of information, access and extreme disabilities Musahars have not been able to access them effectively. There is no data tracking by the state except for the census. There has been little academic interest in these communities and their specific issues have not been considered significant enough for study. Though they experience the worst forms of social exclusion in education, even the recent MHRD-EDCIL study⁴⁵ in 2012, does not throw any light on the experiences of these children and communities in particular.

Even when out of school, both children and parents often repeated that *“education is important and earned ‘name and fame’ in society, a means to gain employment and earn respect from people and gain understanding”*. They had examples of dominant members in the village that had accessed government employment in their village after being educated. They also had the idea that educated people get jobs as IAS and IPS officers. It is interesting that while they referred to gaining employment, respect, name and fame, they did not connect it to

earning money as is usually done by young boys. They reported that education helps one to think and take decisions after considering its impact.

In their opinion, education was means to become good/better people. A few boys wanted to be teachers and ensure that they teach the children of their community and that no child will be beaten by teachers. Others had the vague idea of gaining employment. Getting an employment as an officer was also seen as a means to get their families out of poverty. An interesting response was *“when we are not educated how can we aspire to be anything.”* It reflected their understanding about the relevance of education. Education supported them build aspirations in life. For some of them, their aspirations in life was linked to aspirations for their community—*“if we study and gain employment we can change the situation of our families; if we became teachers we can provide education without corporal punishment and provide education for all children.”*

Enquiries into the Musahar community/children are important to promote their education and development. They stand at a unique junction in a historical process of their journey from tribe to caste and being excluded and discriminated by both General Caste and Dalit communities. They hold the bottom most position in both literacy and poverty in the State. Given that RtE promises every child their right to education, specific understanding of their perceptions, opportunities and barriers is essential to develop specific strategies on their behalf. Given the role of education in accessing other rights, this historical opportunity in RtE is a first step towards ensuring Musahar children access and enjoy them.

CHAPTER 4

MUSAHAR CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Disaggregated data on education of Musahar children is not captured by the State in its annual educational statistics, be it at school, block, district or state levels. The decadal census provides basic information on this community, but the interval of ten years is too long. Two Five Year Plans (FYPs) are planned and implemented at national and state levels during this interval. Critical decisions are made on plan approaches and budgets during the FYPs and Musahar children lose out in the wider national and state level plans, be it education or other sectors. Given that both Centre and State further fine tune their plans annually, the lack of data further eliminates any possibility of aligning annual plans with the needs and constraints of the Musahar children.

Educational data of SC children is collected as part of the annual state education department data. However, this cannot be automatically applied to the Musahar children owing to wide disparity between them and other SC children in educational indicators. It is also a matter of concern that education programmes and strategies are designed and implemented through various fast track projects and schemes and Musahar children do not find any specific strategies within them.

Given that Musahar children and community have very low literacy rates in the State, capturing disaggregated data at school/block/district and state level will be of great relevance in designing strategies for promoting their education per se as well as reducing the inequalities between them and other children. Given the multiple deprivation and disabilities, it is desirable that Bihar state identifies Musahar children as being most vulnerable and at risk with regard to education. It is important to review their situation on annual basis and make necessary strategic interventions to address them, in the overall frame of providing equitable quality of education and reducing inequalities across groups of children.

4.1 Literacy and Education among Musahar Community:

The literacy rate of Musahar community as per 1991 census was 2.25 per cent (1 per cent among Musahar women) and rose to 9 per cent in 2001 (3.9 per cent for Musahar women). Thus in percentage points, literacy rate among Musahar women rose by 2.9 percentage points. In 2001 literacy rate among Musahar community was 9.0 per cent while that of SCs in general was 28.5, and that of General Population 47.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Census 2001.

Literacy Rate among Different SC groups

Literacy Rate	All SCs Bihar	Dhobi	Pasi	Dusadh	Chamar	Bhuiya	Musahar
Persons	28.5	43.9	40.6	33.0	32.1	13.3	9
Females	15.6	27.9	25.3	18.5	16.8	6.5	3.9

Source: Data Highlights, Census 2001

Further education levels among the 9 per cent literate Musahars is also found to be poor with 59.3 per cent (15.3 literate without education and 44 per cent being below primary school level) educated below primary level. Only 5.5 percent of children completed 10/12 classes. Less than 1 out of 100 youth were graduates or above. It is next to impossible to find a technically qualified person in the Musahar tola. The poor literacy and education status of the community is stark.

Education levels among SCs

Name of SC	Literate without education	Below primary	Primary	Middle	Matric, secondary, higher secondary, intermediate	Diploma Technical And Non-technical	Graduate and above
All SC	6.6	33.1	28.4	13.1	15.1	0.1	3.6
Bhuiya	15.3	44.1	26.5	7.4	6	nil	0.6
Chamar	5.9	33.6	28.5	13.4	15	0.1	3.5
Dhobi	4.5	28.3	27	14.9	19.7	0.2	5.4
Dusadh	6.0	32	28.5	13.7	16.1	0.1	3.5
Musahar	15.3	44	27.8	6.7	5.5	nil	0.8
Pasi	5.7	30	27.1	13.4	17.9	0.2	5.6

Source: Data Highlights, Census 2001

In 2001 just about 10 per cent of Musahar children in the 5-14 years age group attended school. 90 per cent were not attending schools. The situation foreclosed their opportunities for higher or technical education, economic development for the children and the community too. The gap in education between Musahar and Dhobi (other Dalit) children in 2001 was thirty-five percentage points. One does not have data to see how this disparity has changed since 2001 to the present.

Percentage of school going population in the 5-14 years age group among SC groups:

Age Group	All SCs	Chamar	Dusadh	Musahar	Pasi	Dhobi	Bhuiya
5-14 yrs	29.4	33.7	34.1	9.8	39.4	45.6	15.1

Census 2001, Data Highlights

Inequalities in literacy rates between Musahar community and others, both General Community and Scheduled Caste communities is telling, where the Musahar girls and women are at the rock bottom. Another area of concern is that even the literates are not reaching any functional levels of learning, be it academic or in technical skills. Thus, the situation of Musahar education demands specific attention in our attempts in universalizing education, and in particular of Musahar women and girls. It becomes important to treat the Musahar children as a category in themselves and track their education data on annual basis.

4.2 Education of Musahar Children in the past decade

Efforts at increasing access to school and promoting universal education have been on the State agenda for at least the past 15 years ever since the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1997. The increased emphasis on infrastructure improvement under SSA focused on making primary schools available within 1 km and secondary schools within 3 km. Some of these primary schools are located within the Musahar tola itself and has improved school access to Musahar children during this period. Having a school within their vicinity has led to greater awareness among the community as well as some interface between the community and schools and education system. One needs to recognize that caste based untouchability and social hierarchy between Musahars and other social groups would not have allowed them easy entry into other habitations, much less the freedom to go into schools or even think of sending their children to schools. This could very well be the reason why only 10 per cent of children were in schools even as recent as 2001.

The greater physical access and public campaigns on 'Education For All' has also created greater awareness and concern for education in the community. The past 15 years have also led to a handful of youth accessing school and higher education in many tolas. These youth provide information, create new education pathways and are role models for others in the community. Having themselves gone through the process of schooling, they guide their siblings as well as other children in the community. Stories of educated persons in the community are all of first generation learners, children who at some point worked as child labourers and bonded child labour and later took up their studies. Some children made the decision to study without much parental support and they were determined to study despite the heavy odds they faced in schools and in society.

The Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission (BMDVM) is an important step in recognizing and providing focused attention on development issues of smaller sub groups within Dalits. An important intervention in the BMDVM is the appointment of tola level education volunteers (tola sevaks) in Mahadalit habitations. The task of these volunteers is to provide additional tola level educational support to children, ensure their regular attendance in schools and also motivate the community towards educating their children. These efforts too contributed to greater enrolment among Musahar children to education.

Overall enrolment data for SC children has improved and is reported at 18.28 per cent in 2010-11 while the population share is 15.70 per cent.⁴⁷ While enrolment data is of some respite, high dropout rates among SCs continues to be critical. At the national level 29.33 per cent (girls 25.31 per cent) drop out at primary level, 51.25 per cent (girls 51.99) drop out at upper primary level and 59.71 (girls 59.03) drop out at secondary level (class X).⁴⁸ The dropout rate of SC children in Bihar is much higher, as discussed below.

4.3 Out of School Children among Musahars (OOSC)

Ten years after the 2001 census, the problem of Musahar children seem to be more dropout than 'never enrolled'. One can say the Musahar children have begun to peep into classrooms, and it continues to be peeping into classrooms. A number of them drop out between classes II and IV and the remaining by class VI, thereby not completing the mandated eight years of schooling under the RtE. Even during the period they are in school, they do not attend regularly. Teachers reported *"Musahar children absent themselves frequently and their irregular attendance contributed to their weak performance and participation in schools."*

Dropout Rates of SC children at Primary, Upper Primary and Secondary Levels⁴⁹

Education Level	SC Girls	SC Boys	Total
Primary	35.9	40.9	38.8
Upper Primary	63.8	68.2	66.5
Secondary	76.8	78.0	77.6

Dept of Education, Govt. of Bihar, 2010-11

The study held 4 FGDs with 37 Out of school boys and 3 FGDs with 26 Out of School Girls

Boys by class of drop out:

Class of drop out	Begusarai	Saharsha	Patna rural	Jamui
Class II		2		3
Class III		3	5	2
Class IV	2		2	3
Class V	3		3	
Class VI	4			
Class VII				
Class VIII				
Total	9	5	10	8
Never enrolled		5		

⁴⁷ Elementary Education in India: Progress Towards UEE, 2010-11, National University of Educational Planning and Administration

⁴⁸ Annual Report, 2011-12, Dropout rates for 2009-10, MHRD, GoI

⁴⁹ Economic Survey 2013, Govt of Bihar,

Unlike 2001, when only 10 per cent of Musahar children in the 5-14 years age group attended school, almost all children in the tola got enrolled in primary schools today. 32 out of 37 boys were enrolled in primary schools and 5 were 'never enrolled'. Out of the 32 enrolled into primary schools, 15 dropped out before completing class III. 13 dropped out in class IV and 6 in class V. thus 28 children out of 32 who were enrolled in primary level dropped out by class V. The dropout rate in this small sample was as high as 87.5 per cent at primary level while the state data for SC children reports 38.8 per cent. Even as one cannot come to any conclusion from such small data, field data showed much higher dropout rates for Musahar children. Only 4 boys (12.5 per cent) in the study sample continued their studies beyond primary to upper primary school. Thus, the dropout rates among Musahar boys requires serious efforts to retain them in schools.

Girls by class of drop out:

Class of drop out	Begusarai (8 girls)	Saharsha (10 girls)	Jamui (8 girls)	Total
Not enrolled				
Class II				
Class III	2	4	2	8
Class IV	3	3	2	8
Class V	1	3		4
Class VI	2		3	5
Class VII				
Class VIII			1	1
Total	8	10	8	26

Of the 26 girls who took part in the FGD in three panchayats in three districts, 8 girls (30 per cent) dropped out by class III. 20 girls (76.9 per cent) dropped out by class V and 6 girls (23 per cent) continued beyond class V and dropped out by class VIII. The parents of all girls were non-literate and employed as wage labourers.

That boys and girls enrolled into schools drop out by class II and III is a matter of great concern. One is concerned that these children dropped out even before gaining any understanding of what schooling is, no understanding of what schooling can do for their lives. They were not old enough to make decisions for such an important aspect in their lives. Moreover, they are too young to be working and hence, one assumes that the decision to drop out at such ages is not wholly linked to taking up labour for contributing income to the family.

4.3.1 Commonly Reported Reasons for Dropping Out of School

There are many studies that point to various reasons why children dropout of schools. There is no doubt that these reasons also hold good to why Musahar children drop out of schools and

hence these are touched upon in this paragraph. These include but are not limited to lack of adequate classrooms, lack of space in each classroom, lack of water/toilets and non-functional toilets. Teacher related reasons include shortage of teachers, teachers irregular to school, teachers do not teach full classes, corporal punishments etc. The MHRD reports that only about 5 per cent of the schools are RtE compliant on the nine indicators in the RtE schedule at preset.⁵⁰ Apart from the school level causes for dropouts, family and community issues include poverty, migration, distance and physical barriers to reach school, lack of safety on the way to school etc. Language barriers, un-interesting teaching methodology have also been discussed in various reports. The study emphasizes that these are important reasons for children's drop out and are equally relevant to the Musahar children. One may even assume that these reasons are more severe for Musahar children given their multiple disabilities and deprivations.

4.3.2 Specific Issues Reported by Musahar Children in the Study

1. Stigma related to identity: As discussed in the first chapter, Musahar children are excluded and discriminated owing to their identity. Children are stigmatized as 'rat eating' and related images are incorporated into their identity to exclude them. In one of the schools in Patna, Yadav community children refused to sit together or play with Musahar children on the basis that they eat pork meat. One of the children reported how *"his school friends caught a dead rat and beat him with it calling him Musahar ka bachha."* The common term used for their tola is always "musahari" and they are invariably referred to as 'musahar ka bachha' by other students and even teachers. Musahar girls who had completed primary schools in their habitation and got admission in Upper Primary schools had dropped out of school. When pressed on why they did so, the reported they were being called "Musaharni" both by teachers and other students, which they resented and felt ashamed of. Many studies have reported 'teacher attitudes promoting exclusion-more explicit in case of children from deprived communities and particularly girls'.⁵¹

ii) Excluded as Dirty and Unclean: Musahar children reported that other children consider them dirty and unclean and in some cases teachers also refer to them as being dirty and unclean. *'More sensitive teachers encourage them to have baths, comb hair and come clean to school'*. While this may be looked upon as encouraging the child, public statements of this nature by teachers only reinforce that they are unclean and need to be told to come clean to schools. This contradicts what the parents shared in the earlier chapter about how they take extra efforts to ensure children bathe themselves before going to school, even when they have difficulty to access water and toilets in their homes. Thus, even if it happens that some child/ren may not have come clean to school on particular days or regularly, making these

⁵⁰ Stock taking by MHRD, 2011-12

⁵¹ *Inclusion and Exclusion in the Schools and Class rooms in Primary and Upper Primary Schools: Bihar State Report*, Edcil Ltd, 2012

statements without enquiring into efforts children or families make to come clean to schools is both biased and in-sensitive to the children, their feelings and aspirations. An even more painful part is that by and large, Musahar children internalize and accept these perceptions about themselves.

"If the Musahar children come clean to school, have bath and comb their hair, they can become friends with other children" – teacher

'Our clothes are all patched up and not clean and so other children do not like to sit with us' was the reflection of a young girl regarding the discrimination meted out to her in school.

iii) Regular and severe Corporal punishments: A more common reason reported by a number of children for dropping out, boys in particular, was corporal punishments. Corporal punishments continued in schools despite it being prohibited and made punishable offence. Students reported various forms of physical punishments as beating hard and pinching hard. They said teachers made it more painful by pinching soft body parts like the belly or upper portion of the arms. Further, boys reported that they were beaten even when there was no reason. They said they did not understand why they were beaten. In their opinion, they were punished more often than others and more severely than others, sometimes on every day basis.

Birbal from Begusarai dropped out and currently is an agricultural labour and also migrates to Gujarat periodically; *"Teacher used to beat me without any reason. The minute I enter the class he would beat me. He used to beat me every day. I do not want to go to school if the teachers beat so."*

Raghu said that he did not go to school despite his father urging him to do so. He was afraid of corporal punishment. He heard his friends frequently shared how they were beaten in the class by the teacher. He also saw parents go to school and question the teacher about beating their children.

iv) Improper Teacher behaviour: *"teachers do not behave properly with us"* was an oft-repeated statement, particularly by girls. While it was not possible to engage on the issues at depth, girls reported their discomfort at how some teachers related to them, there were instances when they did not like how male teachers looked at them, touched them or talked to them. They felt the instances had sexual overtones. It was reported that the quieter girls had to

bear these overtures than girls who were confident and assertive. This may also be reflection of the social attitudes towards Dalit women and particularly Musahar women. Common perceptions in the village included that Musahar women were 'willing to sell themselves along with the alcohol'.

Students reported how teachers do not pay attention to the learning of the Musahar children in class. One boy reported how when he asked clarifications to the teacher, *'the teacher rather than answering his doubts asked other students to explain it to him'*. Parents questioned why they should send their children to school when teachers did not pay attention to their learning. Children also reported that teachers did not encourage them, referred to them in undignified terms, referred to practices like rat eating, alcoholism in the community in derogatory terms. Research evidence also suggests that children who are not engaged by teacher and school tend to drop out faster.⁵²

v) Not given their entitlements: Many students reported their unhappiness at not receiving entitlements like scholarship, uniform etc. Parents too expressed their discontent in this regard. Parents went to school and demanded that their child also be given entitlements, when other children similarly placed had received it. This was often interpreted by teachers as *"parents send children only to get the scholarship and not to study; or that children came to have the mid day meals and not study"*. While on the face of the matter, it may look so, deeper issues of family need, family inability to spend on children's education, crisis management in families often push families to look for any possible resources. There is also a sense of being treated unfairly or the teachers indulging in malpractices. Various instances that may not look so serious to an outsider was quoted as reflections of being unfair or humiliation: *being made to sit on the floor when others sat on the desks, not being allowed to sit in the front, not being allowed to have MDM first, not being allowed to touch MDM vessels. These were not inconveniences, but reinforcements of the social hierarchy and untouchable status.* Not being given entitlements was part of being treated unfairly.

vi) School level costs:

"I have three school going children and I cannot spend the Rs.1200/year which is the additional costs per child for schooling, making it Rs.3600/- year. I myself have work for about 150 days a year fetching me Rs.15000-20000/year. Where do I have the money to spend education costs after managing the basics for my family. I would like to provide my children additional tuitions, but it will cost at least Rs.600-1000/child."

⁵² 11th SSA JRM Report, January 2011

RtE titled 'children's right to free and compulsory education' focuses on providing infrastructure in terms of schools, classrooms, water, toilets, and teachers to make schools and its infrastructure available to all children present and projected. It is maintained that schooling is 'free' and families do not incur costs on schooling. State provisions like mid day meals, books, uniforms, scholarships, cycles are further to reduce financial burden on parents. However, there is no effort so far to identify whether families do incur costs to educate their children in schools and if so how much do they spend. Even when anecdotal accounts exist of what families spend on their children's education, even on those studying in government schools, there is no acknowledgement by the government about it. The concept of 'out of pocket expenses' is calculated in the health sector, but no such studies exist for the education in the government school sector. Discussions during the study found that the annual cost incurred by a family on a child studying in the government schools was Rs.1200-1500/-. This increased to Rs.2800/- when parents tried to support their children through local tuitions. It was disheartening to see teachers themselves suggesting that they take tuitions to cope with their curriculum. In some of the schools children were found doing the homework given by their private coaching centres/tuitions. It was clear that teachers knew about it, but chose to ignore and not comment. These costs are difficult for Musahar children where annual income of families vary from 12000/- to 21000/-. They are thus wholly dependent on what is taught in the classroom and are found not to avail additional coaching/tuitions.

vii) Non-Availability of school: While Bihar reports that schools are available as per norms of the RtE, there stills seems to be an issue for Musahar children. One of the schools studied in Saharsha did not have any infrastructure and the classes was conducted in the Uthan Kendra. The school did not have pucca building, class rooms, nor equipments. Access to the school was a problem during the monsoon when the area was flooded. In another school half the children sat outside and studied for lack of class room space. In Saharsha and other flood affected areas, the Musahar community lived within the bunds and was totally displaced by the flood. Even after the flood, the area was water-logged for 3-5 months, making access to schools difficult. It also meant teachers who came from outside were more irregular during this period.

viii) Lack of transport in flood affected areas: Musahar community is widely spread in the upper Gangetic plane which is prone to floods and water logging. Many of the Musahar tolas are situated within the banks of the kosi river bunds and they bear the brunt of the floods year after year. There is no transport except boats during the water logging season. Boats being available only to a few in the village, children depended upon these boats to go to school. When there is no certainty that teachers would be coming or when the boats are not in use, children did not attend schools. Hence, even if children were formally enrolled in schools many

of them did not attend schools for considerable part of the year in the flood affected areas of the state.

ix) MDM not served in Saharsha: In this area children and parents were upset about the quality and irregular mid day meals provided. Children had a genuine problem,

“we start early from homes by 8 am coming to school by boat etc. We have little food at home or sometimes none at all before coming to school. Hence the mid day meal is very important for us to stay on in school and concentrate on studies. We feel weak and tired without the MDM. If the school did not provide the MDM, there was no way we can run home and have food and come back. Hence, MDM is very important for us.”

While in some places, only a portion of the students took MDM, in places like this, MDM was absolute necessity to ensure that children stay on in schools and study.

“We leave our houses in the morning without proper food and stay on in the school till 3 pm. Our houses are far from the school and we cannot go in between. The mid day meal is very important for us as we feel hungry otherwise.”

4.4 Community level issues that lead to children dropping out of school

i) Lack of learning-supportive environment in the tola: The tolas are separate and isolated from the other habitations, and children keep to themselves and build friendship within the same locality. Very little friendship is built across other tolas. The Musahar tolas did not provide a learning environment to children. School going children see that other children in the tola had dropped out and did not think much before they also dropped out for one reason or the other. No one in the tola took any additional effort to put them back to school, guide them or mentor them. In many cases it was reported that parents did ask them to go back to school, but the encouragement was apparently not sufficient to send the child back to school. The tola lacks an environment where there is learning, where there are support systems, where members push each other into education. Parents and other community members are not aligned with the education system to guide their children. The only section that can be of support is other educated youth and students themselves.

ii) Slowly integrated into work: Parents engage children into their work and they get a taste of working and earning. Added to this, the sense that their family needs their economic contribution often resulted in them getting diverted from school and education. After a while they tended to prioritise work and family support than education. Both boys and girls reported

that they did not give much thought about dropping out of school or the long term impact of dropping out of school. It often was a response to some stimuli than a well thought out process. This brings to light the need for guidance and support to children when they exhibit signs of dis-engaging from education. A combined effort from school and family is needed to arrest this.

iii) **Migration** in the family was also found to be a reason for children to drop out of school. In cases where the fathers alone migrated as in Saharsha region and mother and children stayed back, mothers took the help of children (both boys and girls) to support them in managing the home. Boys were required to do grazing and support in agriculture (families had small bits of land here) and girls to support in home and also animal care. Children reported their feeling that their families needed them and hence their reasons for dropping out. On the other hand, in places like Jamui where the entire family including children migrated to brick kiln work, children found it difficult to cope with studies on return. There is no effective systemic provision of education to migrant children even after the RtE.

v) **Abject Poverty in family:** Boys reported that their family conditions did not encourage them to study. They felt they had to work to support families. They also discussed that there were quarrels, other disturbances in the house that also led to their dropping out.

v) **Alcoholism:** Some of the Musahar families earn through brewing and selling alcohol. This made the home the business centre with outsiders coming to purchase and even drink in the premises. It led to arguments, quarrels, violence and abuse among clients as well as on the family. Children and women reported that alcoholism in the family led to children dropping out of school. Alcoholism and the resultant conflicts within the home, the absence of conducive environment for children to study and further conflicts with the wider community disturbed children's studies. Many children reported anxieties about the welfare of mothers/sisters in their homes.

4.5 Dropping out of school

It was reported that a good number children dropped out by class III as also seen in the discussions with out of school children. In addition to many other reasons, getting the child engaged in household responsibilities was also a major reason for dropping out. In this region, fathers migrate to Delhi and nearby areas for work and given that the families have small agriculture and animals to tend, mothers take the help of their children, particularly boys to take care of animals. Over a period children tend to be irregular, absent themselves and feel their presence is needed for the homes. Inevitably children who take these tasks seriously drop out of school even as young as class III. The number of children who go beyond 6th class is limited and a herculean task given the odds against them.

In discussions with children, it was clear that the decision to drop out was finally that of the child by and large, particularly in the case of boys. While parents may engage them in work, take them along during migration, most often parents wished boys go to school and have a better life, earn for the family etc. In fact, they also tried to send them back to school when they dropped out by encouraging them. However, the final decision seems to be that of the children themselves. After a while the parents claim helplessness and expect the boys to further engage in work.

In many cases of dropping out, children reported how it was a collective decision by a group of children, particularly boys. FGDs showed that a group of 12 boys dropped out together from one school and from another group of 4 girls dropped out together.

Response to children dropping out: By and large both boys and girls dropped out not singly, but in pairs or in groups. There was thus peer support for dropping out. In most cases of boys dropping out, family intervened or encouraged the boys to go back to schools. However, schools or teachers did not seem to take effort to get the students back to school or enquire why they dropped out, except in one case where the girl said the teacher was upset at her dropping out. It did not seem to matter whether these students were present or absent in the school.

In the case of girls, it was seen that there was not as much encouragement to go back to studies– rather families were more comfortable with girls when they stayed back at home. Most often these were engaged in household responsibilities. In fact in some cases parents provided incentives to girls if they work, saying they will buy them new clothes from the money they earn.

4.6 Regarding resuming education

There is general interest to go back to school, but they were anxious about how they will cope having dropped out so long, that they are older than other children in class. There was also anxiety that there was not much teaching and learning in schools, and what would they learn even if they went back. What if the teachers are again like the earlier ones and beat them for no reason? Thus, it is clear that going back to school on their own strength and conviction is difficult. In one of the FGDs, a few girls said they would rather not join schools back even if given the opportunity. Some were of the opinion that they learned nothing in schools and there was no point in going to school. At the same time, from the discussions with the children, it is also clear that they can be convinced to come back to school. Further, it is important to convince the children themselves in this regard, it is not enough to motivate the family alone.

Some of the experiences reported by the children show that they may be open to resume studies. However, more thought has to go into how education can be organized for to suit their needs:

- many reported they did not like the work they are engaged in,
- that they did not earn enough money from their current work
- they felt obliged to work to support family income
- they would like to have better employment opportunities and options
- they held educated and employed persons as role models
- After a while in work they hold hopes of coming back to school
- Out of school children are in conversation with school going children in their tolas
- they wished to gain respect and dignity in society

School was still good: Even after dropping out, some of them had good memories of school where they had gone with friends to school, had sat together, had learned together. The good memories were linked to friends and their times together than the process of studying or learning. One can consider the possibility that if given appropriate environment and opportunities with consistent motivation, many among them will study and complete their education that would make some difference to their lives. At the same time, we cannot take it that all children are motivated to go back to school if given the opportunity. Even those who express the desire to go back to school, it would be a hard journey. They would be tempted to drop out again and consistent motivation and support would be necessary to sustain them in school. There needs to be mechanisms within the school system to provide this support.

4.7 Children's Experiences within Schools:

The study held focused group discussions with school going Musahar girls and boys in the different panchayats to understand their access and experience inside the schools. Together with the above section on out of school children, a more holistic picture of their schooling experiences emerge. There are obvious overlaps between the two sections, given the continuum. It is however important to also analyse the two aspects distinctly too.

School Going Girls

Class studying	Saharsha	Patna rural	Jamui	Total
Class 1		1		1
Class II		1		1
Class III	2	4	2	8
Class IV	5	2	2	9
Class V	1	1		2

Class VI	1	2	3	6
Class VII				
Class VIII	1		1	2
Total	10	11	8	29

29 girls studying from classes 1 to 8 took part in the FGDs in the four study sites. 17 out of the 29 were students from class III and IV. The age group varied from 10 to 15 years, with many of them joining late to school.

School Going Boys

Class studying	Begusarai	Saharsha	Patna rural	Jamui	Total
Class 1		-			
Class II		3	1		4
Class III	1	3	5	2	11
Class IV		4	2	2	8
Class V	6				6
Class VI			2	3	5
Class VII	2				2
Class VIII	1			1	2
Total	10	10	10	8	38

38 boys studying in classes 2 to 8 took part in the FGDs. Majority (25) came from classes III to V. Nine came from upper primary school.

4.7.1 Access to school

In most places, parents and children including girl children did not report any safety issues to reach the school. In most cases they reported schools were near and distance not a problem. Thus, physical access in terms of distance to school was more or less addressed in most places. It continued to be a problem in flood affected areas of Bihar like Saharsha. With considerable parts of the state affected annually by floods and water logged for many months, a systemic response to the problem needs to be evolved. Musahar communities live in the flood affected areas, bang within the bunds. Schools are closed during this time, teachers are not regular and transportation is difficult. While the state provides a few boats during the time of floods, these are not available after the floods during the water logged periods. Even if the boat is available it is under the control of the panchayat or other dominant caste members. Private boats are maintained only by well off families, as boats cost about R.4000-6000/ boat. While RtE and SSA makes provisions for transport where schools are not available within prescribed distances, it does not specify provisions for flood affected areas as this.

Social access however continues to be a problem. A number of children in the discussions, both girls and boys, reported that *'they were anxious in schools as children fought with them. They did not like fighting, they said. Expanding on it, some children reported how other students would take their books, throw their bags out etc. Teachers did not take it seriously when they reported this'*.

4.7.2 Lacked attendance and were not regular

Children, both girls and boys, were irregular to school. Teachers reported various reasons as to why they were irregular, much of it to do with families- lack of parental attention to children, families preferred children to earn than study, migration, alcoholism etc on one hand and other issues like lack of educated persons at home, lack of guidance etc. Teachers also attributed that Musahar children were absent on days they give them home work and hence they did not wish to study, but sought ways to 'escape homework, hard work and studies'.

Children reported that parents encouraged them to accompany and work with them in peak labour seasons which made them irregular to school. In addition they stayed back when there was any demand at home. It is found that these children are extremely sensitive to the needs of the home and tried to pitch in whatever way they can.

Another important reason for the irregularity of children to school is the irregularity of teachers. Children reported that many times they would wait to see if the teachers came, and went to school only after teacher came. It was common for teachers to not come to school in these areas.

In the flood affected areas, both during floods and during the water logging periods, children and teachers need boats to reach the school. Boats being private and multipurpose, Musahar children do not have easy access to them. Musahar families did not own boats.

4.7.3 Teacher's attitude

Children reported that teachers did not behave properly with them, referred to them by their caste names than individual names. Teachers referred to them as *'dirty people, unclean, rear pigs, make alcohol and drink a lot; that families did not send their children to school and put them to labour.'*

Children in some cases agreed that the teachers were right, reflecting that these perceptions got internalized sooner or later. They did not think they were being discriminated through the teacher's perceptions.

4.7.4 Lack of teaching in classroom

Irregularity of teachers was a problem reported in all places. Even when they were present it was found that teachers do not teach the whole time. Observations in school showed that in almost all cases teachers came fifteen minutes after class was to begin and this was even longer in the first period after the 'chetana satra' (assembly). Teachers came late to class and took another 15 minutes taking attendance. Teachers often chatted with other teachers, or spoke on their mobiles during class hours. Some are seen to be knitting after asking children to read or copy from board or books. Most times, there was no teaching after mid day meals. Rough calculation of the school reports about 2 to 3 hours of teaching in class in a day. MDM and other report work took considerable times of individual teachers. Lack of teachers as per PTR norms, lack of subject specific teachers further hampered the teaching-learning in schools.

4.7.5 Teaching – learning process

Teaching learning continued to follow the rote methodology with the teacher using the board and chalk at best, or reading and asking children to repeat or write. No group reported any group activity or innovative practices in class room. Children reported that they hesitated to ask questions or doubts as they were not confident about their questions, about their understanding – teaching learning process is not understood as a process of starting where you are and moving ahead together learning from one another. Children spent considerable part of the class time doing their own thing in the class or doing things with their friends. Class observations showed that multiple things can be going on inside the class room, not under the teacher's guidance, but due to its absence.

4.7.6 No track of children

There did not seem to be much tracking of children –whether they were present or absent in classes. One of them had stopped school for a while, but later found that his name was not removed and went back to school. This raises many questions – how reliable are the data on school attendance, how much do teachers track children's learning in class if they do not track their presence/absence. How reliable are the data base on which we make education plans?

4.7.7 Practice of reading at home

Despite the many constraints of space, other disturbances at home, household level works, an encouraging feedback from the school going students and one out of school child was that they spend some time to study at home. This is usually in the late evening after all work is done. This is certainly a new practice. *A mother said that while she was not literate, she asked her children to study while she prepared rotis at night. After she finished cooking and they finished studying the family had dinner together. In this home, the father was a school teacher.*

In another incident an out of school boy said that he reads at night with the help of his brother who was a student. The reading habit has been supported by the presence of the tola sevak who has the task of gathering children in the mornings before school and got them to read and study. For a community where there is no environment of reading and studying in the community, additional efforts are needed to develop this practice and these are indications of such a process beginning in the Musahar tolas.

4.8 What interested and encouraged in schools?

Largely all reports/answers pointed to schools not being interesting or encouraging to the Musahar children. Invariably they said there was no teaching in school and they hardly learnt anything each day. There was no group activity in classes, it was teacher reading or writing on the black board and children copying down.

In those cases where children were motivated to go to school, it was on account of their friends – being able to go together with friends, being able to spend the day with friends together in the class, doing things together with friends in the school.

A very disappointing discovery was their answer to recount one activity/incident where they thought they had done well in school which they could be proud of. The list of negatives went on as:

1. Not stand out for being good in studies
2. Not been first in class any time
3. Not been first in sports

Thus, it is a sad thing that instead of schools being the place where they would build up their self and confidence, it was a place which did not give them instances where they *'could feel proud of themselves, could feel themselves as worthy of appreciation, could feel themselves as achievers'*. This is of serious concern and efforts to provide children the opportunity to feel good about being in school and learning and developing in schools is central to the child staying on and studying in school.

Positive experiences are extremely valuable and cherished as recounted in a few instances. In Begusarai, boys recounted how one of them had won a prize in the running competition, every one recounted the incident and were excited to recount it. The boy who won was obviously very happy to remember it. Another boy reported how people appreciated his singing. These are such important experiences and so few of these children seem to experience it in school.

Rajkumar Manji in Jamui said the teacher generally asked him to read the lessons. He feels proud because he can read well and does so in front of the whole class.

4.9 Friendship in schools

To a question about who they make friends/who become their friends in school, by and large Musahar children maintained friendship with other Musahar children coming from their tolas. There was little friendship building across communities was very limited in schools. One girl explained, *“We sit together inside the class room, but we do not become friends; we do not go together outside the class room, eat MDM together, play together – but we do not go to the homes of other children nor do other children come to our homes.”* Thus, while some forms of segregation in schools/class rooms were beginning to dissolve, there was yet limited genuine engagement or friendship across Musahar and other children. Some politically correct answers were that the tolas are far apart and they had no particular reason to go there.

While one assumed caste based distances/discrimination between Musahar and other dominant caste children, it was also prevalent between Musahar and Muslim children. Tiruhuthia Musahar children who are more sanskritised than other Musahars did not feel they could be friends with Muslim children who *‘ate buffaloes/cows’*. It was clear that social prejudices crept into classrooms in their perception about each other. Name calling, use of socially derogatory terms for each other was common between Musahar and Muslim children too, with both groups engaging in it. Thus, Musahar children were at a distance from children from other Dalit, general caste as well as Muslim children. One of the boys, Ravi, in Jamui found it important to register that he *‘has a friend in the Pasi community and they do everything together’*.

4.10 Discrimination in schools

Children in some schools did not raise problems in sitting together, water and toilets use. They said there was little space and so all sat together, there were no toilets for anyone to use. Hence, it seemed that circumstances pushed children together and lack of facilities prevented some forms of discrimination. However, these were hit and run instances in some schools with no systematic interventions to address discrimination in schools.

Other forms of exclusion reported by children included not being able to build friendship with other children with girls expressing this more strongly. They blamed themselves for it *“others do not become friends as we do not dress well, wear old and patched up clothes, not clean so others do not become friends with us”*.

Children also talked about more harsh corporal punishments towards them, teachers neglecting them, they not being involved in school programmes etc. They picked up favouritism and prejudices reported; *‘Muslim teacher favoured Muslim children, Koheri teacher favoured some*

children because he too belonged to the same group. Favoured children were considered 'bright children'.

Favouritism was explained as 'teachers asked them questions, allowed them to come to the board, asked them to lead the class, asked them to monitor the class' etc. Musahar children are neglected in this process. *A child reported how the teacher would ask other children to answer to questions asked by Musahar children while he would personally answer questions raised by other caste children. Girl children reported gender bias against them that 'the boys were always selected for various functions while they were overlooked'.*

They also did not like to be referred by their caste group 'musahar ka bacha' 'musaharni' while addressing them.

A matter of concern was a child saying that teachers comment that '*Musahar parents do not send children to school, make children earn, rear pigs, are not clean, brew alcohol and drink a lot*'. The child was of the opinion that the teacher was right in criticizing the family. There was no discussion to understand the larger context of the community or any discussion to understand the community context. Children too accepted the perceptions without any critique of it. Children also hold themselves responsible for teacher's attitude to them "*teachers do not ask us because we do not understand it*" etc. This led to undermining children's community and self-image.

In one of the schools in Begusarai, children expressed satisfaction with one of the teachers who motivated and encouraged them to study well. '*He would clarify doubts. He would review previous day's lessons with the children to see if they understood them. He would correct their mistakes. He gave good examples of Musahar community members*' which, made them feel good and motivated with the teacher.

The study did not come across any instance where children or teachers answered in the affirmative to providing extra support to children who needed it. Support and considerations seemed to flow along caste and community lines – Muslims favoured Muslims, Koheri teacher favoured those from his own caste.

4.11. Changes they would like in school:

In schools children desired that teachers would not beat; that they can learn without anxiety. That all children can go to school without any problem. School should ensure basic infrastructure and facilities. In Saharsha, children were concerned that entitlements should be

given on time to help children study well. In Jamui they wanted the teacher to be changed from their school.

Inside homes, children wanted families to support them reach school on time, they should ensure food on time so that children can reach school on time. In some cases they wished their families would not brew and sell alcohol or even drink. They wanted more facilities at home and more conducive learning environment at home and in the community.

4.12 Aspirations:

Despite the many limitations they faced in schools and in studying, some of them wanted to be teachers when they grew up. Teachers may be the highest in the employment ladder they came across regularly. Often children just reported that they wanted to become 'good persons'.

Finally, enrolment today is not a problem and almost all children enrolled in the primary school. However, there was almost an immediate drop out, about half dropping out by class III at a time when they had hardly experienced school. It was also not a time when they could have thought this decision through. Class V became the next watershed where the majority dropped out. There was much more thinking, planning and peer decision at this level to drop out. In almost all cases, parents encouraged them to go back to school, particularly boys, but were not successful in most cases. Peer support and environment seemed to play a more important role in dropping out of school. Children did not report any effort from the school to enquire why they did not come to school or to bring them back. They simply stopped to exist for the school, though one is not so sure if they stopped existing in records. In all possibilities they continued to exist in the records. As they grew older, children recognized the role of education in providing employment, respect, understanding, name and fame. They wished that situations in schools would change that would allow them to go back to school if possible. Education for some was an opportunity to improve not just themselves but support their families and bring changes in society.

CHAPTER 5

MUSAHAR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION: COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS AND SUPPORT

The caste system in India historically excluded different communities from formal learning, restricting them to caste-based occupations. Different castes and communities thus entered the process of formal education at different points in time and some through struggles. The SC communities began to access education from late nineteenth century through the pioneering efforts of Mahatma Jyotiba and Savitri Phule and others after them. Thus dominant communities who did not have restrictions on their learning had an edge over others as far as reading and writing were concerned while many communities like denotified tribes, some tribal groups are yet to enter the formal education system. Based on this graded process, one can identify communities at different stages of their engagement with formal education, such as:

- those that are historically and socially privileged in education,
- those though excluded earlier have caught up with the mainstream education,
- those excluded earlier but currently aware of the relevance of education and struggling to access it and
- those who are yet to recognize the relevance and have to be encouraged and motivated into education.

The Musahar communities have a somewhat unique history of moving from a tribal community to becoming a Dalit community with its own problems of displacement, cultural alienation, livelihood alienation, social and economic standing etc which deeply impact opportunities for engaging with formal learning. They are among those few communities, which, has reached the edge of the education scenario and need to be encouraged and motivated to fully engage with education. Hence efforts to promote education among Musahar children needs necessarily engage with the communities. Engagement has to promote their i) perceptions towards the relevance of education, ii) understand possibilities and opportunities from education, iii) understand the system and its functioning iv) support their engagement and stakehold in education, v) support children to go through the system successfully. Thus any strategy to improve the education among Musahar children need necessarily engage with the community at large in an equally critical and sustained manner. The study held individual and focused group discussions with young educated people, mothers, SMC members and social activists from the community to understand their perceptions about education and the barriers and constraints they experienced in accessing education. The effort was also to understand from mothers their information about education system; their children's schooling process, their own participation in the education system and how they supported their children's schooling.

5.1 Relevance of education

Education efforts among Musahar communities have increased over the past two to three decades in the context of the push for universalizing primary education to all with the 'Education for All (EFA)' processes. All current school going children are invariably first generation learners except for a few. In all discussions, the community expressed their concern to educate their children and a broad understanding about the relevance of education. Educated youth were unequivocally articulate about the relevance of education as the only means for the community to move forward. Mothers too expressed their commitment to their children's schooling and education and were hopeful of education providing greater understanding, better social standing, and better life opportunities for their children. Thus, one can say the wider environment of education, school availability and focused efforts with the community has facilitated the community to cross the first goal post towards education as also evident in almost all children getting enrolled into schools in class 1. The handful of literate parents explored private schooling for their children with the common perception that private schooling is better than the state supported education system.

5.2 Perceived benefits from schooling:

Mothers had various ways in which they expressed the benefits of education for their children; Leela Devi from Saharsha expressed that *'children become aware and smart and no one can cheat the child (koi thagathe nahin). Other benefits from education were counted as 'one can become officer, one will not have to put thumb impression'. One becomes 'gunavan, one's 'aankh roshini khul jayega' (the knowledge eye will be opened). One becomes capable person, skilled person. One can get an employment and plan life ahead and lead better lives. One is respected in the community and community comes to consult on various issues – community functions, festivals etc. Children learn cleanliness and good habits.'* Thus, it was very clear that mothers associated many positive aspects of life, livelihood and community life with education and is sought after today.

5.3 How did mothers/parents motivate their children to go to schools?

This question gains importance given the current environment of the Musahari with no basic amenities, few educated youth, majority of parents out at work, majority of children out of school on daily basis. Pramila Devi said that, *"I am not literate, my husband is teacher. In the evening when I am making rotis, I ask the children to study. Once they finish studies and my husband is back, we all have food together."* Another mother shared, *"I have heard about how Babasaheb Ambedkar studied and struggled and achievements through education. I repeat this to my children so that they will also become educated and useful to society."* Many others did not report directly talking to children and motivating them to study, but expressed their

concern and support in other ways in trying to provide food and other necessities to their children.

Mothers and children reported ‘pocket money’ to children as an incentive to make them go to school. It amounted Rs4-5/week. Children saw it as their parents efforts to ensure they studied *‘hum pad rahe hain, isiliye hamein paisa dhete hain’* (as we are studying they give us money).

Majority of mothers counted their efforts in preparing children to school in the morning which included providing breakfast, coaxing them to get up before they went out to work, bathing and washing them, etc as their responsibility and contribution to their children’s education. One can only appreciate their efforts if one spent a couple of days with them and their daily struggles to get through the basics of water and food, washing and sanitation. Families even paid for accessing electricity through the village generator so that children can study during the evenings.

5.4 Access to Schooling

All agreed that it was easy to get children admitted in schools after RtE Act. Schools were available in the vicinity in most places and parents admitted their children with help from some leader in their own community or in other communities. Children also shared that they did not have any physical barriers or safety concerns about their children on their way to schools. However, children reported being harassed in school, other children teasing and harassing their children on account of their being Musahars, on account of their clothing, cleanliness etc. They were concerned about other children fighting with their children in schools.

5.5 Costs of schooling

Mothers calculated the costs of schooling as– note books/pens (500), tuition (1200), shoes/socks (100), pocket money (500), clothes (500). Annual costs – Rs.2800/-. In many cases children and parents reported that they cannot afford tuitions, still school costs remain.

5.6 Ensuring Attendance and Regularity

Sending children regularly to school was a problem. Many mothers explained that they themselves went out to work in the morning before the school timing of the child⁵³. Even if they had successfully prepared the child, one could never ensure that the child actually went to school. Other elders in the family were not literate and had no schooling of their own, did not recognize the relevance of education and did not ensure the child went to school. They were

⁵³ Bihar state has recently changed the school timing to start at 8 am in the morning, which aligns better with the work times of parents in agriculture and other wage work. However, a few mothers and fathers went out for work even earlier, as early as 4 am for loading/unloading work or other work in nearby towns.

concerned that when children are irregular, they are not able to cope up with the studies and eventually dropped out. At the same time, they felt helpless to ensure children's regularity to school. SMC member expressed that if the teachers would engage with the community, visit the community and meet the parents, it would ensure greater enrollment and regular attendance of children in schools. Mothers and others also shared the general perception that teachers are not teaching their children, that children do not learn anything in school and that teachers do not 'behave properly' with their children all of which led to absenteeism and irregularity among children.

5.7 Dropping Out

Children dropping out of school was common phenomenon among Musahar families. Families attributed both family and school level issues in this regard. With regard to schools, it was reported that teachers do not come on time, teachers are irregular, even when they come they do not teach children. Teachers do not behave well with their children well and do not treat them properly. The teachers do not engage with parents and parents do not feel comfortable to engage with teachers. Further, teachers do not take care to ensure children got their scholarship and other benefits from school. The mid day meal was also a major conflict area reported to be of poor quality and taste.

Mothers in Saharsha explained how they did not have money to support children's needs on daily basis when men migrated out for work. *"When fathers migrated outside for work, we cannot be sure, when they will send some money. We in the village have little access to money. So when children need some money for their school, we are not able to provide it immediately. Sometimes even when they have money, they find it difficult to send it home."* Remittances from the male members are not regular and they do not have others they can turn to for emergency money. In addition, when men migrated mothers also required the help of children to manage the home and the animals. This also took away time and the child's mind away from studies, also leading them to be irregular and even drop out.

Mothers also expressed that once children dropped out of school and decided not to go to school there was little they could do about it. They then engaged children in full time work and there was little probability for the child to go back to school. When mothers were non literate themselves, they did not seem to press children to go to school even on daily basis. Alcoholism and domestic violence was also attributed by mothers as barrier to children's schooling. This led to violence and was not conducive for the child to study at home.

Mothers by and large were of the opinion that being non-literate themselves they did not understand what their children studied and hence were not in a position to support them in their studies. They could only ensure enrollment, ask them to study, provide them the basics

and some incentives, but were helpless in supporting their children's actual studying. *'I can only ask them to study, but they do not listen to me'* was a common response.

5.8 How do they know their children are studying?

When mothers were not literate, they were not confident to guide their children in their schooling. They were often not able to convince their children to stay on in school when they dropped out. There was little formal mechanisms of information sharing and mothers and community did not have confirmed information about the system and its functioning. They engaged with the school when there was some difficulty, like their children not receiving scholarship or other entitlements. This often resulted in conflict and altercations with the school. In January 2013 the government declared that children required 75 per cent attendance to access any of the state provisions be it scholarship, uniform etc. While the government is supposed to have informed much earlier, the community was not aware of it, nor did the school inform the parents about this. There was considerable confusion and even conflict between parents and teachers. Teachers were upset at the community's reaction to this and felt they were being "humiliated" in the process. Parents demanded that if their children lost entitlements, teachers were in some ways responsible too and should also be similarly deprived. There is considerable disturbance among mistrust among the community about how school functioning. They did not trust that teachers and schools were interested in their children and would do what is best for them. Teachers on the other hand also considered that Musahars sent their children only to access the scholarships and mid day meals.

5.9 School Management Committees

There was considerable confusion about the SMCs. The state had notified the rules and wanted to hold elections for the SMC. They could not do so and re-named existing Vidyalyaya Shiksha Samitis (VSS) with some modifications as the SMCs. People were confused about the old and the new one. In some cases, an initial meeting was held. The study interviewed the SMC members two of who came from Musahar community and one from a backward community. Members were not aware of the RtE Act or rules and were not oriented on their roles or responsibilities and reported that meetings were largely, dominated by the teachers. Teachers made decisions and they were mere participants. *'Teachers do not listen to us'* was a common perception among the members.

One of the members reported that they had discussed water, toilet and boundary wall. One of them asked about the scholarship to Musahar children, but did not get any information. The general feeling was that teachers took all the decisions and did not give attention to the SMC members. One SMC members felt that teachers need to engage with the community to enroll and retain Musahar children in the schools.

The increased awareness among the community and the availability of schools within and near the tolas has brought schools and education nearer to the Musahar communities. This was evident in the increased primary schools environment. Having a school within their accessible distances also made communities a little more familiar with the school and system, which they were totally un-connected to. Mothers in the community took considerable efforts to see that children went to schools. Engaging the community is important to promote enhanced access and completion rates among Musahar children.

CHAPTER 6

BIHAR STATE POLICIES AND STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE EDUCATION AMONG MUSAHAR CHILDREN

Government intervention plays central role in the education and other development improvements of any community. Since Independence, Musahar communities have been located within the Scheduled Caste category eligible to avail related policy-provisions like prohibition of untouchability, prevention of atrocities, prevention of economic disabilities like child labour, bonded labour and manual scavenging, reservation in education, employment and representation and special economic development schemes. However, their development indicators continued to lag behind, especially that of Musahar women, when compared to other Dalit communities and the General Communities.

POLICIES AND PROVISIONS

6.1 Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission (BMDVM)

Recognising that despite development outcomes in the state, certain castes/communities particularly among Dalits continued to lag behind without accessing development benefits, the Govt of Bihar constituted the 'Bihar Mahadalit Commission' in 2007. The objectives of the Commission were:

1. To identify the castes within scheduled castes who lagged behind in the development process
2. To study educational and social status and suggest measures for upliftment of these castes
3. To recommend actions for initiating measures for their educational and social upliftment together with ways for their employment
4. Any other subject state government entrusts the Commission.

21 of the 22 sub-castes among Dalits were identified by the Commission for special attention Musahar community being a central one. This is an important acknowledgement by the state of the development gaps and inequalities of the Musahar community vis-à-vis other communities. The Bihar Maha Dalit Vikas Mission (BMDVM) was set up in 2008 as an autonomous society under the Society Registration Act, 1860, to spur multipronged efforts for

the social, education and economic development of these communities. Special allocations were mandated from the Scheduled Caste Special Plan (SCSP) for the same. The various interventions of the BDVM aligned with the development of the communities.

Major Initiatives for education under the BMDVM included:

1. Mahadalit Anganwadis to be opened within the Mahadalit habitations to provide nutritional supplement and health care to 3-6 years children.
2. Mahadalit Crechees to be set up in the Mahadalit habitations to provide care and protection to the 0-3 years aged children to allow mothers to go for work.
3. Special schools and hostels to promote inherent skills within the community to take up productive activities that are marketable.
4. Special schools and hostels for improving education among Musahar girl children
5. Mukhyamantri Mahadalit Poshak Yojana providing school uniforms to Mahadalit children
6. Dasharath Manjhi skill development scheme to promote marketable skills among the youth of the communities

In addition the state took the policy to recruit new cadres called Vikas Mitras (Community Development facilitators) and Tola Sevaks (Education Facilitators) from among the educated Mahadalit youth to give special attention to education and development of Musahar and other communities. There are almost 10,000 Vikas Mitras including about 2300 from the Musahar community⁵⁴ to function as development facilitators for the community taking government development programmes to the community.

6.2 Tola Sevaks

Tola Sevaks (TS) is a valuable strategy developed by the BMDVM to bridge the education inequalities through providing additional learning support to Mahadalit children and ensuring their regular attendance to school while also being a bridge between the community and school. They are recruited from Mahadalit communities at the tola level, one tola sevak for every 25 school aged Mahadalit children. The tasks of the TS include:

1. Build awareness among communities on education and mobilize them to support and promote education among their children.
2. Provide two hours of additional coaching to children through the Uthan Kendras
3. Ensure that children attend school regularly by escorting them to school
4. Ensure that Mahadalit children are not subjected to discrimination or harassment

⁵⁴ Discussion with the mission team members.

5. Support the teachers and the community for promoting education development of Mahadalit children

The TS is attached to a local school under the supervision of the head teacher there and also paid monthly honorarium of Rs.4000/- at present. S/he is also entitled to training to ensure their ability to fulfill the said tasks and Rs.500/year for teaching learning materials. The state currently has about 20,000 tola sevaks and additional 30,000 are to be recruited with the special focus on promoting women's literacy in the mahadalit communities.

6.3 Scheduled Caste Sub Plan

The Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP) was promulgated during the sixth plan to bridge the development gap between scheduled castes and dominant castes by setting apart population proportionate funds in the plan budget of every ministry and department at the state and central levels. This requires the Department of education in the state to set apart 15.7% of its education funds for SC children and the Ministry of HRD to set apart funds 16.2% of its education funds for SC children's education. This funds is specifically to address special needs of these children and to reduce the education inequalities between them and other dominant caste children.

In 2010, 18.28% of all children enrolled in elementary schools belong to SC community, more than their 15.7% population proportion indicating positive trends of increased interest in the community to access education as well as increased availability/accessibility of schools.

6.4 Provisions to promote school education among SC children including Musahar children:

The State also has other provisions to promote school education among the SC children that apply to Musahar children as well, such as:

1. Prematric scholarship: The state government provides additional pre-matric scholarship of Rs.100/month to Musahar and Bhuiya students studying in classes 1-6. Other SC students are provided only Rs.50/month under this scholarship. For classes 7-10 students are paid Rs.150/month/student while students in residential facilities are paid Rs.250/month/student.
2. Residential Schools: There are 80 residential schools in Bihar for Scheduled Castes spread across all district of Bihar. Each school is provided with infrastructure for boarding and teaching learning facility for average 200 children. Social Welfare department manages these schools and Musahar children are eligible for enrollment there. However Musahar children's access to these schools is limited and the schools

are found to lack in teacher availability, adequate care and support to the admitted children.

3. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV): This is a centrally sponsored scheme under SSA. There are around 400 KGBV in Bihar, some of them run by the Mahila Samakhya (MS). The MS is seen to have taken a keen interest to include Musahar girls in their KGBVs.
4. Reservation in special School like Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV), Sainik School, Simultalla Residential School – There are 39 JNV, 2 Sainik School, and 1 model residential school in Simultalla. Reservation is applicable to these schools and Musahar children are eligible for admission under the reservation. However, there is little effort to promote their enrollment into these schools.
5. Upgradation of merit of SC students: Under this scheme, the centre provides Rs.15000/- per student on annual basis to every school to provide coaching facilities in Maths and Science to children studying in classes 9 to 12.
6. Merit Scholarship: The Bihar government provide Rs.10,000/- as special incentives to the students who clear board examination in first division.
7. Mukhyamantri cycle yojana: Girl children in classes 9-12 are provided cycles by the government to promote their access.

6.5 State Performance under RtE in favour of Musahar Children⁵⁵

The foundation for providing elementary education to children including all Musahar children is the extensive network of government and private schools across the state. There are 67,926 government schools⁵⁶ mandated to implement the Right to Education in addition to a few thousands of private schools which are expected to provide 25% reservation⁵⁷ to disadvantaged and economically weaker section students in addition to fulfilling the RtE norms. SSA, the

⁵⁵ Data in this section is taken from the latest DISE, 2010-11, pertaining to data as on 30th September 2010

⁵⁶ DISE 2010-11

⁵⁷ As per section 12 of the RtE Act

vehicle for implementing RtE at present has been in operation since 2000 with the four following explicit objectives.⁵⁸

1. All children in schools
2. Bridging gender and social gaps
3. All children retained in elementary education
4. Education of satisfactory quality

In this context, the schools become the primary vehicle for the education of Musahar children and their functioning to impart equitable quality education with social inclusion is the key to promote the rights of Musahar children's education. Further, the RtE recognizes the need to ensure non-discrimination, elimination of corporal punishment in schools, elimination of all forms of physical and mental harassment and sets standards on teacher availability, teaching hours, infrastructure standards and special standards for children with disability.

6.6.1 Non-compliance with RtE norms:

Bihar does not do well with regard to many indicators under RtE; the average student-classroom ratio (SCR) with 83 students/class room, making them over-crowded, inability of the teacher to manage the class room or provide quality attention to children's learning, least of all to those who need it most. Considerable absenteeism of about a third of enrolled children is observed during field visits. 4.53% of elementary schools are single teacher schools, the per cent being higher 6.46% for primary schools. It is a far cry for these schools to provide quality education with the lack of basic infrastructure, teacher responsibility to manage mid day meals, records and registers to be maintained and additional tasks placed on them from time to time. As of September 2010, only 45% schools in Bihar have common toilets and with 37% having girls separate toilets. 47% schools have ramps. A large number of Musahar children are out of school/attending irregularly. However, the state has not set up training to bring them back to schools. Other indicators too perform poorly against standards. It may be possible that schools located in the habitations of Musahar and other marginalized communities perform worst in any said indicator, given the exclusion and discrimination mindset even within the

⁵⁸ 13th JRM_Final Aide Memoire

administration, low priority attached to their education and the lower accountability to these communities.

6.6.2 Teacher negative attitude towards Musahar children:

There is no doubt that teachers play the most important role in providing quality education to Musahar children. Discussions with Musahar children and dialogues with teachers bring out various negative attitudes, biases, prejudices against these children. During the course of this brief study following were opinions/perceptions gathered from about half dozen teachers in four schools regarding Musahar children and their parents in relation to education. Musahar children and parents are held responsible for their low performance in schools and these are reinforced upon the children in many ways. In one case a girl student repeated “teacher and I think he is saying the truth’. It goes without saying that these create powerful negative images for the child impacting upon their ability to learn and develop.

Teachers in the four schools concurred with the fact that the majority of OOSC in their catchment area are Musahar children and teachers make community/home visits to bring them back to school. Musahar children are weak in studies because they i) are not regular, ii) avoid coming to school, iii) skip studying lessons, iv) lack parental guidance, v) are not interested in non-academic subjects, vi) do not come to school when home work is given to them, vii) are more interested in mid day meals and scholarships, viii) do not make friends with other caste children, ix) they fight with other children. Their poor performance is also attributed to their home conditions, x) parents are more interested in earning through children than educating them, xi) lack of educated person’s support at home, xii) lack of anyone at home to motivate them to study, xiii) owing to alcoholism in the family.

They are not chosen as monitors as they are weak in studies. Teachers’ opine that the provisions of the state are adequate for education of Musahar children, that there is no discrimination against Musahar children in schools.

As solutions they propose that Musahar parents must give more attention to their children, should be made aware of the need to educate their children, should not transfer their problems on their children and should send their children to school and not work.

6.6.3. Poor and ad-hoc implementation of incentives in cash and kind

Pre-matric scholarship for classes 1-6 has been raised from Rs.15/month to Rs.50/month for all SC students and enhanced to Rs.100/month for Musahar and Bhuiya students on a positive note showing the acknowledgement of the special constraints of these children. There are however many issues in the disbursement of the scholarship which are routed through the

Mukhiya of the gram panchayat and not through the school, is not provided to all children, does not come on time and even lapses many years. There is no information or transparency of the procedures towards parents and not getting scholarship has become a source of conflict between teachers and community. Some children and parents reported that they dropped out for not getting the scholarship. Such gaps exist in other provisions in kind or cash

6.6.4 Inadequate data on admission of Musahar children in residential schools

Another important strategy of the state is in providing residential schools, KGBVs, JNVs etc. While Mahila Samakya in Bihar has made pro-active efforts to include Musahar children in the KGBVs, there are no clear strategies by other residential schools, despite the inequalities and social exclusion. In the present context where disaggregated data at sub community levels are not tracked and reviewed for planning and monitoring it is difficult to know how many Musahar children are enrolled and studying in these institutions. There is no understanding or strategies outlined for their active inclusion in the policies of these schools.

6.7 Gaps in SCP Implementation

The total plan budget of the financial year 2010-11 was Rs. 19,999.6 crore. *As per the Scheduled Castes Sub Plan guidelines, dalits should have been allocated Rs. 2,999.94 crore for their empowerment but in reality, only Rs. 231.56 crore (1.2%) was allocated.* Similarly the government allocated 1.2 %, 1.1 %, 1.2 % and 1.2 % respectively in 2007-08, 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11, the gap in what was supposed to be allocated and what has been allocated is huge. Further, these allocations are often made as block and institutional grants and not towards individuals and family development as per the guidelines. Non utilization of funds is reported even after these measly allocations, the data available for 2008-09 shows that while the Revised Estimate was Rs. 168.67 crore, actual allocation was reduced by 87.21 % to Rs. 147.1 crore.⁵⁹ Further diversion of allocated funds to other purposes, intra-programme transfers etc are also done making it difficult to track the real allocation and utilization. Department of Education is an important contributor to the SCSP implementation and a review

⁵⁹ Calculated by National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) from Detailed Demand for Grants, 2010-2011, Govt of Bihar.

here would provide resources to meet the specific disabilities of the Musahar community in education.

6.8 Performance of Tola Sevak

Tola sevak and Vikas Mitras are bold and relevant strategies and can play an important role in the mahadalit communities where the community is not linked to the state systems and need to be provided information and support to engage with the state. These communities have been isolated and excluded for long and a process of inclusion can be promoted through these educated youth in the community. They provide academic and moral support to the children and was reported in positive light by many children. Even above the presence of the TS has provided a reading and learning environment in the habitations that was hitherto absent. It was interesting to hear from many school going children and an occasion out of school child that they spend time reading and doing homework during the evenings and the TS helped them with their studies and home work. There are however many gaps and challenges in implementation. While they are envisaged as education facilitators, the necessary training and handholding is not available to them for taking up the task of teaching. TS are currently more engaged in teaching students in the school as demanded by the head teachers in the schools. In doing this they neglect other important mandated tasks of mobilizing community and providing out of school support for children.

Various administrative constraints have also been raised by the TS as i) not paid on time, ii) not paid regularly even when they are expected to give full time, iii) no/negligible training to provide academic support, iv) no skill training to manage multi-grade class rooms, v) no mechanism to look into the issues and needs of this large youth cadre and their potential for promoting education.

6.9 The role of Vikas Mitras

A big challenge is also the lack of adequate capacity building and support to the vikas mitras for taking up the genuine concerns of the community and ensuring their fulfillment. They essentially need support and confidence to take up the issues of the community and negotiate

for implementation with the government administration, rather they have become another cog in the wheel for the government machinery. In the absence of such space and facilitation, the vikas mitras are sandwiched between the community who now blame them for non implementation and the administration who wants them to be mere cadre for state data collection or programme implementation. The cutting edge role envisaged under BDVM is undermined and needs a thorough review, rather than discarding the provision as a failure.

6.10 Gaps in implementation under the BDVM:

The BDVM was visualized in a mission mode to make right the development gaps experienced by the Mahadalit communities with the Chief Minister the chair of the General Body and the Minister for SC/ST Welfare department the chair of the executive committee. Much was expected from the mission with allocating various development programmes for the community along with budget allocation, skill development programmes, helpline against discrimination and violence, and the Vikas Mitras as development facilitators and bridge builders between the state and the community. Over the past four years however, the community has expressed disillusionment and disappointment for lack of implementation of the promises made. The most prominent and widespread programme currently implemented is the distribution of radios, understandingly simple to implement, to the community. Other promises like homestead plots, basic facilities in the habitations, community hall cum work-sheds, access to employment, access to credit facilities etc have come up with various roadblocks in implementation. Without proper orientation of the implementing machinery and implicit urgency in ensuring the provisions, these schemes have become good on paper and poor in implementation.

In conclusion, while a number of measures are outlined and developed by the state and supported by the centre, the implementation has huge gaps. An underlying factor is the caste mindset and social exclusion of these communities by the dominant social groups even within the administration. There is very little efforts to implement them on the ground for the benefit of these communities.

CHAPTER 7

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS STRATEGIES ON MUSAHAR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

An important step in the study process was to explore current strategies adopted by civil society organizations working on Musahar children's education. This would throw important light on approaches and strategies adopted and provide insights into what has worked and what needs modifications. We found engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs) ranged from a state of 'no special engagement except as part of the larger poor' to working only with the Musahar community. The field explorations revealed important role played by CSO connected to the Catholic church in living and working with Musahar communities and promoting education and women's empowerment in particular for over three decades.⁶⁰

The range of persons/organizations with whom discussions were held included community leaders, educated youth from the community, employed persons, administrators, social activists, academics, national and international development organizations⁶¹. Some of the members came from the

Musahar community and other Dalit communities, some had lived and worked with the community while others engaged with the community in the course of their work. An important aspect was the study team engagement with many young people from the community – educated youth, students, tola sevaks, NGO leaders, activists, women members.

While ethnographic reports from British administrators and some limited data from census of those times are available from before independence, there is little information about the community post independence, except through census data sets. Small academic studies have been done in a few instances.

7.1 Civil society engagement, early days:

Chhatra Vahini Yuva Sangharsh is one of the first civil society engagements with Musahar community as part of the total revolution led by Jayprakash Narayan. The movement was located around Gaya and Bodh Gaya and included movements for land rights. Given that the community does not have even homestead land. After the Vahini Sangharsh wound down their activities, some of the movement leaders around Gaya began to work on education issues of the Musahar children. Other organizations led by members of the church like Bihar Dalit Vikas Samithi, Manthan may have been contemporaries or just after.

⁶⁰ Given the short time for the study, we focused on organizations that expressed specific focus on Musahar communities and had only limited discussion with others

⁶¹ See Annexure for list of persons.

7.2 Current CSO Approaches in Education

1. NGOs that do not have a specific focus on Musahar Community: A somewhat outdated rationale was reported by some I/NGOs that were met during the course of the study that 'they work with the poor in general/all children and hence did not have special focus or strategy to work with Musahar community'. Thus in some ways the organization expected that interventions and strategies would reach/be accessed/benefit the members of the Musahar community, children as much as other communities/children. Given the social realities and experiences, this is far-fetched expectation. In our society Musahar community is ghettoized outside the main community, untouchability and social exclusion continued to decide social interactions and power sharing. In such context expecting that the larger society has institutionalized 'level playing field' for Musahar community is yet not there. Given that Musahar community members also express constraints in engaging with the larger community even if they know they have the right to and even when they would like to do so also undermines the relevance of this approach.

Given current deepening of the understanding on processes of social exclusion contributing to poverty and powerlessness, multi-dimensional nature of poverty it becomes imperative to deepen situation analysis and strategies to identify the most marginalized and tailor make strategies for them even within larger strategies.

2. I/NGOs that have developed focus/strategies to work with the Musahar communities: These organizations recognise and acknowledge that Musahar communities are disproportionately over-represented among the landless, the poor, are the illiterate, are the migrants on one hand. On the other they are also disproportionately under-represented in the middleclass/upper class, employed, educated, local power structures. Hence organizations have thus focused development interventions with children, youth and women in particular from the community. Education has been an important dimension of their work.

The interventions included creating space for Musahar community to come together and build platforms of their own for land, for development etc. The Musahar Vikas Manch promoted by Action Aid is a case in point.

3. Interventions by Musahar community that is focused entirely on the Musahar community: Here two types of civil society interventions are seen – i) voluntary coming together of members to build organizations for promoting community/common interests. Examples are Musahar Vikas Manch, these function more or less like membership based bodies and are fairly loose and may or may not be formally registered bodies. Financial requirements are by and large met by members themselves and through some donations. ii) second category of such organizations are NGOs formed by members of the Musahar community which have their entire work among their own community. Unlike the former these are not membership based

but has been developed by an individual or a small group of people and are oriented towards addressing community development rights issues.

4. It is important to mention the interventions of the organizations related to the Catholic church in a category of its own. The liberation theology seems to have provided the impetus for them. From about three decades, members of the Catholic church in Bihar have recognized the disabilities of the Musahar communities specifically and initiated work with them. The engagement has been very intense with members opting to live with the communities and build community organizations and processes of empowerment. Foremost names are Fr. Philip Manthra, Fr. Mathew, Sr. Sudha, Sr. Sujitha, Sr. Sabina and many others. One of the first NGO to have a name including 'Dalit' word in Bihar was started by Fr. Jose Knanayikal while forming 'Bihar Dalit Vikas Samiti (BDVS)' giving clear indications about the approach and direction of the organization. BDVS worked with the larger Dalit community and did not have exclusive focus on the Musahar community in their work. Sr. Sujitha and Sr. Sabina took their understanding and empathy with the Musahar communities into larger development institutions and processes like the Mahila Samakya. Sr. Sudha has taken these forward at another level bringing international visibility to the community. Fr. Nishant has done a full thesis on the cultural life of the Musahar community and many others have also written on the community. Thus, one comes across the most in-depth and vibrant strategies from the interventions of these organizations and are good places to look ahead from there.

7.3 Formal Education Strategies by NGOs

- i. Preschool education at the community level
- ii. Non formal education at the community level
- iii. Hostel facilities for school going children
- iv. Residential schools
- v. Short term residential programmes
- vi. National institute for open schooling
- vii. Additional flexible support to meet competitive/school final examinations
- viii. Self confidence building, showcasing talents at local and international levels
- ix. Community awareness and support programmes for promoting education to children – SHG, CEC, CEL,
- x. School Education to higher education and skill development

1. **Pre-school education:** The need to prepare the child towards schools is currently acknowledged and accepted. While children from affluent and educated backgrounds have 2-3 years of school preparation, the large majority of Musahar children are deprived of such preparation. Given that families do not have the experience, resources

or mechanisms to provide this preparatory phase at home, NGO interventions have focused on organizing pre-primary education for Musahar children within their tolas. Very few of their tolas have been provided with ICDS centres by the state. Their exclusion and discrimination by the larger society also limits their access to ICDS centres set up in other tolas or the main village. Pre-school education has also been taken up to free girl children from sibling care so that they can pursue their education. It also frees working mothers from child care and anxiety about them. Thus special focus on pre-school education with special materials, specially motivated teachers and community spaces were mobilized for this programme. There are ample strategies and materials available in these processes for one to take them forward. It also provides a space for parents and community members to directly observe and engage with some system of teaching learning processes, that they themselves may not have had the opportunity to experience.

2. **Non Formal Education:** Has been one of the first interventions and emerged from the larger literacy movements spurred by goals like Education for All and Total Literacy campaigns. Given the difficult circumstances in which children in these communities grew up given the bonded labour like conditions of the parents, abject poverty, lack of any information or interface with other communities, Manthan, BDVS etc and other organizations initiated NFE programme for school drop outs, child labour and as also a support process for school going children.
3. **Short term residential programmes:** This has been well developed by various organizations like Manthan, Prabhat, Read where efforts at community level awareness and education processes were augmented by bringing together children across Musahar communities for short periods of ten days to two weeks for intense learning and un-learning. Given the limited environment Musahar children see and interact with, and the limitations of their habitations and context, these experiments provided alternate experiences in the short term. The process included bringing children for residential programmes where there experienced i) alternate daily routines more related to routines that fitted into schooling and education, ii) provided alternate learning experiences, iii) provided wider social interface, iv) exposed them to national and international status and scenario.
4. **Hostel facilities and residential schools:** is also found to be a strategy to promote education among Musahar children and used more widely in the case of girl children who bear greater burdens and have greater chances of dropping out. A place where

they are freed from home responsibilities and have guided learning opportunities in addition to peer support is useful.

5. **National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS):** Many organizations have also used the opportunity available under the NIOS to encourage children to complete their schooling through the open school system. Here again children need information, learning support, some cost coverage, motivation and encouragement etc.
6. **Short/long term support to undertake school final exams:** A few years ago, the Musahar community hardly had one secondary/senior secondary completed person in a tola. The need to give added attention to children who were keen to complete schooling was an opportunity to help them prepare for the school final exams. Through the combined efforts of many of these interventions one can see a handful of young children who have completed their schooling and may have also moved to college education.
7. **A modern residential school for Musahar children:** A modern English medium school is run by Shoshit Seva Sangh (SSS) and has attracted the attention primarily of educated parents. A unit, Shoshit Samadhan Kendra initiated and managed by ret'd. IPS officer JK Sinha provides education to 4-14 years of age from kindergarten to class X. About 250 children currently study here and all costs are met by the organization.
8. **Alternate pedagogy:** Gram Nirman Kendra and Deshkal society, two organizations in Gaya has developed an alternate pedagogy for Musahar children along the lines of the conscientisation pedagogy used by Paulo Freire.

7.4 Analysis of current strategies

1. **Understanding the Musahar child:** Almost all the people we talked to discussed the need to understand the Musahar child in their cultural and social context. The MS team that has worked for more than two decades with Musahar girls said it as 'if you ... scold two children – one Musahar and the other non-Musahar – it is almost always that the Musahar child takes it more seriously and is affected by it and it can lead to the child withdrawing and even dropping out. They shared how the social environment of the Musahar child has not brought her in contact with formal education, formal discipline, some of the social etiquettes that we practice and hence it takes a while for the child to understand and accommodate them. It takes almost a week and much patience and creativity on the part of the teacher/facilitator to help the Musahar child to settle in to the new system and develop a rhythm in the educational set up. Fr. Nishant puts it as

the paradoxical situation as ‘Musahar children experience much love at home even when they are not well looked after’. Another activist put it as ‘the Musahar child must be given the best experience, the best must be given to them’. In his understanding as they have always been pushed to the last and given the last and the worst, repeating and replicating an environment where they are pushed to the last and given the left over, is not encouraging to them. This cycle must be broken in the new frame of engagement with Musahar children.

2. **Education plus strategies:** Some of the successes that have been attained by Sr Sudha, Mahila Samakya in promoting education among Musahar girls is by providing opportunities to engage the girls in activities that engage them innovatively. An important strategy adopted by both MS and Nari Gunjan is that of engaging them in karate. This has given opportunities for them to showcase their talent visibly gaining self confidence and recognition too. Other projects had taken up cultural trainings, provided opportunities to put up shows, had important others (teachers, parents..) to observe these programmes, had important state officials attend these programmes. The best was the way in which the girls from Prerna Centre run by Nari Gunjan went all the way to Japan and won the Asian karate championship.
3. **Facilitating entry and adjustment to systems:** The environment of the Musahar child is more or less unguided with the parents engaged in working to meet food and other basic needs. Being isolated with no engagement with other mainstream communities they are also not aware of the routine systems that function within other social groups. It was interesting to listen to youth saying that while in college they ‘observed how other students study, behave, respond and took to even imitating and practicing some of those’.⁶² Fr Nishant in his extensive work among the Musahar communities and later also in his thesis reports how the community on the whole is averse to getting into any system. The ten days to two weeks short term residential programmes used as a strategy by many organizations was a means to expose the children to a more systematized routine and adapt to it which would then be easier for them to adopt a school routine system.
4. **Residential schools:** Residential schools and hostels despite the many limitations linked to them have been of great relevance to promote education among Musahar girls. The KGBVs, Nari Gunjan and even the residential schools of the government are in this line. It of course goes without saying that these schools need to be safe, creative and respond to the needs of the children.

⁶² Santhosh kumar from Jamui

5. **Mothers and children's education:** Another strategy used by the organizations is to engage women/mothers in the process of the education of their children. One of the Tola Sevak was of the opinion that Musahar men do not put energy into the education of children while Mothers do. As a cutting across strategy many organizations have engaged with mothers – formed mothers groups, engaged the SHGs, linked mothers committees to community learning centres to promote children's education. This also helped mothers and community at large to also familiarize themselves with the academic processes and cycles.
6. **Community education Centres:** Almost all the organizations had community education centres where basic literacy and awareness were imparted to children. These functioned as nonformal education centres and provided a bridge to motivate children to school education. Given that the community has very little link to education, such a strategy provides a basic foundation to promoting school education.
7. **Opportunities for lateral entry:** Children dropped out and re-joined and this was prevalent. An empathetic understanding for the reasons and gentle encouragement was given to facilitate the process of re-entry. It was also found that this re-entry may need to go just beyond providing a space in the school – it may need additional learning support, occasional support to meet education costs, occasional support for other needs, etc

In conclusion, it is encouraging that education has been one of the important interventions of civil society organizations in working with the Musahar community. Given that the Musahar community educationally is at a stage where they are not linked to the state education systems, time and energy needs to be invested in building interest in the community on the relevance and rationale for educating their children. These efforts and the State efforts to make schools available have impacted positively that today, the community is aware and keen on educating their children, albeit various barriers and constraints. A combination of these strategies has been very effective and it is heartening to see them replicated in the state BMDVM strategies. The interventions of these organizations also had the benefit of promoting youth from the community to develop their own civil society work within the community. The presence of these organisations and leaders are also resource persons and institutions that can be engaged with in taking the process forward. The State taking the process to scale through the Vikas Mitras and Tola Sevaks is an added avenue for promoting the education and development of the children and community.

CHAPTER 8

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The twenty one lakh plus Musahar community in Bihar is third largest among Dalit communities in the State and constitutes one of the poorest communities in the State as well as at the national level. Historically considered descendants of a tribe from the Chotanagpur region, surveys and reports of British India record them as 'semi-Hinduised tribes/semi-Hindooized aboriginal tribes in 1881. While they were classified as tribes in the 1935 census, the 1961 census classified them under SCs. Their gradual journey from the hills to the plains has also been a graded change from the tribal roots to more Hindu influence and incorporation as outcastes and untouchables over the past hundred years or so. Given their culture, they can be classified as Magahiya Musahars, Tiruhuthia Musahars, Nomadic Musahars and the Slum Dweller Musahars. In a society where social groups are named after their caste occupation rather than their food habits, the naming of this community by their food habit can be attributed to a prejudiced or a political process of subjugation, an indication of institutional and structural violence against them.

Musahars face exclusion and discrimination from both general caste communities as well as other Dalit communities leading to their current situation of chronic poverty, landlessness, lack of assets, illiteracy, unemployment, child labour and even alcoholism. In such a context, lack of disaggregated data to help assess and track the community status and progress/lack of progress is a central gap in planning and monitoring development among the community. An equally important gap is the dearth of research and academic studies on the community. Even the latest study on social exclusion-inclusion in education in Bihar by the MHRD does not throw any light on the status of this community.

Recognising the central role of education in the development of any marginalized community, this study is an effort to understand and analyse the constraints and barriers experienced by Musahar children and communities in accessing their rights to education. The study was qualitative in nature and focused on in-depth discussions and interviews with Musahar children, mothers, educated youth, civil society activists and school management committees at community level and school functionaries in four panchayats in four districts of the state to capture the diversity and the different contexts of the community. Study also explored the perspectives and strategies of policy makers, executives from social welfare department and Mahadalit vikas mission as well as almost everyone from among national and international development organizations having focused work with the community in the state. The study uses the human rights framework for analyzing their access and progress under the right to education.

The world of Musahar children is one of exclusion and isolation in their 'musaharis'. Even when they go to school, other children keep away from them and do not include them labeling them 'dirty, unclean, wear torn clothes'. Early on, they take on adult responsibilities of agriculture, animal care and domestic chores, more so girl children. Dropped out, children end up child labour, migrant child labour repeating yet another cycle as their parents.

Literacy rates among the Musahar is about 9 per cent, one of the lowest in the state, one can hardly come across a professional or technically qualified person in their tola and handful who have dropped out at 10th/12th standards. While enrollment rates have increased manifolds in the last two decades, the majority drop out between classes 2-4 and almost everyone by class 6. Given the increased availability of schools and the thrust for universal elementary education, parents report that admitting their children to schools is not a problem, but retention and learning are huge problems. In addition to the problems of infrastructure gaps, shortage of trained teachers, lack of quality in teaching, Musahar children face specific problems owing to their identity in schools. They include being stigmatized as Musahars, excluded as being dirty and unclean, regular and harsher corporal punishments, low expectations and neglectful attitude of teachers, school level costs and non-availability of functional schools in some places. All children do not receive scholarships which are also not regular or on time, mid day meal is not provided regularly and despite the provision of transportation under SSA, they do not have transport available in flood affected areas of Saharsha. Teachers report that Musahar children are most irregular in school and hence their backwardness in learning. Children and communities assert that the irregularity among teachers is also major reason for children's irregularity. One also suspects forms of institutional discrimination where schools located in the Musahar tolas or where they are predominant in numbers are least endowed, teachers lack accountability, there is no monitoring and no commitment to improve the education standards for this community.

Community members especially mothers express their concern to educate their children and the efforts they take at it. However, they express helplessness at supporting them academically and especially in influencing them to resume studies when they drop out. School management committee includes some members from the community but are not able to evolve strategies given the non-functional nature of the SMCs, their own lack of information and confidence and the negligent attitude of the system towards them and their children.

The Bihar Mahadvalit Vikas Mission (BMDVM) initiated in 2007-08 has at last placed some focus on the community and the need for specific strategies. Various development programmes have been re-focused as the 'Mahadalit' programmes, be they anganwadis, schools, hostels, roads, drinking water, sanitation, skill development etc. The recruitment of many educated youth

from the community as vikas mitras and tola sevaks under the BMDVM is also a break-through in many ways. However, implementation remains a perennial problem.

The study helps bring out the concern and commitment as well as the effort of the community to join the mainstream seeing education of their children as key to this. The study brings out the many constraints and barriers children and communities face in staying on and studying in schools. It highlights the efforts of Musahar led and other organizations and their efforts at Musahar children's education. It reviews the state policies and strategies and their effectiveness in promoting Musahar children's education, particularly girl children. Given the above findings, the study makes specific recommendations to promote the fulfillment of their right to education.

8.1 Recommendations to the State: specific to education of Musahar children:

1. Include the culture, contribution and icons of Musahar community in school curriculum and orient teachers to recognize, respect and disseminate them among all children. The initiative to name 'Dasarath Manjhi' skill development scheme is one such, others can be explored.
2. State government track and monitor Musahar children's enrollment, drop out and learning at school, block, district and state levels. Annual education data should be organized to track enrollment, drop out and learning for specific vulnerable communities as Musahars so that appropriate policy-strategy can be developed.
3. To build capacity of the tola sevaks to support children in their learning, motivate and mobilize the community. Tola sevaks to be supported to provide mentoring and career counseling to children to give them a broad brush of possibilities and opportunities in and through education.
4. State give advisory to schools that school development plans include specific strategies to promote Musahar children's access and participation in schools. SMCs are specially oriented towards this. SMC members from Musahar community are encouraged to bring up issues of the community and children in this regard.
5. State gives advisory to schools prohibiting all forms of discrimination, humiliation and exclusion of Musahar children in schools.
6. State set up a grievance redress mechanism at the school level and upwards to provide the space for children and parents to raise their issues and seek redress
7. Ensure that all Musahar children have access to anganwadis in their tolas and are provided both adequate nutrition and pre-primary education there.

8. Ensure Musahar children's physical accessibility to schools on priority basis, setting up schools within 1 and 3 kms wherever necessary, ensuring transport where needed and providing boat access in flood prone and water logged areas.
9. Ensure Musahar children's economic access to schooling by enhancing the scholarship amount and ensuring that it reaches all children regularly and on time so that economic disability does not prevent children's education.
10. Evolve specific need based schemes to promote Musahar children's education through the Scheduled Caste Sub Plan funds under the Education ministry to offset the reported costs of Rs.1000-1200/year incurred by parents on children who are studying in the government schools.
11. Ensure timely and full implementation of entitlements like scholarships, books, uniforms and additional support wherever necessary to Musahar children to ensure they access a full cycle of elementary education and can move on to class x and xii
12. In places where migration is very prevalent, residential schools are set up so that families do not withdraw and take children with them for labour.
13. Increase access and monitor the admission and retention of Musahar children in KGBVs, JNVs, residential schools and welfare hostels.
14. Youth in the community are provide skill training and support to find employment, start enterprises so that they find meaningful benefit from education and become path breakers for other children currently studying.

8.2 Recommendations to the State: scaffolding education development of Musahar children:

1. Recognise the Musahar community as a specific sub group for development efforts given their large population in the state, social exclusion and low development indicators. There is enough evidence to show that the wider society including administration practice untouchability, discrimination and social exclusion of extreme nature against them. Special focus is important to stem the tide and make development programmes work for them.
2. Track disaggregated data for Musahar children and communities in all state data gathering and analysis programmes and utilize them as the basis for planning development programmes for the community be it children, youth or adults.
3. Facilitate vikas mitras to fulfill their mandated duties. This includes capacity and skill building on one hand, liberating them from tasks that do not fall within the objectives and goals outlined in the BMDVM mandate, supporting and handholding them in the efforts to mobilize and motivate the community and be the bridges and supports they are to be.
4. Engage and support educated youth and civil society activists from the community in state development programmes to ensure they reach and benefit the community

5. Implement, monitor and regularly review the programmes under the BMDVM and make additional efforts to ensure that Musahar children, youth and community benefit from them and the development gap between them and other groups can be bridged in a time-bound manner.
6. Ensure representatives from the Musahar are members of elected and statutory bodies, their voices heard and issues addressed on priority.
7. Undertake focused interventions on livelihood promotion for Musahar community through the Bihar Rural Livelihood Programme to reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and migration.
8. Create packages for the skill development of Musahar youth through the National Skill Development Mission in collaboration with the Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission.
9. Allocate, utilize and track development budgets under the BMDVM and SCSP for benefitting this community specifically towards all round development of the community to reduce development inequalities between them and others.

8.3 Recommendations to civil society organizations to strengthen and support education of Musahar children

1. Recognize Musahar community as a specific sub group that needs special development strategies and evolve specific development plan for them within the overall development strategy of the organization.
2. Identify and build partnership with civil society organizations and networks led by Musahar youth to reach development initiatives to the community more effectively.
3. Allocate specific and additional budgets within the overall budgets and programmes to meet the needs and overcome the constraints of these communities and children to accessing development.
4. Undertake studies on various issues of the community for better understanding and strategy building, as an immediate example on education: 'out of pocket expenses' for children in government schools to influence the RtE implementation.
5. Hold public education, public hearings, social audits to highlight relevant issues of the community to the public and state.
6. Take up collective advocacy on implementation under BMDVM and other specific issues at the state level.

Finally, In addition to addressing social exclusion, one needs to engage in a process of promoting social inclusion and solidarity with the clear focus on who/what is at the centre. The strategy should progressively include building spaces around the centre for other communities to engage beginning from similarly placed communities to larger circles and spirals of social inclusion with equity. It is important to initiate steps in this direction keeping Musahar and

other similarly excluded communities at the centre and widening the circles consistently to engage with other communities. There are considerable international experiences of Roma and other indigenous people that can provide lessons and insights. At this point there are also members from the Musahar community that have individually despite all strangleholds managed to shoot out of the dis-privileged orbits like shooting stars. They stand as shining examples for the young of the community – Dasarath Manjhi, Mishri Sada, Bhagwati Devi in the past and currently Jeetan Ram Manjhi etc. In addition, we are sure there are other local leaders and motivators.

Larger community mobilization needs to be done with some of these ideas and icons. In this regards, youth mobilisation through the Mahadalit Vikas Mission is a very poignant opportunity. It must be recognized that this process has identified large numbers of young people, educated to the extent possible, in the remotest habitation. It has not only made the web and weave of a potent network among them but also provided some basic survival means. If developed thoughtfully, the mission can serve as the core/platform for the most marginalized youth and circles of other marginalized youth and provide a perfect initial engine to take the process forward. In addition, tolas sevaks numbering about 20,000 from the Musahar community and surrounded by another almost 20,000 other marginalized youth can be engaged and mobilized. The Mahadalit Vikas Mission with all its limitations and non-implementation has also helped the Musahar community to identify themselves, recognize some available spaces and create spaces for themselves. Given the environment and the potential opportunities, it is a good time to take forward existing strategies and move it up scale and build institutional mechanisms to replicate, modify and move it forward.

One cannot emphasise on the need for focused strategies and interventions for the Musahar community given the chronic poverty and multiple deprivation they face. An important strategy to countering social exclusion and discrimination is building concrete strategies to promote inclusion action between Musahar and other children in schools. Bringing children together to understand and appreciate one another and diverse cultures and life-styles as well as contexts is central to such a process. The Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission is a step in this direction and it is hoped that convergent and collaboration across departments, departments and civil society organizations can be taken up with the Musahar children and youth at the centre.

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Annexure

Established Standards under RtE Act/Rules and Desirable Standards according to RBA

Feature	Essential Standards provided under RtE Act 2009 and RtE Rules 2010	Desirable Additional Standards (that not specified under RtE Act/Rules)
Availability	1. Government/local authority should establish schools within every neighbourhood limits 2. Central/State/UT governments to share in the provision of adequate funding for implementation of RtE provisions 3. School should have adequate space and facilities for children to learn, play, have meals, wash rooms, interact, etc.: (i) All-weather school building/s (ii) One office-cum-store-cum head teacher's room (iii) Separate male/female toilets (iv) Safe and adequate drinking water facility (v) Kitchen where midday meal is cooked (vi) Playground (vii) Boundary wall or fencing 4. School has adequate teachers and facilities for teachers to teach like classrooms, teaching materials, etc.: (i) Adequate number of suitable trained/qualified teachers for the number of students (see Schedule) (ii) Adequate teacher training facilities (iii) One classroom per teacher (iv) Timely prescribing of elementary education curriculum and courses of study (v) Prescribed minimum number of instructional hours in an academic year fulfilled (vi) Teachers conduct and complete curriculum in time	• School should have adequate and functional toilet facilities • School should have adequate facilities for SMC/parents to engage and participate in the children's education, like a room for teachers and parents to interact, hold discussions, etc. • Teachers should be regular and punctual

	(vii) Teaching learning materials as required by each class (viii) Play material, games sports equipment as required by each class (ix) Library	
Physical Accessibility	1. Primary school (I-V stds) should be within 1 km of the neighbourhood, and Upper Primary school (VI-VII stds) within 3 km of the neighbourhood 2. Location of schools should avoid risks like dangerous terrains, flooding, landslides, lack of roads and other dangers for children to travel to and from school 3. Special facilities like residential schools or transport should be provided for children from small hamlets outside of neighbourhoods. 4. Appropriate and safe transportation arrangements should be made for children with disabilities to enable them to attend school 5. Schools to have special physical infrastructure to ensure barrier-free access for children with physical disabilities, like ramps to school building	• There should be no safety barriers or harassment of especially girl children or disadvantaged children in travelling to and from school • Child should have escorts to school when and where necessary to avoid harassment or threats to safety • The school academic cycle and school timings should be flexible and convenient, taking into account the different cultural and religious contexts of students (haj times, migrant festival times,) • School environment should be welcoming, motivating, child friendly and informative to attract children and facilitate their learning
Economic Accessibility	1. Schools are free and children do not have to pay fees (incl. capitation fees) of any kind <i>(NB: free and compulsory education subject to different rules depending on type of school)</i> 2. Children are entitled to free textbooks, writing materials and uniforms 3. Children with disabilities are entitled to free special learning and support material	• Scholarships should be needs-based, adequate and timely • Necessarily writing and learning materials in addition to text books should be provided to all children of adequate quantity and quality • Children should be provided with <i>good quality</i> midday meals • Children who desire additional learning should not have to give it up because of lack of financial resources • Children should not be prevented from participating in cultural or extra-curricular activities for lack of financial resources
Social Accessibility	1. Parents have duty and should be encouraged to admit all their children into	• Non-discrimination should be both in law and in fact, with <i>active</i>

y, Non-discrimination	schools for education 2. The government/local authorities should ensure that children's access to schools is not hindered on account of social and cultural factors 3. There should be minimum 25% reservation in Class I to children from disadvantaged and weaker sections in neighbourhood <i>private</i> and 'special category' schools, with fees reimbursed by the government 4. Government/local authorities should ensure that children belonging to disadvantaged groups or weaker sections are not discriminated against and prevented from pursuing and completing elementary education • Discrimination includes segregation or discrimination in the classroom, during midday meals, in the playgrounds, in use of common drinking water and toilet facilities, and in the cleaning of toilets or classrooms • Children from disadvantaged or weaker sections should not be segregated from other children in classroom,, nor their classes held in different places and timings from other children • Children from disadvantaged or weaker sections should not be discriminated as regards entitlements/facilities like textbooks, uniforms, library and ICT facilities, extra-curricular activities and sports 5. Local authorities should ensure admission of migrant children in education 6. Schools should not deny admission to students at any time of the year 7. Schools should not hold back or expel students from elementary education 8. Schools should not have any screening process of child or parents to enter into the school 9. Children should not experience physical punishment, mental harassment or abuse	measures taken to combat both overt and passive discrimination in education • Governments should monitor schools for de facto discrimination, identify and address the issues in terms of policies, institutions, programmes, spending patterns, etc. • Governments should put in place positive measures to facilitate access to education for disadvantaged children (eg: quotas) • Right to fundamental education for those who have not received or completed elementary education, <i>or not received basic learning needs</i> • Child should not feel discriminated in school, nor be abused, humiliated, threatened, live in fear or anxiety, or told cannot learn or less capable of learning • Child should not hesitate to share identity, family background, culture and community, food habits, religious practices, etc. • Child should not be picked out to do extra work in the school, or any tasks hurting her/his dignity • Schools should not have practices that neglect or negate a child's culture, religion, gender, etc. • Child should not stay only in her/his own social group in school • Child should have mentors to monitor their progress, and to help them cope with times of stress and shock • Child should be able to raise complaints and get redress for any incident violating her/his RtE in a
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	on basis of caste, class, gender or religion in schools 10. Special provisions should be made to admit into schools any child who has never been admitted or has not completed their elementary education, to receive special training that enables them to complete their elementary education; special training may also be given to those children who are enrolled in schools more than six months into the academic year 11. Teachers should regularly meet with parents to discuss the child's progress in education	supportive environment
Acceptability	1. Government should ensure good quality education conforming to the Schedule norms(<i>NB: quality defined in terms of availability only</i>) 2. Curriculum and courses of study should meet minimum standards (see sec.29(2)) 3. The medium of instruction, as far as practicable, should be in the child's mother tongue 4. Curriculum and evaluation procedure should make the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety, and help the child to express their views freely 5. Specially designed, age appropriate, learning material should be developed for imparting special training to children who have not received or completed elementary education	• Curricula and teaching methods should be relevant and of quality • Curricula and teaching methods should ensure child's basic learning needs are met • Curricula and teaching methods should be culturally appropriate and have inputs from diverse sources and socio-cultural backgrounds, especially those of marginalised children • Curricula on religion/ethics should be unbiased and objective • Education should promote respect for different cultures, religions, racial and ethnic groups, non-violence, human rights and fundamental freedoms, the natural environment, etc. • Teaching methods should foster critical thinking and freedom of expression among children, enable them to freely raise doubts and questions in class • Education should prepare children for a responsible life in which they make balanced decisions, promote

		the value of equality, are tolerant of other societies/cultures/religions, resolve conflicts in non-violent ways, and develop a healthy lifestyle • Education should promote children's capacity to aspire for a future with opportunities • Parents should be allowed to ensure moral/religious education of children according to their convictions
Adaptability	1. Teachers should assess the learning ability of each child and accordingly give supplementary instruction where necessary 2. A process of continuous comprehensive evaluation of the child than examination resulting in pass and fail system 3. A child receiving special education should, after induction into the age appropriate class, receive special attention to ensure they successfully integrate both academically and emotionally	• Education should be flexible to respond to needs of students within diverse socio-cultural contexts • Education should be flexible to adapt to needs of changing societies and communities • School hours and terms should be flexible to accommodate the local cultural and religious context of students
Monitoring and Developing Schools	1. Government/local authorities should ensure and monitor <i>admission, attendance</i> and <i>completion</i> of elementary education by all children in neighbourhood 2. Local authorities to maintain record of all children aged 6-14 years within jurisdiction 3. Local authorities should monitor the functioning of all schools within their jurisdiction 4. Schools, except unaided/private schools, should have a School Management Committee (SMC), composed of 50% women, and 75% parents with proportionate representation of parents from disadvantaged social groups and weaker sections 5. Each SMC should prepare a school development plan, communicate RtE to	• Local authorities should be adequately capacitated to carry out mandated tasks • SMC members should be provided with adequate capacity building and handholding support where needed to ensure that they are able to fulfil their responsibilities and tasks • The RtE Rules should include provision for children's participation in the monitoring and developing of schools • School, school administration and community interface should be promoted through shiksha samvads at block level and shiksha divas at school levels to promote

	neighbourhood community, monitor child enrolment and attendance, ensure maintenance of RtE norms 6. The SMC is the immediate agency for grievance redressal under the Act, requiring registration, investigation and responding to complaints 7. National and State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR/SCPCR), or Right to Education Protection Authority (REPA) shall examine and review safeguards for rights provided under RtE Act and inquire into complaints relating to a child's right to free and compulsory elementary education	effective problem solving and school development • Social audits be promoted for community monitoring of schools • Standards and indicators for monitoring equity and inclusion provisions of RtE should be developed
Budget Provisions	1. Central and state governments should ensure adequate budget provisions for RtE implementation 2. School development plans developed by the SMC in keeping with needs become the basis for school funding 3. Bottom-up approach to school budgeting and funding to be evolved by collating school development plans at block, district, state and national levels 4. SCP and TSP funds to be indicated separately in both plan and non plan as well as revenue and capital categories 5. Governments take care to ensure flow of funds to the schools for effective functioning and development	• Education budget be raised in keeping with Kothari commission and titrated against current needs and costs • Special bundle of schemes under SCP and TSP are developed, implemented and monitored to ensure that education gaps between them and other communities are eliminated • The PM 15 point programme provisions in education be effectively utilised to ensure education of Muslim minority children • Special budgetary provisions are developed, implemented and monitored to ensure that education gaps between specific categories of vulnerable children are eliminated (migrant children, brick kiln children, rag picking children, D-NT children, urban poor children etc) • Members from the most marginalised groups are ensured in the SMC to highlight their issues

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- * Disadvantaged groups = SC, ST, socially and educationally backward classes, or such other group having disadvantage due to social, cultural, economic, geographical, gender, linguistic or other such factors
- ** Weaker sections = children of parents/guardians whose annual income is lower than the minimum specified by the appropriate government by notification