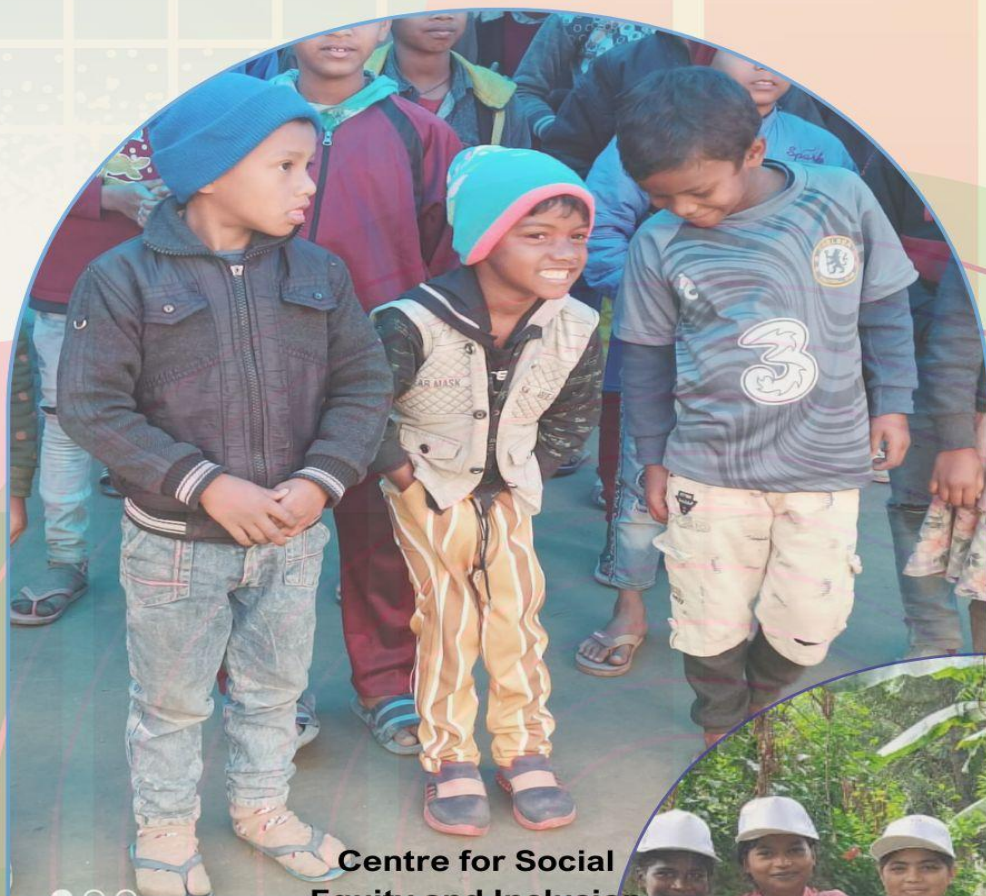


Social Identity of Children: How does it matter in Schooling?

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS IN BIHAR**



Centre for Social
Equity and Inclusion
@2013



Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion
Aligning People To Policy & Policy To People

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Glossary

<i>ASER:</i>	<i>Annual Status of Education Report</i>
<i>BCF:</i>	<i>Bihar Curriculum Framework</i>
<i>BEPC:</i>	Bihar Education Project Council
<i>BRC:</i>	<i>Block Resource Centre</i>
<i>CAL:</i>	Computer Aided Literacy
<i>CRC:</i>	<i>Convention on the Rights of the Child</i>
<i>CSEI:</i>	Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion
<i>CSS:</i>	<i>Centrally Sponsored Scheme</i>
<i>CWSN:</i>	<i>Children With Special Needs</i>
<i>DA:</i>	Dis-Advantaged
<i>DIET:</i>	District Institute of Education and Training
<i>DISE:</i>	District Information on School Education
<i>DPEP:</i>	District Primary Education Program
<i>EBC:</i>	Extremely Backward Community
<i>EDCIL:</i>	Education Development Consultants, India Ltd.
<i>EWS:</i>	Economically Weaker Sections
<i>FGD:</i>	Focus Group Discussion
<i>FYP:</i>	Five Year Plan
<i>GER:</i>	Gross Enrollment Ratio
<i>GoI:</i>	Government of India
<i>Govt:</i>	<i>Government</i>
<i>HM:</i>	<i>Head Master</i>
<i>HRD:</i>	Human Resource Development
<i>IMRB:</i>	Indian Market Research Bureau
<i>KGBV:</i>	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
<i>MDM:</i>	Mid Day Meal
<i>MHRD:</i>	Ministry of Human Resource Development
<i>NCF:</i>	National Curriculum Framework
<i>NGO:</i>	Non Government Organization
<i>NIOS:</i>	National Institute for Open Schooling
<i>NPEGEL:</i>	National Programme to Promote Education of Girls at Elementary Level
<i>NRBC:</i>	Non-Residential Bridge Courses
<i>NUEPA:</i>	National University of Educational Planning and Administration.
<i>OBC:</i>	Other Backward Class
<i>OOSC:</i>	Out of School Children
<i>PAB:</i>	Project Approval Board
<i>PGVS :</i>	Pragati Gramin Vikas Samiti
<i>PPP:</i>	Public Private Partnership
<i>PRI:</i>	<i>Panchayati Raj Institutions</i>

PTR: Pupil Teacher Ratio
RBC: Residential Bridge Courses
REPA: Right to Education Protection Authority
RtE: Right to Education
SC: Scheduled Castes
SCSP: Scheduled Caste Sub Plan
SCPCR: State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights
SCR: Students Class-room Ratio
SMC: School Management Committee
SPQEM: Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madarsas
SSA: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All)
ST: Scheduled Tribes
TLM : Teaching Learning Materials
TSP: Tribal Sub Plan
UEE: Universal Elementary Education
UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Education Fund
VSS: Vidyalay Shiksha Samiti

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

“Human beings have to be the end of all social purposes; not the means” Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

“I believe ... our strength lies in the presently deprived three-fourths of our people...marrying their socially acquired competencies and skills with academic pursuits in our educational institutions would lead to a special flowering of talent and skills” (NCF 2005 foreword).

1.1 Education: Means and End

Education is well recognised as a means for **development** and as an end in itself. The importance of education in the life of every individual, and hence the need for states to commit to provide education to every child in their jurisdiction and to every adult who had been denied education is well acknowledged. National development through improving the standard of mass education, rather than promoting ‘elite’ education to a select few, is also evident from the development trajectory of developing and developed nations. The national and global calls for universal education, adult and continuing education are in keeping with these commitments and evidence.

Education for **social transformation** needs as much or more emphasis as education for development. Without recognising the role of education in individual and societal transformation, it can end up being instrumental and oppressive; that is, instrumental to achieve parochial goals or to impart particular kinds of skills and knowledge. Examples of such instrumental engagement in education are the limited focus of adult education on ensuring people ‘sign their names’ as an evidence of high literacy rates to reach global commitments; or short-term skills development courses to ensure skilled human power to maintain industrial production without ensuring a rounded education to develop human potential. Education can also become a tool for domination and oppression, even means to gain the compliance of the oppressed in their oppression. We have the examples of schools run by fundamentalist religious groups in this regard. It is well to recollect educationists such as John Dewey who stated that education is not just about studying society, but to contribute to it and transform it. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar followed this philosophy of education in his efforts to mobilise the Dalit community in India for social transformation, with his call to ‘educate, organise and agitate’.

Education that needs to be oriented towards social transformation and individual and social development cannot be framed in vacuum, but requires strong philosophical and ethical underpinnings. Our Constitutional values as ‘**equality, liberty, fraternity and justice**’ provide us such an underpinning. Equality is the recognition of equal rights and equal opportunities for all in building a democratic society. Fraternity calls for the disposition of an individual to treat others with reverence and love and the desire to be in unity with fellow beings. It becomes the basis to collaborate and cooperate for social good than pursue one’s good in competition and at the expense of the others. Liberty in various dimensions is essential for a free social order including civil liberty (movement,

speech, action); liberty of thought and liberty to participate in decision making about society and governance. Justice promises individuals and communities redress and succour against past and continuing forms of exploitation or injustice. Given our particular social context, where millions have been pushed to the margins, have been and continue to be oppressed and exploited through the existing social order, the Constitution framers found it important to emphasise the above values to promote a more just and egalitarian social order. The 'National Curriculum Framework, (NCF) 2005' hinges itself on these values and enjoins them to be translated into our education system, education content and education methodology.

Children from marginalised communities face particular constraints in accessing education, given their exclusion from education for generations. Recognising their limitations, the Constitution laid emphasis on state to 'provide with special care education and economic development to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST)' in Article 46. Promoting education among religious and linguistic Minorities (Article 30) and women were also concerns of independent India. However, despite various policies and provisions, children from these communities continue to lag behind others in school participation and learning outcomes. In a fast moving, knowledge society, education is the principal means by which children from the SC, ST, Muslim or Nomadic/Denotified tribes can hope to participate and enjoy equality and liberty in society. They need an education beyond mere literacy and numeracy to also promote dignity and confidence, affirmation of their knowledge, person-hood and citizenship. It needs to meet their aspirations to participate and part-take the benefits of the fast growing nation. Hence measures to ensure social equity and inclusion are central for marginalised children to enjoy their rights to, in and through education.

1.2 Social Identity and Education

The Central and State government annual reports on school education provide information on enrolment and dropout rates, disaggregated by girls and boys, and for SC, ST girls and boys. This data tracks their progress across years and is useful in understanding trends. While the data presents inequalities in learning outcomes between SC, ST and 'All Children'¹, there are little insights into the causes or effects of these inequalities. Given that education has primarily been input oriented and by rote method, there has been little appreciation for the need to understand the different socio-cultural contexts of children from different social groups and its influence on their learning. There also have not been efforts to draw upon the resources and experiences of diverse groups of children in facilitating their learning.

A preliminary area of differentiated school provisioning is reported between SC, ST and other children in late eighties. Referring to the physical conditions in which schools of SC children is

¹ All Children include SC, ST and Muslim children too, thereby depressing the overall value as education indicators of SC, ST and Muslim children generally lower than other children. More useful information would be comparison between SC, ST, or Muslim children against the education indicators to the non-SC/ST/non-Muslim General Caste children. This will be more useful while building strategies to reduce inequalities in education.

located, the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes² observed 'the environment in this institution was reported to be very dirty as the ground was swampy and there were cow-dung heaps and firewood stocked all over'. The same report also observed how schools did not function in Adivasi areas for long periods owing to teacher absenteeism.

While these initial studies focused on poor and unequal provisioning to children from marginalised communities, there were little insights into what actually went on inside the classrooms in terms of teaching learning practices or the experiences of marginalised children. Initial insights into classroom processes came from studies³ conducted by the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). They reported how the curriculum transactions in schools were primarily text-book based, directed by the teacher and dominated by rote learning. Studies found little connection to the context of the children, their community knowledge or experiences. Further, looking into caste negotiated education provisioning, Anitha⁴ reported how educational transaction was characterised by the 'absence of learning activity, accompanied by silence (defined by teacher as tolerable noise) and was similar to herding....Educational transaction was directed to keeping the children within the classroom'. These studies while going a step deeper into schooling beyond poor and unequal provisioning did not look into how these processes are experienced by marginalised children.

The need to make differentiated provisions was first articulated as the need for 'education in the home language for Adivasi children' in the early years. Academics suggested that the exclusion of tribal languages from school as well as the negative teacher attitudes to 'tribal dialects' could be partly responsible for lack of interest of children in their studies, poor performance and ultimately drop-out from schools.⁵ Studies also reported on the differences between the home languages of Dalit children who bring their 'home dialects' even when they speak the same language⁶.

Jha and Jhingran) highlighted the Brahminical cultural dominance in their paper, 'National Focus Group on Problems of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Children'⁷ The paper discussed how the curriculum was urban elite male-centric and bereft of the country's rich cultural diversity. They also found there has been corresponding devaluation of "lesser" dialects, cultures, traditions, and folklore of Dalits and Adivasis as also of peasantry. Padma Velaskar, Krishna Kumar and others also report on how Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are rarely represented in the curriculum and textbooks, which became tools of cultural dominance and hegemony. When represented, it is usually in positions servile to upper caste characters; or as 'strange' and 'backward' exotica. Hidden

² Govt of India. 'Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes', Twenty Eighth Report 1986-87. New Delhi. Government of India, 1988

³ District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). 'Reaching Out Further: Para Teachers in Primary Education- An In-depth Study of Selected Schemes'. Educational Consultants India Limited (EDCIL), New Delhi, 1999

⁴ Anitha, B.K. 'Village, Caste and Education'. Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2000

⁵ Nambissan, Geetha B. 'Language and Schooling of Tribal Children: Issues Relating to the Medium of Instruction', Economic and Political Weekly XXIX (42), 1994, 2747-54.

⁶ Aruna, R. 'Learn Thoroughly: Primary Schooling in Tamil Nadu', Economic and Political Weekly, 1 May 1999, 1011-1014

⁷ Jha and Jhingram. 'National Focus Group on the Problems of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes'. National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi, 2005

curriculum” referring to teacher’s preconceptions, bias and behaviour, subtle or overt, conscious or unconscious, operating to discriminate against children of SC/ST background also came up for discussion around the same time.⁸

In a further study Jha and Jhingran⁹ extensively explored the challenges of universalising elementary education given the large proportion of children from poor and deprived sections of society currently out of school. The study explored school participation across Dalits, Muslims and Tribals and unravelled issues from the prism of poor and disadvantaged families. Girls were found further disadvantaged from all parameters. It analysed both family related and school related reasons for children from poor families not attending school. School participation according to the study was a result of four dimensions of social positioning, economic opportunities, socio-political processes and cultural beliefs and practices. The study confirmed that Dalit children continue to face exclusion and to have low aspirations for their children. Muslims, facing cultural isolation and adverse social relations, feel insecure and make choices that further isolate them. Schools were not found to function as accountable institutions of learning.

Deepa Sankar’s ‘Time on Tasks’ expands on what happens inside the class room. It studied the nature of tasks and the time given to various tasks by teachers and students, exploring what actually happens inside the class-rooms¹⁰. The study explored time spent by teachers on academic and non academic tasks as well as actual teaching times inside classrooms. The study found that the non-academic activities “crowded out” academic activities of the teacher in schools. On an average each grade received 2 hours 30 minutes of teaching time in a day, much of which was passive, repetitive and teacher centric rote learning. An important finding of the study was that individual teachers built the quality and environment of their classroom and school than a generalised environment of classroom in the school showing the importance of teacher attitudes and behaviour towards various groups of children. The study also tracked student’s time on tasks along three dimensions, (a) student attendance; (b) students’ engagement in classes either with teachers or on their own; and (c) students’ opportunity to learn outside school. Study found that less than 60% of the student’s time was spent in some learning tasks. The study however, did not differentiate between teacher attitudes and behaviour towards different groups of children. It also did not look into whether tasks differed across different groups of children and how different groups of children spent their times in school/classrooms. It did not look at the learning experiences of diverse groups of children in the schools. Given that classrooms reflect the real world outside, the opportunities and experiences of children from different social groups is bound to be different which is not enquired into in this study. It looks at all children as uniform, generalised category.

⁸ Kumar, Krishna. ‘*Social Character of Learning*’. Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1989

⁹ Jyotsna Jha and Dhir Jhingran. ‘*Elementary Education for the Poorest and other Deprived Groups: The Real Challenge of Universalization*’, New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 2005.

¹⁰ Deepa Sankar, ‘*Teachers’ Time on Task and Nature of Tasks: Evidences from three Indian States*’, South Asia Sector for Human Development, The World Bank, Human Development Unit, South Asia Region, December 2007

Geetha Nambissan has been particularly engaged in exploring and analysing educational experiences of SC children in various studies¹¹. She explores SC children's experiences in school related to their participation in academic and extra-curricular activities, their access to basic facilities as water, toilets and mid day meals in schools, their friendship relationships and participation in schools. It draws attention to how despite efforts from the parents, the apathetic treatment by teachers and school administrators largely shape the learning experiences of these socially disadvantaged groups.

The experimental study by Karla Hoffe and Priyanka Pande¹² in this context is significant. Their study with 'high caste' and 'low caste' junior high school male students in rural India found that there were no caste differences in performances when caste was not publicly revealed or made salient. But making caste salient created a large and robust caste gap in performance.

Education Development Consultants (EDCIL) in more recent study¹³ explored various dimensions of elementary education in Bihar as part of a national study with particular focus to identify exclusion and discrimination against various groups of children and girl children. It confirms what is being said about discrimination. Task assignment - Cleaning and sweeping work in the schools and classrooms were mostly assigned to girls and it was also observed that such tasks were mostly assigned to girls from deprived communities though not through an explicit order from the school authorities. In the morning assembly it was found that mostly "bright students" and most of the time girls (70%) lead the assembly- normally girls are leading while reciting rhymes of prayers while "bright boys" are reading the newspaper headlines. It was observed that majority of these girls were found to be from economically better off families. Through FGDs with parents and adolescents, it was inferred that there was more exclusion than inclusion of children from deprived communities in cultural activities. They experienced more corporal punishments. Discrimination was observed in sitting arrangement, where boys and girls usually sat separately and also children from deprived communities and those weak in studies generally sat at the back. Teachers did not encourage classroom participation and the primary focus in classroom transactions were the "bright students" who were front benchers while the backbenchers who were mostly "weak students" were literally ignored. Children from deprived communities were neither encouraged to answer question nor participate in the class. Reportedly it is also the trend in schools having composite class that children coming from weaker deprived communities sit on the floor if the number of benches in the classroom is less.

To summarise, studies on how schools were provisioned and how they functioned have been subjects of enquiry over the past three decades. The poor and unequal provisioning of schooling in terms of infrastructure, teachers and facilities in schools predominated by SC and ST children gained attention from as early as late 80s. Studies looked into how teachers and students spent time on academic tasks

¹¹ Geetha B Nambissan: 'Equity in Education? Schooling of Dalit Children in India' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31, No. 16/17 (Apr. 20-27, 1996), pp. 1011-1024;

¹² Hoffe, K, Pandey P. 'Belief Systems and Durable Inequalities: An Experimental Investigation of Indian Caste', Pennsylvania State University, 2004

¹³ Taramani Naorem and Ajay Kumar Singh, 'Inclusion and Exclusion in the Schools and Classrooms in Primary and Upper Primary Schools', Bihar State Report With respect to four Districts: Bhojpur, Gaya, Katihar and Muzaffarpur; Technical Support Group, SSA-RTE, EdCIL India Limited, New Delhi, 2012

and non-academic tasks. Further a few studies explored how school curriculum and classroom transactions were dominated by mainstream dominant cultural bias and relegated the culture and knowledge of marginalised communities. Academics attribute the negation of their culture to their alienation from education and higher dropout rates. While SC and ST children have gained some attention, there is little information on the experiences of Muslim in schools.

This study takes the debates forward in terms of looking at Dalits and Muslims, two major categories of marginalised children in Bihar who constitute more than a third of the school going children in the state. The study explored how Dalit and Muslim children experience schooling, what are 'their perceptions about schooling and about them in schooling'. It suggests how various processes in schooling and their experiences in learning may be shaped by their identities. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with Dalit, Muslim and General Caste children were held to understand these perceptions from various corners. It also captured teachers' perceptions and attitudes through interviews. A large part of the study was insights gathered through classroom observations. At the threshold of ensuring 'free and compulsory education to all children from 6 to 14 years of age' under the Right to Education (RtE) Act, 2009, the study explores how the identity issues of Dalit and Muslim children facilitate or constrain equal education opportunities for them.

1.3 Education Status of Dalit and Muslim Children in Bihar

1.3.1 Dalit children's education in Bihar

15.70% of the Bihar state population belong to Scheduled Caste (SC) communities, as per the 2001 census. The enrolment of SC children at elementary level has steadily increased through government's added focus and efforts towards universal elementary education. The Bihar state government in its presentation to the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Project Approval Board (henceforth SSA PAB)¹⁴ reported that enrolment of SC children at elementary level has increased from 80% on September 2007 to 90% on 30th September 2011. This shows a high steady increase of 10 percentage points in 4 years which is substantial and higher than the state average which increased from 88% to 96% in the same period.

As per the District Information on School Education (DISE) data for Bihar, 19.32% of children enrolled at primary levels in 2010-11 came from the SC community, of whom 47.72% were girls. At the Upper Primary level, 14.51% of enrolment was SC children, of whom 45.13% were girls¹⁵. The data points out to the fact that SC children are represented higher than their population proportion at the primary level. Their enrolment however drops below their population proportion at the upper primary level, showing that fewer SC children survive primary and enter upper primary level compared to general children. The percentage point drop for SC children from primary to secondary level is high at 4.81 percentage points. A parallel drop is also seen in the enrolment of girls from primary to secondary level. Out of school children (OOSC) among SCs in the state is reported to have

¹⁴ 190th SSA PAB meeting, 21st May 2012, presentation of Education Dept, Bihar state government,

¹⁵ Elementary Education in India: Progress towards UEE, DISE 2010-11, NUEPA, New Delhi, 2012

reduced from 29.0% (971,179) to 2.00% (85961) during 2001 to 2012 in the 6-13 plus years age group.¹⁶

Dropout Rates of SC children in Bihar: 2010-11¹⁷

Bihar	Dropout rates 1-V classes			Dropout rates VI-VIII classes			Drop-out rates IX-X classes		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
All children	42.13	35.3	39.27	57.87	51.31	55.14	64.38	68.85	62.24
SC children	40.9	35.9	38.8	68.2	63.8	66.5	78.0	76.8	77.6

A review of the dropout rates of SC children and All Children in Bihar in the above table shows that at primary levels the dropout rates of SC children is marginally lower than the state average. However at the upper primary level, the dropout rates for SC children rises high and is 11 percentage points higher than the state average. The situation at the secondary level is graver where dropout rate among SC children in classes IX and X is 15 percentage points higher than the state average. It must be noted that a better comparison to understand the gravity of the situation and the efforts needed to ensure SC children access schooling would have been to compare data between SC and General children than SC and All Children. This is so, given that the data of All Children includes the data of SC, ST and Muslim children which would depress the state average figures.

Some interesting phenomenon is observed in the above data sets. Firstly the enrolment rates of SC children have steadily increased over the years, showing substantial increase over the past years. This can be attributed to greater awareness among the community and their concern to educate their children as the means to social and economic mobility and development. The better enrolment at the primary level also reflects the better physical availability of primary schools within 1 km in the state, often being available at the habitation levels itself. An important inference from the data is the lower percentage of dropout among SC children at the primary level when compared to the state average. While the state average dropout rate at primary level is 39.27 percent that for SC children is 38.8. This shows reverse trend at primary level in both enrolment and dropout rates for SC children, where enrolment rates are higher than population proportion and dropout rates lower than state average.

However the dropout rates of SC children at both upper primary and secondary school level is of concern, both being considerably higher than the state average. This gap is substantial and needs focused strategies to improve their situation. The high dropout rate pushes SC, ST children and adolescents in to despair and helplessness and retains them within the poverty cycle. Given that a large number of SC, ST children are 'first generation learners', the high drop-out levels negate any opportunity for higher education, skill development or enhancing ones personality. Further, even when they have completed school education with great efforts, there is no equivalent opportunity to

¹⁶ Presentation to the 190th SSA PAB by the Govt of Bihar on 21st May 2012

¹⁷ Dept of Education, Govt of Bihar reported in Bihar Economic Survey 2012-13, Dept of Finance, Govt. of Bihar

access higher education or employment, given the low competency levels they acquire in the government or even low fee-paying private schools and the inability to access employment or enterprise opportunities.

A further matter of concern is that lack of disaggregated education data for particular SC communities like the Musahar, Dom, Mehtar whose indicators are wont to fall way below even other SC communities in the state. They are further vulnerable from the fact that they are discriminated not only by general community, but also by other SC communities. Given their further vulnerability on various fronts, they are 'particularly vulnerable'. The lack of disaggregated data on their enrolment and dropout rates creates gaps in understanding the particular issues of these children, as well as in developing strategies to promote universal elementary education among them. State level nuanced and focused strategies for promoting school education among them is of particular importance in the context of RtE Act implementation.

1.3.2 Muslim children's education in Bihar

Muslims constitute 16.53% of the population of Bihar of which 85% live in rural areas.¹⁸ The literacy rate of the Muslim population in Bihar was 42.0%, being 49% for male and 28% for females in the rural areas. Among the urban Muslim population, literacy rates are 71% for males and 57% for females¹⁹.

Availability of schools for Muslim children in the state is matter of concern. Only 30% of habitations in Kishanganj, Araria, Pura, Katihar with high Muslim population have primary schools within 1 km. In Kishanganj district only 5.02 % of habitations have middle schools within 3 kms and 0.87% of habitations have high schools within 5 kms.²⁰

It is difficult to gain comprehensive understanding of the educational status of Muslim children from the annual education statistics as they are not tracked as a separate category. In more recent times, DISE data has begun to track the performance of Muslim children in its datasets. DISE 2010-11 (data as of 30th Sept 2010) shows that while the Muslim population in the state is 16.53 (census 2001), only 14.38% of children enrolled in primary level comes from the Muslim community, of whom 49.5% is girls. The data for Upper Primary levels for 2010-11 show that 13.99% of all enrolled children come from the Muslim community of whom 49.82% are girls²¹. At both these levels, Muslim children's enrolment rates are below their population proportion reflecting their poor access to elementary education.

Data on availability of Muslim teachers is also difficult to come by. Proportion of teachers in Bihar from different social categories was reported as 9.49% from SCs, 6.66% from STs, 36.40% from BCs, and 47.27% from General Category. While the data of the Muslim teachers are hidden in the data

¹⁸ Census 2001

¹⁹ Imam, A Dr., Literacy and Education among Muslim Children in Bihar; Bihar Social Watch Report, 2010

²⁰ Literacy and Education among Muslim Children; Bihar Social Watch Report, 2010

²¹ Elementary Education in India: Progress towards UEE, DISE-2010-11, NUEPA, Delhi

from the OBC or even General category, the information is not helpful to understand the situation of Muslim community in education²².

Some efforts by the state in promoting elementary education among Muslim children in recent years have been the opening of 'Talime Markaz' who are education volunteers recruited by the state to motivate and mobilise the community towards education. They are also expected to provide habitation level support to children to study and ensure their regular attendance in schools.²³ The Bihar government²⁴ provides financial support to 1119 recognised madarsas (and 9 Girls Madarsas) under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) for Providing Quality Education in Madarsas (SPQEM) to introduce the study of modern subjects in the madarsas. This support is to introduce mathematics, science, social studies, Hindi and English for classes 1 to XII to those madarsas that are registered under the Central or State Government Acts, Madarsa Boards, Waqf Boards or National Institute of Open Schooling and opt for it. The programme has provisions for infrastructure facilities like labs and libraries, books and computers, mid day meals, vocational trainings, support to teacher trainings and teacher salaries. However, the support is not provided to unregistered madarsas.

The Bihar Government's presentation before the SSA PAB in 2012 reported the following regarding the status of Muslim children in elementary education and the state efforts -1.60% of Muslim children are reported to be out of school, numbering 40,061. 8270 Muslim children are covered under special training programme through 284 madarsas/maktabas to mainstream them into schools. 12.0% of the girls enrolled in KGBV belong to Muslim community.²⁵ Further, the presentation states the "Hunar" a vocational skill development programme for Muslim girls in collaboration with the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) where 13,764 girls have been trained in the first phase and 12,251 girls trained in the second phase. Of them 9232 girls have been provided Rs.2500/each to procure equipments they may need to set up their own self employment with the training. Given that Muslim children are among the most disadvantaged in the state with regard to education, more comprehensive and focused efforts are urgent.

Specific data on Muslim children is important, given our objective of universalising elementary education (and perhaps even secondary in the near future) and the fact that education levels in the community are below that of others. It is also important to understand the education situation within this community more specifically given various stereotypes regarding the lack of community interest in education. The community also has specific requirements that need to be placed in the planning processes as recruitment of Urdu teachers. Strategies for aligning madarsas with mainstream schools have also been in the front burner in Muslim children's education.

²² Imam, Al Dr., Literacy and Education among Muslim Children in Bihar; Bihar Social Watch Report, 2010

²³ State reported 1293 Talimi Markaz as on 31.12.2009, Bihar Social Watch Report, 2010

²⁴ Govt of Bihar, Ltr-10/va-1-84/2012

²⁵ Presentation to SSA PAB by govt of Bihar, 2012

1.4 Frame for Equity with Social Inclusion in Education

Dalit and Muslim communities experience exclusion and discrimination based on their social identities of Scheduled Caste (ex-untouchable) and religious minority status, gender as cross-cutting axis. Various other dimensions also add to their experiences of exclusion and discrimination as poverty, occupation, disability, migrant status, geographic location to name a few. Dalit and Muslim girls and boys experience these discriminations and exclusions as schools re-play them in their education systems, curriculum, teaching learning and everyday practices. These are further nuanced based on the particular context. These practices are naturalised and need special efforts to identify and address them.

These dimensions are captured in the following frame which is indicative and not exhaustive. A few indicators are given as examples and need to be expanded and nuanced based on the particular context. Two levels of standards as 'minimum' and 'essential' are listed; minimum referring to basic standards provided in the RtE Act, other legislations and policies. The 'essential standards' once again impress upon the fact that existing legislations, policies and provisions are necessary but not adequate. Given the current vulnerability of the specific group of children, without the essential standards met, the indicator may not be realised. Hence the need to revise the minimum standard and raise it or expand it to facilitate real time rights enjoyment and not just on paper. These need to be tracked at the organisation structure, organisation processes, provisions and school practices.

Possible Framework for Promoting Social Inclusion²⁶

Dimension	Indicators	Minimum Standards	Essential Standards
1.Representation	Head count data on Dalit and Muslim children including girls among them	Gender is disaggregated Social group disaggregated	Further vulnerable sections within the said social groups are identified and education tracked, including gender disaggregated data
	Data on leadership positions occupied by girls and boys from Dalit and Muslim communities	Dalit and Muslim girls and boys are visibly represented in the leadership and decision making roles in the school.	Additional opportunities are made available to Dalit and Muslim girls and boys. They are provided additional handholding

²⁶ This is work in progress at Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion. It has been developed from the experiences and insights by a group of development practitioners and community based activists.

			to play these roles by teachers.
2.Recognition	Dalit and Muslim culture, knowledge is recognised	Curriculum content includes their culture, knowledge. Examples are drawn from their cultures and knowledge base Icons from these communities are represented in curriculum	Teachers positively refer to and discuss their knowledge, culture and contribution. Whole class is facilitated to understand and appreciate them.
	Limitations and disabilities are recognised	Historical and current exclusions are recognised as basis for disabilities and limitation.	Whole class is encouraged to understand and seek redress for these disabilities.
3.Affirmative Action	Disabilities are recognised and entitlements are available	Education inequalities are tracked and their causes analysed. Scholarships and other facilities are ensured on time, in sufficient quantity without humiliation in accessing them.	Scholarships and facilities are periodically reviewed and revised in keeping with the needs and costs. Policy recommendations are made based on needs and constraints.
4.Non discrimination	Areas of discrimination are identified and addressed.	School is vigilant about discrimination of any sort and has a grievance redress mechanism to address the same. Schools become 'zero discrimination' zones.	Schools take pro-active steps to facilitate social inclusion – help children to mix and engage across social groups/gender/ability etc Teachers are equipped to promote special inclusion actions in the school

5.Participation	School environment is inclusive	School messages are respectful of Dalits and Muslims. School spaces are maintained secular. School practices that may exclude any group of children are prohibited. Participation of Dalit and Muslim parents are ensured in all forums and decision-making	Teachers motivate Dalit and Muslim children to actively participate in all spaces and levels in the school. Teachers meet Dalit and Muslim parents and ensure their participation in school meetings and programmes. Teachers are respectful of Dalit and Muslim children and parents.
6.Learning Outcomes	Learning outcomes are assessed in relevant ways	The system of assessment is unbiased and in keeping with the learning objectives. Any discrimination in assessment processes are addressed on urgent basis.	Dalit and Muslim children are supported to cope up with the curriculum and learning. Alternatives are developed to overcome the disabilities in the home environment and community

While a continuous concern has been the lack of representation of the knowledge, culture, values and norms of marginalised communities in education, the recent ‘cartoon controversy’ points to another dimension of discriminatory and negative inclusion and representation. Given that Dr Ambedkar is an iconic figure, one who is role model for Dalits and other marginalised communities, putting a cartoon which did not reflect his real contribution or personality, but denigrates the same goes against the grain of representation of these communities. The participation of members of the community while designing such materials as well as sensitivity cannot be overemphasised.

1.5 This study

Given that Dalits (16.2%) and Muslims (12.0%) constitute large sections of our population and children from these sections, despite high enrolments, have poorer education indicators in retention, transition and learning outcomes, the study is focused on children from these communities. Thus the study findings have relevance not just for Bihar but for other states and at the national level.

This Study reviews the experiences and engagement of Dalit and Muslim children in the elementary class rooms and schools in Bihar from the various frames enunciated above; various practices

observed and discussed with the children and teachers are reported in this report with a view to promoting social equity with inclusion in schools. Empowering children and adults from the marginalised communities to participate and learn equitably in school related process are also emphasised upon. The purpose is constructive and transformative contributing to the process of social harmony and nation building than simply explaining or recording these practices.

This study goes beyond the commonly used indicators of infrastructure and school provisions to observe and understand the teaching-learning processes in class rooms with particular reference to Dalit and Muslim children in Bihar. Given that children from these two communities, despite some provisions, continue to lag behind in retention and learning outcomes, this study looks critically at what happens to them inside class rooms; how they experience the teaching-learning processes in class rooms and how they engage with the same.

The study is important for the school system in Bihar as well as at the national level in going beyond corroborating proxy indicators with quality education to observe and understand the teaching-learning practices inside class rooms. Given that the 12th FYP recognises quality education as the central need for the education system, this study is important and a first of its kind in understanding how children from marginalised social identities experience the teaching-learning processes inside class rooms in government schools. It provides insights into what contributes/does not contribute positively to the learning experiences to these children. The study concludes with detailed suggestions and recommendations to the government and civil society organisations in improving the access, participation and learning outcomes for these children as we search for policy-strategy options to ensure the right of all children in school education.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed with specific focus on socially excluded and disadvantaged (SC/Muslim) communities, with an assumption that it is children from these communities whose social identity had potentially the most negative impact on their schooling and learning. In an ideal situation, the enrolment of SC/Muslim children in schools at the elementary education level should ensure that they become integrated into the school, and ensure positive changes to their social identity as the children progress through elementary education in the school system. This study set out to see whether this was actually the case.

2.1 Overall Purpose

Promote equity and inclusion in schools and classrooms by addressing the impacts of social identity, particularly for children from disadvantaged and socially excluded communities, on participation, learning processes and learning outcomes in schools and classrooms.

2.2 Specific Purpose

Strengthen the ability of school management, teachers and government functionaries to monitor and assess the different issues and needs of disadvantaged and socially excluded children within the school and classroom based on their social identities, in order to ensure their retention and successful completion of elementary education.

2.3 Objectives

Overall: To assess the impact of social identity in terms of equity and inclusion in schooling processes, particularly in the classroom.

1. To identify the ways in which social identity affects the teacher-student relationship and relationships with peers.
2. To identify the ways in which social identity impacts on teaching learning processes.
3. To ascertain whether social identity impacts on the participation of children in co-curricular activities.
4. To ascertain school readiness to promote equity and inclusion for disadvantaged and marginalised children.

2.4 Location and Scope of the study

- 1) The study was located in Phulwarisharif block, Patna district and Manpur block, Gaya district in Bihar state. All the schools selected for the study were located in the rural areas of the state. This was done so for various reasons: i) large proportions of SC and Muslim populations live and study in the rural areas; ii) Save the Children's interest in understanding the issues in their project area;

- iii) the majority of schools in the state are located in rural areas; iv) the limited time period for the study meant settling on one focus geographical area.
- 2) Only government schools were selected for the study, given that government was the primary provider of elementary education in the state and the majority of SC and Muslim children studied in government schools. The study also intended to engage with the state with the findings for promoting equity with social inclusion for these children in the schooling system.
 - 3) From the pool of twenty schools, twelve, six in each block, were selected for intense school and class room observations. The processes included five days of school/classroom observations by a team of two researchers, focus group discussions with various groups of school going and out of school children, and individual interviews with teachers. The criteria for the choice of schools were the following:
 - (i) Representation of government schools located in rural areas.
 - (ii) Schools in areas with differing aggregate populations of SC and Muslim children – high population, medium population and low population. Care was taken to ensure representation of the different groups of SC children, especially the most disadvantaged in accessing education.
 - (iii) Primary, Middle and Elementary schools were covered in the intense observation
 - (iv) Intense classroom observations was done in class 5 in the primary schools, though in many cases it became observations of classes 4 and 5 in most cases and classes 1 to 5 in one case. This happened because classes were combined together for lack of class rooms or lack of teachers.
 - (v) Intense classroom observations was done in class 8 in the elementary schools, though in many cases it became observations of classes 7 and 8 or even classes 6, 7 and 8 for the above reasons.
 - (vi) The two classes were selected for intense observations as they represented children who are completing primary, entering into upper primary and completing upper primary education respectively.
 - (vii) Children in these classes were at an age to recount their experiences in the school.
 - (viii) Class V and Class VIII were chosen as they were also watersheds when children dropped out in large numbers and disproportionately from the SC and Muslim communities. Study sought to ascertain if any factors within the classroom and school influence their/their families' decision to discontinue their education.

2.5 Field Work

2.5.1 Selection of field area

As Save the Children was interested to understand the impact of social identity in the school and learning experience of children in their working area, Mainpur block in Gaya district and Phulwarisharif block in Patna district were selected. Gaya district has high SC population while Phulwarisharif has high Muslim population. Save the children partners, Nidan in Phulwarisharif and Prgati Gramin Vikas Samiti (PGVS) in Mainpur, who have been working with 50 schools each for over a year, facilitated further selection of schools and habitations.

Selection of villages: Villages were selected on the basis of the type of schools selected for the study. FGDs were done with out of school children from the habitations near the schools.

2.5.2 Selection of Schools:

20 schools were selected from the pool of 100 schools in the first round. These schools were profiled with a sample questionnaire and discussion with the head teacher. In the second round 12 schools were narrowed down, six in each block, for the intense study purpose where classroom observations, teacher interviews and FGDs were held. The selection of the 12 schools were as below

6 Middle/Elementary Schools (1-8 Classes) out of which:

- i) 1 school with SC dominated population
- ii) 1 school with Muslim dominated population
- iii) 2 schools with mixed where SC/Muslims are in medium numbers
- iv) 2 schools with mixed population where SC/Muslims are in low population

4 Primary Schools (1-5 Classes) out of which:

- i) 1 school with SC dominated population
- ii) 1 school with Muslim dominated population
- iii) 1 schools with mixed where SC/Muslims are in medium numbers
- iv) 1 schools with mixed population where SC/Muslims are in low population

2.5.3 Selection of field investigators:

20 field investigators were selected for the study, 10 in each block. The field investigators were staff and volunteers with the partner organisations and had sound knowledge of the local field areas and schools. Care was taken to include members from SC and Muslim communities along with members from general community as field investigators.

2.5.4 Orientation and monitoring of field investigators:

A four day orientation was given to the field investigators to build conceptual understanding on social exclusion based on caste and religion with gender and disability as cross cutting dimensions. Further the orientation familiarised investigators with the purpose and methodology of the study. One day field testing was included in the orientation. Attention was given to build understanding on unbiased observations and reporting.

The field work was monitored closely on day to day basis by the coordinators of the two partners and further by the CSEI team.

Reviews of findings were conducted periodically in both the blocks bringing together all the researchers.

Checking and verifications of the questionnaires and the FGDs were done meticulously to limit any possible bias and errors.

2.6 Data Collection Tools and Methodolgy

Various tools were used for collection data. Schedules were used for preparing School Profiles, guidelines for making Classroom Observations, Interview guidelines for teacher interviews, Guidelines for FGDs. guidelines were prepared. Tools were shared with field researchers towards incorporation of any feedbacks, suggestions and changes in the tools designed for data collection. A detailed work plan was developed with each team given below.

FGDs were done with three sets of students. Teachers were asked to identify a group of 8-10 students who in their opinion were the top students, and another group of 8-10 students who in their opinion were weak students. FGDs were held separately with the two group of students. In addition, FGDs were held with out of school children in the SC, Muslim habitations near the 12 schools selected for intense study.

S. No.	Data Collection Tool/Instrument	Interventions per Block (Total numbers in parenthesis)	Criteria of choice Persons/Classes
1	Classroom and School Observation for one week per school (Monday to Friday)	• 5th class in 2 primary schools • 6th class in 2 middle schools • 8th class in 2 middle schools Six classrooms were observed for five days in each block (total 12 classrooms in the study. Some were mixed classrooms.)	• Chose classes where the field investigator and teachers had good rapport • Chose schools where SC/Muslims have medium or low populations and the school had General caste children too.
2	School Profile	• 1 profile per school 10 school profiles were done per block (20 school profiles in the study)	• Information obtained from Head Teacher and/or through Observation
3	Individual Interviews with Teachers	• 1 teacher per school 10 teachers were interviewed per block (total 20 teachers in the study)	• 2 teachers of Mathematics in middle schools • 2 teachers of Social Studies in middle schools • 1 teacher of Language in a middle school • 1 teacher of English in a middle school • 4 class teachers in primary schools
4	1 FGD with top 8 children in the class	• In 6 middle schools	• Class teachers to identify the children for the FGDs

S. No.	Data Collection Tool/Instrument	Interventions per Block (Total numbers in parenthesis)	Criteria of choice Persons/Classes
	1 FGD with bottom 8 children in the class	12 FGDs were held in six schools in each block (total 24 FGDs held with school going children in the study)	- Take children from the 4 classes in the 4 middle schools under observation - For the remaining 2 middle schools, take one 6th class in one school and one 8th class in one school
5	4 FGDs with Dropout SC & Muslim children	1 FGD with SC girls who have dropped out from Classes 6-8 1 FGD with SC boys who have dropped out of Classes 6-8 1 FGD with Muslim girls who have dropped out from Classes 6-8 1 FGD with Muslim boys who have dropped out of Classes 6-8 4 FGDs with out of school children were held in each block (total 8 FGDs with OoSC in the study)	- Identify the school with the highest dropout of SC boys, SC girls, Muslim boys and Muslim girls from the 10 schools in the block - Choose locality near those identified schools to undertake the FGDs with SC boys, SC girls, Muslim boys and Muslim girls

2.7 Classroom Observations

- 1) The research concentrated on the perceptions and practices of five key actors - the students themselves, their peers, their teachers, and the school management with regard to social identity and its impact on schooling. The rationale was to develop an in-depth understanding of the interrelationships between these actors, and the influence that school management, teachers and peers had on the classroom and on the school experiences of children from disadvantaged SC and Muslim communities.
- 2) In each school, 2 field investigators sat in and observed one classroom together, after which they wrote down extensive notes on their observations. In addition, they observed their class children's patterns of interactions and participation outside of the classroom with other students in co-curricular activities such as games and sports; at morning assemblies; at midday meals; during any cultural activities conducted at the school; at drinking water points; and in informal spaces.
- 3) Of the two investigators in the classroom observation, one observed and recorded at length all activities and behaviour of the teacher, while the other observed and recorded at length all activities and behaviour of the students in the classroom.

Observations included a focus on the following:

- seating arrangements in the classroom;

- interactions with peer group both inside and outside the classroom;
- participation levels of different children in the classrooms in terms of asking questions, attention and following the teacher's lesson, ability to answer the teacher's questions, and participation in group activities;
- whether teachers gave their attention equally to all children in the class, including by specifically encouraging certain social groups of children to participate in the classroom activities and tailoring lessons according to the different capacities of the students;
- whether teachers motivated and gave affirmation to the identities of all children in their classroom and if so, in what ways;
- instances of discrimination, segregation, punishment, abuse or differential behaviour towards or treatment of certain groups of children;
- issues surrounding the classroom curriculum, including whether information on different social, cultural and religious groups were part of the curriculum;
- issues surrounding classroom lessons, in terms of what supportive teaching learning practices are adopted (e.g. different social, cultural and religious groups are discussed in the lessons, examples from the local cultural contexts of different children are used during lessons, etc.);
- whether socially excluded children were involved in leadership positions within the classroom and school, and received recognition as such.

2.8 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Individual Interviews

- 1) 12 FGDs with school-going children in each block making it total of 24 FGDs, were conducted with two groups of eight children identified by the teacher, one group that was doing well in the class (top 8-10 students) and the other not doing so well in the class (bottom 8-10 students) based on teacher's own perception about their attendance, academic performance. The assumption was that many socially excluded children will be identified by the teachers in the bottom pool of students. The children's views on social identity, equity and inclusion, and their meanings were explored through this process.
- 2) In addition, 20 teachers/head teachers were individually interviewed across the 20 chosen schools in order to obtain their views as to how different stakeholders within the school system affected the children's identity formation processes and the consequences of that identity. These included the following aspects:
 - the ways and extent to which social identity was seen to impact on children's participation in the school, teaching learning processes and learning outcomes;
 - how the school provided a welcoming environment and facilities for all children to learn well, and developed norms to prevent discrimination against certain groups of children within the school premises;
 - the workings of entitlement provisions and complaints mechanisms within the school;
 - their views on social identity, equity and inclusion, and their meanings and impact on education processes and outcomes;

- the working of the Cluster and Block Resource Centres and the Village Shiksha Samitis (VSS) in terms of monitoring and developing the schools, and their influence over education processes for different social groups of children.

2.9 Data Entry and Analysis

As much of the study was qualitative, detailed observation notes and narratives were recorded in writing and later collated in an internally designed qualitative data entry format. The school profiling data (largely quantitative) was entered in excel sheets and analysed. 46 indicators of school compliance on state RtE rules were analysed.

2.10 Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data was collected at the state and national levels on child populations, literacy rates, school education reports, DISE data, studies and reports on social exclusion and education, etc. The secondary literature included survey of various studies pertaining to classroom processes and participation of children from diverse groups in school/classroom. Studies on social exclusion and discrimination were also included in locating the current study.

2.11 Definitions

- 1) Scheduled Caste (SC) community has the same meaning as used by the Govt of India/Bihar. It includes both Dalit and Mahadalit communities identified by the Govt of Bihar.
- 2) Dalit community is interchangeably used with Scheduled Caste communities given above.
- 3) Muslim community is used to recognise communities and children following the religion of Islam.
- 4) Social exclusion is understood as the denial of equal opportunities imposed by certain groups of society up on others which leads to inability of individuals/groups to participate wholly in the political, economic, cultural and social functioning of the society in which they live.
- 5) Discrimination includes any conduct based on a distinction made on grounds of natural or social categories, which have no relation either to individual capacities or merits, or to the concrete behaviour of the individual person. The distinctions made are negatively valued.
- 6) Stereotype is a set of biased generalizations about a group or category of people that is unfavourable, exaggerated and oversimplified. Stereotyping is a form of categorizing, and most often negative.
- 7) Equity in Education requires securing every child's right to education, in education and through education. It not only means providing equal opportunity, but also conditions that allow the socially excluded children to avail that equality. It means making institutional changes to allow all children achieve their aspirations and potential in and through education.
- 8) Equality ensures equal rights for people regardless of what factors they might have that is different. Equality includes equality of status, equality of opportunities, and equality in outcomes.
- 9) Social inclusion in education is both a process and a strategy which recognizes diversity among learners in education and creates an environment and facilitates the process by which the diverse knowledge, values and skills are shared with mutual respect and used to enhance the competency levels of all towards building an egalitarian society. It is critical to achieve social justice and social equality.

- 10) Social Justice requires that society redress past disabilities and limitations of social groups and promotes measures for them to enjoy equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realising their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefitting from) economic, social, cultural and political development.

2.12 Limitations of the study

1. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the short time-period, it did not go into analysis of the syllabus and content of different subjects.
2. Children's learning was not assessed in the study and hence there was no systematic information on what and how much children learnt
3. Community views on teaching learning process was not covered as the study was primary located within the school campus and classroom processes

CHAPTER 3

RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND RIGHTS IN EDUCATION: CASE OF DALIT AND MUSLIM CHILDREN

The Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) in its report to the SSA Project Appraisal Board (SSA PAB) on 21st May 2012²⁷, provided education related data for boys and girls across social groups. Girl's enrolment shows consistent improvement over the 11th plan period. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) reported 106 for girls (boys 98) at primary level and 84 for girls (76 for boys) at Upper Primary level in 2011-12. Net Enrolment Rates at primary level reported 99 for girls (92 for boys) and at upper primary level 76 for girls (69 for boys). As seen, the enrolment ratio reflected positive trend of bridging gender inequalities and moving towards a 'reverse gender gap' of 8 points in both primary and upper primary levels in gross enrolment ratio. The reverse gender gap of 7 points is reported in the net enrolment rates in both primary and upper primary levels too.

For the 6 to 13 plus year age group, the same report showed 96 percent enrolment rates for all children and 90 percent enrolment rates for SC children as on 30th September 2011. The social group gap is reported to have come down from 8 percent points in 2007 to 6 percent points in 2011²⁸. DISE 2010-11 reported 18.28% enrolment rates for SC children, which is higher than their population proportion reflecting positive trend in their enrolment. Thus the enrolment rates of SC children per se and their proportion in the larger school population also showed positive trends. On the other hand, enrolment rates for Muslim children reported below their population proportion. The DISE reports show that 13.99 percent of all children enrolled in elementary education are Muslim children, which is lower than their population proportion of 16.53 in the state.²⁹ Thus while enrolment in general, enrolment for girl children and for SC children have improved considerably, it continues to lag behind for Muslim children.

It is important to reiterate that RtE Act mandates that no child will be out of school and quality education will be provided for all children, including Dalit and Muslim children. SC and Muslim children are vulnerable to exclusion within schools, given their historical exclusion from education and continued discrimination and stereotypes in society. This chapter analyses the state level macro data and located information from the 20 schools studied to review the implementation of the Act, to understand what (if any) and how equity and social inclusion measures were taken by the schools to address historical and current challenges faced by Dalit and Muslim children in accessing quality education.

3.1. RtE Progress: Notifications Done

The state had notified many of the norms under RtE implementation as reported below;³⁰ compliance gaps in substantive indicators though were large and needed urgent redress. A number of norms

²⁷ Bihar Education Project Council, Govt. of Bihar, Presentation to the SSA Project Approval Board, 2012-13

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ DISE 2010-11, data as on 2009-10.

³⁰ Ministry of HRD. *RtE Act, 2009*, 'The 2nd Year Report', MHRD, Govt of India, March 2012

easy on paper were in place: i) state rules were notified, ii) State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR)/Right to Education Protection Authority (REPA) constituted, iii) State Council for Education Research and Training (SCERT) is notified as academic authority, iv) elementary education cycle complied to 8th class, v) no detention policy notified, vi) no corporal punishment notified, vii) no board examination till elementary level notified, viii) ban on private tuition notified, ix) ban on screening and capitation fee notified, x) guidelines issued on the number of working days and working hours in primary and upper primary schools.³¹ However mechanisms to monitor their compliance or adequate instruments to report them were not in place. Hence it was difficult to understand and track how these mechanisms functioned on the ground or what benefits they brought to marginalised concerned children or communities. In addition there was little communication about these notifications to the concerned schools, Vidyalay Shiksha Samitis (school management committees) or the communities. Mechanisms were also not in place for concerned or aggrieved citizens to engage or report for redress.

The state mandated 25% of reservation for Disadvantaged (DA) and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) children in private schools and formed state and district level committees to register private schools and monitor their admission procedures. However private schools were yet to be registered. The formation of the Vidyalay Shiksha Samithis (VSS) which are School Management Committees (SMCs) need further clarification. Temporary guidelines for forming adhoc VSS with 7 members was notified. While SC, ST, OBC, EBC and general community members were included, Muslims and parents of Children with Special Need (CWSN) were not included.

As noted, some measures, particularly those that can be complied with through notifications are in place. Several challenges remain in the implementation of these very notifications like making VSS functional, ensuring there was no corporal punishment in schools, ensuring teachers did not hold private tuitions, strengthened SCPCR/REPA etc. Despite three years of preparatory period, there are many challenges that need attention for full realisation of RtE Act. Important ones included ensuring Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR), teacher training, monitoring teacher presence and teaching in classrooms, providing physical access for CWSN, addressing the widespread discrimination, promoting community participation etc. Government schools not being RtE compliant failed to provide basic teaching-learning environment and consequently quality education to Dalit and Muslim children who attended government schools at large.

3.2 School Availability and Accessibility in the Sample Villages

3.2.1 Low Availability of schools in Dalit and Muslim habitations

Bihar reports that habitations are saturated as far as primary and upper primary schools are concerned, and with priority to villages with 40% SC, ST and Minority populations.³² 99.75% of

³¹ 200 days for Class I to V & 220 days for Class VI to VIII. Instructional hours 800 hours for Class I to V & 1000 hours for Class VI to VIII in an academic year.

³² Bihar Education Project Council, Presentation to the Project Approval Board (SSA) Bihar, (SSA PAB Presentation) 21.5.2012

habitations in Bihar were reportedly served with primary schools and 99.8% with upper primary schools. It was reported that 232 habitations were not within the norms of opening a primary school and 148 habitations did not qualify for upper primary schools as per distance and population norms.³³ The RtE rules of Bihar further reiterate that access to schools would not be hindered on account of physical, social and cultural factors, and appropriate arrangements would be made to ensure children from disadvantaged communities, children with disabilities, those living in difficult physical and geographical areas, living in small habitations had access to schools.

Dalit and Muslim children continue to have problems with even physical access in some places in the state, particularly where their population was high. In Kishanganj district with high Muslim population only 29.57% of habitations had primary schools within one km, 5.02% of habitations had middle schools within 3 kms and 0.87% of habitations had high schools within 5 kms. In Gaya district with high Dalit population 38.48% of habitations had primary schools within one km, 6.02% had middle schools within 3 kms and 2.09% had high schools within 5 kms. These districts show poor coverage of schools when compared to the state averages; 50.28% for primary schools within one km, 11.02% for middle schools within 3 kms and 2.71% for high schools within 5 kms.³⁴

Literacy rates of districts with high Muslim and Dalit population are also among the lowest in the state, with even worse indicators for women; women literacy rates in Kishanganj was 18.49%, Araria 22.14, Madhepura 22.31, Purnea 23.72 against a state average of 33.57 for women in 2001³⁵.

The lack of physical access to schools, particularly for communities that have been historically excluded from education have many implications for current access of their children to schools. When schools were not available within the vicinity, marginalised communities were distanced from education which also lowered their motivation and confidence to send children to schools. The presence of school in their habitations and vicinity familiarised people with the school processes and built confidence in accessing them. This is proved by the increased enrolment of SC children after schools were located at the habitation levels through SSA. Hence the rationale choice would be to invest in more schools in districts and locations with higher SC and Muslim populations.

Eight out of the 20 schools studied did not have Muslim children, one did not have SC children, and one did not have children from general communities. SC and General Caste children were more uniformly distributed across the schools studied. This can be attributed to the more even spread of general caste and Dalit children and concentration of Muslim children in particular geographical areas. However, it is a matter of concern that Muslim children are not distributed more evenly across schools where their population is high, as in Phulwarisharif block in Patna district. This reflected a situation where Muslim children did not access schools in their locality, even when available, for social and cultural reasons, further ghettoising them. Availability of Urdu teachers and facility to learn Urdu language is an important factor in Muslim children's education. In some schools the situation was contradictory, 'Urdu schools' with a large number of Muslim children did not have

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ Bihar Social Watch, School Education Profile, Bihar Govt and National Informatics Centre, reported in 'The status of Muslim Children's Education in Bihar', Bihar Social Watch, Patna, 2010

³⁵ *ibid*

adequate number of Urdu teachers; there were no Muslim children in ‘non-Urdu schools’ which had Urdu teachers. As only a few schools are categorised as Urdu schools, Muslim children limited themselves to these schools, overcrowding them and sometimes travelling far. Thus ‘Urdu’ is understood more in its relation to the Muslim community than as a language like other languages. Not accessing ‘non-urdu’ schools may also be a process of ‘self protection’ response in the face of social exclusion. Families and children may be concerned about the discrimination and potential violence against them and prefer to send children to schools where they are in substantial numbers. Muslim children thus get segregated into some schools without the opportunity for them and other children to build mutual friendships. It is important to popularise Urdu as yet another language which may be provided in all schools, particularly in areas with high Muslim population. This will allow greater choice and more access to Muslim children. It will help non-Muslim children to choose Urdu as a language to study and studying together in an integrated school environment will go a long way to break the social exclusion that Muslim community and children currently experience.

60% of the schools studied were elementary schools (12 out of 20), many of these schools were upgraded from primary to elementary levels recently in keeping with the current policy to ensure schooling till class 8 to comply with RtE Act³⁶. Half the schools were equidistant from general caste and SC habitations. The enhancement of primary schools to elementary grades thus benefitted both Dalit and General caste communities in terms of distance. However, Muslim habitations in the study reported lesser numbers of schools, even at the primary level. It can be assumed that the lower availability of schools in and near Muslim habitations also contributed to lower enrolment rates, greater numbers of out of school children among Muslims, and a higher proportion of Muslim children dropping out after primary school in comparison to other social groups.

Given the annual floods and water-logging, schools remained closed for long periods of time officially, and longer periods unofficially, with serious consequences to schooling. Dalit children in a few schools complained that roads from their habitation to school were blocked during rainy season. Thus while the state had almost fully complied with distance norms for schools under RtE Act, the reality on the ground, showed that large numbers of children continued to be without ‘real access’ to schools even on physical parameters.

3.2.2 Poor Investment in Schools Located in Dalit Habitations

“This school did not have its own land or building and functioned from the community centre in the Dalit habitation for many years. 39 Scheduled Castes 9 Muslim and 12 General Caste children were enrolled in this school studying in 5 classes. The entire school was recently shifted to a ‘one class-room school’ in an existing school building in Faridpur with the help of Mukhiya. Currently all children sat on dari, there was no drinking water facility, children drank water from a hand-pump situated in the nearby community”

PWSPS 1

³⁶ The PAB presentation reports that 95% (19936 schools) of primary schools had been upgraded to upper primary schools and only 5% (1043) have to be upgraded further.

Investment in school building and infrastructure had been major part of education expenditure, both during Bihar Education Project (BEP) and later under SSA. The RtE also detailed physical and infrastructure norms, even detailing child friendly and learning dimensions of infrastructure. The focus on new building, additional classrooms and renovating infrastructure continues even today. While children enrolled themselves in large numbers in government schools as seen from enrollment data, in a number of cases schools did not have even basic infrastructure in place to encourage or retain them in schools.

One very rarely came across public institutions located in the Dalit and Muslim tolas except for a few anganwadis, ration-shops and primary schools. In this instance, the primary school, a public institution that was located in the Dalit tola was not prioritized for infrastructure investment and development despite two decades of state focus on providing infrastructure. Children who attended this school while it functioned in the Dalit tola did not have adequate infrastructure or environment thereby depriving the children of a rightful learning space and environment. It is important to also recognize that by all reasons, this school should have been a priority for infrastructure provision given that most children were first generation learners and required best available support. While infrastructure development continued to be big budget item under SSA even today, the school was shifted to a no-better environment, putting all the 60 children into 'one-class-room-school' in an existing school.

The social dimension of shifting the above-mentioned school needs to be recognized. In keeping with exclusion and segregation along caste and religious lines in the Indian context, almost all state provisions of public institutions are located in general caste habitations. This social pattern also follows school provisions: i) segregated primary schools for Dalit children or Muslim children in the tolas where only Dalit or Muslim children attend, ii) secondary and high school provisions are almost always in general caste locations and next to nil in Dalit and Muslim habitations, iii) Dalit and Muslim children are 'mainstreamed' into schools that are by and large located in the general caste habitations. In the latter, Dalit and Muslim children are at social disadvantages owing to the existing stereotyping and social exclusion. Various studies have reported teasing, threats, humiliation and even violence faced by Dalit children when they crossed general caste habitations on the way to school. In this case the primary school served a reverse function of bringing general caste children to study in the primary school in the Dalit tola along with Dalit and Muslim children, an excellent opportunity for facilitating understanding and perspective building towards social justice and social integration. The shifting of the school away from the Dalit tola has put an end to an important positive social process that the state had initiated, even if inadvertently. It also took away an opportunity for marginalized parents who had been hitherto excluded from formal learning and schooling to understand school processes, better access to monitor their children, build rapport with the teachers and school authorities. If priority was given to create adequate infrastructure in this tola, it would have been a source for wider community empowerment and social integration, better engagement of community to address the drop out of children in classes 2-3. These positive fallouts of the school were removed by shifting this school in the name of school rationalization. One has to question why the marginalized always ended up paying the costs of policy decisions and were asked to

accommodate in the name of larger good and social integration. One also wondered if there were any consultation with the concerned communities and with VSS members on the shifting of the school and if their views were sought or given due weight.

3.2.3 Poor Facilities in Schools in Locations with high Dalit and Muslim population

The presentation to the SSA PAB by the Bihar Education Project Council in May 2012 reported gap of 1,86,260 classrooms. 64% primary and 89% upper primary schools had adverse Student Classroom Ratios (SCR). The Student Classroom Ratio (SCR) was high at 92 in Upper Primary schools. The field study of 20 schools showed that only 50% of them (10 out of 20) had all weather buildings and classrooms. The quality of the buildings and class rooms and their applicability as healthy, happy and child friendly environment for promoting education was poor in many schools. The lack of proper infrastructure needs to be reviewed from the equity perspective as where schools are located and the investments in their infrastructure quality are policy and administrative decisions and hence reflect the priorities of the state. Ensuring quality school infrastructure in SC and Muslim habitations would also be a means of enhancing their confidence to access and continue education.

The lack of classrooms was acute in the schools studied. Inadequacy of classrooms was reported in almost all schools studied. Only three elementary schools in the study had separate classrooms for each class. The remaining 17 schools did not have separate classrooms and hence by and large, primary classes were held in two classrooms and classes 7 & 8 had combined sessions. While multi-grade classes in themselves may not be a problem for providing quality education

Indicators	Yes	No
School with complete boundary wall or fencing with gate	8	12
Do all rooms have an all weather structure?	10	10
Adequate ramps	1	19
Separate toilet for girls	2	18
Usable playground	5	15
Separate library space	3	17

(though opinions are divided in this regard), the fact that many teachers were not trained in teaching, subject teachers were not available made this harder. Without the skill to manage a class, organise the class and ensure children's active participation in learning, holding combined classes end up in just maintaining the class room than teaching and learning.

Observations also reflected poor teaching in most schools which focused on a few 'bright children' sitting in the front of the class. In discussions, children reported the lack of adequate space in the class room for them to sit and study and the exercise of going all the way to school in the hope of studying a futile one.

The BEP council also reported that 53% of schools have boundary walls and 47% did not have boundary walls. As against this, 60% of the schools studied (12 out of 20) did not have boundary walls, one of the mandated provisions under RtE. Pigs and dogs freely roamed about in the school compound making it unsafe for children, particularly the younger ones. As mid day meals is provided in the open and in the verandahs of the schools, these animals created a menace to children having safe and healthy environment to part-take their mid day meals. Girls reported hesitation and

difficulty to play when there was no boundary wall for the schools. They said they felt it was '*too much in the open*'.

Against 32% of schools reported to have playgrounds, 25% of the schools (5/20) under study had usable playgrounds. As can be understood, place to play and move around is important space from both physical health and social inclusion in the school. It provides children opportunities to mix with each other in a free environment as well as exhibit other talents and skills, in addition to enjoying their time. It is also a matter of concern that all schools have a games period at the end of the day, and not having play ground or any other designated space to play would mean that this period is not generally utilised. Of the 20 schools studied, 5 schools located in Dalit habitations and 2 located in the Muslim habitations did not have play grounds, all weather class rooms, or fencing/boundary walls. By and large schools did not function after the mid day meals even though two periods were slated after lunch including the games period.

Physical accessibility for children, especially girl children, is determined by many factors including infrastructure availability like toilets, separate toilets for girls. As per BEP reports 42,195 schools (55%) did not have separate girl's toilets³⁷. As against this 90% of the schools studied (18 out of 20) did not have separate toilets for girls. In addition, RtE mandates a functional library for schools. 85% of the schools studied did not have a functional library. Some books were maintained in a box and students were allowed to use it when teachers were not available to teach or as per teacher's convenience than as per schedule. Optimum use of these books and their role in the reading and learning process of children was getting undermined.

As per the SSA PAB presentation more than 40% of schools in Bihar were without ramp and lacked adequate facilities for CWSN children. BEP Council reportedly identified 346287 CWSN and enrolled 271801. However given the projected population proportions, about 1.30 lakh CWSN were yet to be identified, the mandated 'Inclusive Education' coordinator was not appointed at the district level, there was no competent person among the Block Resource Persons (BRPs) for promoting CWSN education, slow process of the recruitment of Resource Teachers and books in Braille were not provided in 2011-12.

The study found 20 CWSN admitted across 10 schools. Most schools had one or two CWSN, except for one elementary school with 5 children. Only one out of the 20 schools had a ramp. Hence it is clear that despite much focus on inclusion of CWSN for many years via the construction of ramps, schools were falling short of any effort to encourage or enrol CWSN in schools. Those who came did so because of their family or own interests. Schools did not have equipment or text books for children who may have had other disabilities.

³⁷SSA PAB Presentation May 2012

3.2.4 Bridging Social and Gender Gaps: Some Pluses and Some Problems

In bridging social and gender gaps, SSA envisaged the development of context specific interventions, over and above the mainstream interventions, to address the problem of exclusion of girls and children belonging to SC, ST, Muslim and other marginalised groups. This included provisions and prohibitions. The provisions included midday meals, special interventions for girls, early childhood care and education, special interventions for SC, ST and Muslim children, for urban deprived children and other groups of children in difficult circumstances such as child labourers, children affected from migration, children in conflict situation, children in conflict with law etc. Prohibitions included discrimination, mental or physical harassment, sexual harassment, corporal punishment etc. In addition, separate fund, 'equity-innovation fund' of Rs.50/lakhs per district was set aside for activities to bridge gender and social gaps and promote inclusion in schools. Information received through RTI³⁸ revealed that this budget was not allocated in full to districts, funds sanctioned were not spent on equity-innovation interventions thus not fulfilling the prime objective for which the funds was set up. In some cases it was spent on salary of Tola Sewaks for running Utthan Kendra in Dalit habitations.

Mid day meals was promoted as means to ensure better enrolment of children from poor and marginalized sections in addition to addressing school hunger. Hence the proper functioning of the mid day meals, regular, healthy and clean meals provided as per the menu, prepared in a clean environment and served with dignity and discrimination becomes important in providing and serving the mid day meals. However many schools are seen to fault in this regard:

MDM Services	YES	NO
1. Kitchen shed for MDM	7	13
2. MDM menu on Display	9	11
3. Visible discrimination during MDM	12	7
4. All Children given plates in school for MDM	10	9
5. Some children do not eat MDM in school	12	7

In the 20 schools studied, one did not provide mid day meals for a few months. 65% (13/20 schools) did not have kitchen sheds where meals could be prepared in safe and sanitised environment. 55% of the schools (11/20) did not display the menu on the walls. In 63% (12/19) of the schools studied, children expressed various kinds of problems related to mid day meals which included not providing plates to all children. 47% (9/19) schools did not provide plates for all children. In most cases those who did not receive the plates were children from marginalised communities who had to bring plates from home. Children expressed difficulty in bringing plates from home, small ones did not have adequate bags in which they could bring the plates, they did not have proper plates they thought they can bring to schools. Older ones were ashamed to bring plates from home. Hence while providing plates may be a small portion of the mid day meals budget, it is an important one from the perspective of marginalised children. Further common plates also break a big food taboo in our country. About 37% (7/19) children did not eat mid day meals in schools. While the purpose of mid day meal was to encourage children to attend schools and also provide supplementary food to children, it can also be

³⁸ RTI filed by CSEI showed that this budget was not fully allocated and used for innovative and inequality reducing activities, but was used for different costs in different districts.

a process of social inclusion. However, in practice it has turned out more to be discriminatory than inclusion. Hence dialogues on the same may encourage better implementation and inclusion.

Gender disparity in education has been of concern and various programmes are being implemented to address the same. These include Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), National Programme to Promote Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) and Meena Manches in schools. 493 out of 535 KGBVs are operational in the state; 293 run by SSA, 97 by NGOs, and 103 by Mahila Samakhya. It was encouraging to note that 45.0% of girls in KGBVs belonged to SC community. The proportion of Muslim children currently 12.0% need to be increased. KGBVs also include trainings in cycling, karate, dress making, computer and music. Group Insurance through LIC of India of rupees 1.0 lakhs introduced (25222 girls benefited) for the girls studying in K.G.B.Vs. There is demand from the KGBV girls to extend the programme from 8th standard to 10th standard. Meena Manches were promoted under the NPEGEL in the 21,238 Model Cluster Schools. 'HUNAR' Programme for the Empowerment of Muslim girls was launched in collaboration with National Institute for Open Schooling (NIOS) for vocational trainings.

These have proved effective in enhancing girl child enrolment, bridging overall gender gaps. 'Reverse gender gap' of 8 percent points in Gross Enrolment Rates at primary and upper primary levels and 7 percent points in Net Enrolment Rates in primary and upper primary levels is reported in 2011-12³⁹. However the residue gender gaps in SC, ST and Muslim children, particularly from the particularly vulnerable groups among them need to be understood and addressed. At present there is very little information about them in the education system. In addition there are a large number of girl children who are currently out of school engaged in labour, migration or household work who also need special strategies to be brought into schools.

The state has taken up Computer Aided Literacy (CAL) under Equity-Innovation funds to promote greater interest in learning and children's familiarity with computers. While this has been started as pilot in limited number of schools/BRCs under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model, its operation has not been integrated into the school system to take it up on scale. It is operational while the private partners are engaged, the ownership or capacity has not shifted to the department/schools and hence its continuity and expansion to all children are issues.

In terms of social and gender inclusion, the problems currently encountered are not one of enrolment, but attendance-completion-learning. Teachers in many schools highlighted that absenteeism and dropouts among SC and Muslim children was high. However, teachers did not connect this phenomenon to the differential contexts and backgrounds of the children, and the need for differentiated approaches and strategies for them. Bihar Education Project Council guidelines made the head teacher responsible to ensure the attendance of all children in the school catchment area and encouraged community visits to those habitations where children were irregular, and design ways to ensure their regular attendance. Teachers did not show inclination to meet with parents of Dalit and Muslim children and expressed inability to do so as these parents were not

³⁹ SSA PAB presentation, 2012

available during day time. These parents also rarely came forward to meet teachers on their own thus creating considerable gap between parents/community and the school. Given the socio-economic conditions and power relations between the two groups, it would be easier for the teachers to take the initiative.

Another dimension to be reviewed in addressing social and gender gaps is the participation of Dalit and Muslim children in the Baal Sansads and girls from these communities in Meena Manches. While Baal Sansads had various important concerns that were entrusted to student-ministers, there was none to address issues of social and gender discrimination/justice. This would be an excellent institution to bring these values and norms among children and also promote greater fraternity and justice through schools. Similarly there is need to track and ensure the active participation of girls from SC and Muslim communities in the Meena Manches and build their leadership there.

There are some gains from the various strategies, in particular on reducing gender gaps. The positive impact of these resulted in greater enrolment of the SC, ST and Muslim children including girls from these communities, and the trend of reversing gender gaps. However critical concerns remained about these programmes and their implementation.

- Many of these are adhoc without an integrated vision or follow up. Except for some of the programmes implemented by the Mahila Samakhya, the large majority did not have institutionalized mechanisms for ensuring quality or continuity.
- The lack of community consultation in need assessment, planning or monitoring in identifying or implementing these programmes is of concern. Given these communities are on the margins and the mainstream are not adequately informed on the issues and concerns of these communities, the preparation of schemes without adequate community consultation is serious concern. Improving community stakehold in these programmes will be a sure way of improving the outcomes from them.
- The access and quality of the programmes were concerns too. Field visits showed that information about the computer aided literacy programme was not disseminated widely leading to limited children having access to it. Not having a systematic curriculum and adequate monitoring also hampered the quality of the programme and children's knowledge and skill building.
- Tracking the participation and leadership opportunities for Dalit and Muslim girls and boys in the Baal Sansad and Meena Manches and other extra-curricular programmes can also be an important avenue to create greater stakehold and ownership of these children in the schools.

3.2. 5 Special Training for OOSC not in place:

The SSA PAB presentation reported substantial reduction in the out of school children. 2.83 lakh children are estimated to be out of school in 2012. There are conflicting data on the actual numbers of out of school children. The government uses various schemes to mainstream out of school children like Residential and non-Residential Bridge courses, Madarsas/Maktabas and other informal Alternate centres (see table). RtE mandates that out of school children who are mainstreamed into schools are provided additional support to help them cope up and integrate with their class.

CHILDREN COVERED UNDER SPECIAL TRAINING	No. of operational centre	No. of enrolled children
RBC	542	47218
NRBC	3076	24523
Maktab/Madarsas	284	8270
Others (AIE)		400
Total	3902	80411

The study in 20 schools found that head teachers did not want to report dropout or out of school children, even when field researchers observed and recorded several out of school children in the community. Head teachers did not run any special training programmes, but said they were making efforts to enrol all children in schools and thereby reduce dropouts in their catchment area. The government reports Utthan Kendra (NRBC), Utpreran Kendra (RBC) and Talime Markaz (NRBC) as part of the strategy for providing support to out of school children and bring them back to school and continue to support them. However, it is doubtful if this role has been made clear to them, as they are currently engaged with 25 school going children each. Apart from this, tola sevaks were currently engaged to teach in the schools leaving aside their other roles. Hence, it was not clear how out of school children were being prepared and integrated into schools. There was no visible strategy or effort to prepare the schools to accept and support these children, even if they are admitted to the schools.

3.3 Vulnerable Children not Mapped

“Quality of DISE data which is the basis for determining physical and financial targets under various components continues to be an area of concern despite some improvement as compared to the previous

year. Coverage of schools under DISE continues to impact the authenticity of the data. It is difficult to get a clear picture of the retention and dropout rates unless correct and complete information is available for all the school.”⁴⁰

There is conflicting information on different variables under the RtE. The Act mandated local authorities/SMCs to map all children in the age group of 6-14 years within their jurisdiction, an exercise independent from the school level data sets, to ensure that all children, school-going and non school going, in and out migrants can be captured and tracked with regard to their access to RtE. This was not undertaken. There were considerable variations in government data on enrolment, drop outs and out of school children and questions raised about their veracity. In addition, the required degrees of disaggregation were not available in these data sets to suit local planning and monitoring. Thus currently information on vulnerable subgroups within larger socially excluded groups was not available and the aggregated data sets did not provide the right and relevant information to ensure the most marginalised children were in school and studying.

No specific strategies were developed by the state for the identification of urban deprived children and other marginalised categories such as child labour, children without shelter, children of sex workers, migrant children which were huge challenges for the state.

3.4. Teacher Issues

3.4.1 Teacher Shortage and Untrained Teachers

Challenges in the realm of teacher recruitment, distribution and training in the state are huge. Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) continues to be high affecting the quality education of children. 85% primary and 89% upper primary schools had adverse PTR. 289473 teacher vacancies were still to be recruited. 52% of the teachers currently in schools were without professional qualifications in teaching.⁴¹

In the 20 schools studied, 18 had ‘Niyojit’ teachers. Niyojit teachers are different from ‘contract teachers’ appointed by many states on temporary basis. These teachers were appointed through the regular recruitment process and are permanent teachers (provided they undergo required training and qualify the forthcoming eligibility test) recruited on ‘fixed salary’. The number of contract teachers varied from one to five across these schools. Five schools had one niyojit teacher each, six had two teachers each, three had three each, two had four, and one had five and three did not have any.

⁴⁰ SSA-190th Meeting of the Project Approval Board (PAB) held on 21st May 2012

⁴¹ RtE stock taking, Year 2 Report, MHRD, year

Three elementary schools had niyojit teachers, two schools had four niyojit teachers each and one school had five. Given that these teachers were by and large not trained, their capacity to teach children in the upper primary classes is questionable. It has to be noted that they have to teach in difficult context of high Student Classroom Ratios, and combined 7 & 8 classes was huge. Another concern was whether they had the skills to provide subject-wise teaching to the children. Hence while all children technically had access to schools till class 8 at this point in time, the quality of the access was of concern.

Overall PTR is also high even in the elementary schools where one teacher per class and subject-wise teachers and part-time teachers for sports, music etc are mandated. Only three elementary schools had eight or more teachers. In one elementary school, three teachers taught the eight classes. The challenge of employing adequate teachers was discussed at the PAB meeting too: “the state has more than 3/4th of the schools with adverse PTR and a majority of the upper primary schools are without subject specific teachers”⁴². Quality of teaching in the upgraded elementary schools thus is a serious concern.

No of elementary schools	No of teachers (regular and Niyojit)
1	3
3	4
1	5
1	6
2	7
1	9
2	11
1	Not available
12 schools	

3.4.2 Tola Sevaks/Talime Markaz in schools

The practice of engaging Tola Sevaks to teach full-time in schools was observed in many schools. Twelve Tola Sevaks were teaching full-time in 12 schools, one per school. Six elementary schools had one Tola Sevak each. This practice was a double-edged sword against Dalit and Muslim children: on the one hand, it took away an important strategy developed by the state to reduce the inequalities between Mahadalit and Muslim children and others in education. Tola Sevaks/Talime Markaz were recruited to mobilise and motivate the Mahadalit and Muslim communities, where children needed facilitation to attend schools regularly and cope with school work. These children thus lost out on this critical learning support, which they were to get from these education volunteers. On the other side, the tola sevaks are not trained teachers and hence their ability to teach children was questionable.

Yet another dimension to Tola Sevaks/Talime Markaz being engaged in teaching full-time in schools was the discrimination against them. While they were required to teach, there was no provision for their training, they did not receive supportive facilities like Teaching Learning Materials (TLM) for

⁴² Annual Work Plan and Budget Appraisal for SSA, 2012-13

teaching from the state. They did not get paid like the Niyojit/regular teachers and further, did not get the recognition and respect other teachers got in the schools. Tola sevaks/Talime Markaz reported that they had no time to take up their original task and expressed concern that they were not able to support children and communities at the habitation level. From all fronts, engaging them in full time teaching in the schools took away the support from the children and was also discriminatory to them for the task they were made to do.

3.4.3 Poor capacity for training teachers

Teacher training capacities continued to be a concern, given about 306,998 teachers have to be trained and current status of dysfunctional DIETs in the state. Even the current quality of training was not effective as reported elsewhere in this report. The PAB of SSA raised concerns;

“even if the state has developed the Bihar Curriculum Framework (BCF), syllabus and textbooks in the light of NCF 2005, the challenge before state is to create awareness about the guiding principles and main features of BCF, it is not an easy task given the fact that nearly half of the DIETs are dysfunctional, the quality team at DPO level is weak and nearly 50% of the BRP posts are vacant. The challenge is further compounded by the fact that the state has more than 3/4th of the schools with adverse PTR and a majority of the upper primary schools are without subject specific teachers”.

Hence despite three years given to the state governments to prepare themselves to comply with the RtE norms in providing quality education to children, many gaps remain.. Teacher recruitment, rationalisation and training are central to these challenges.

3.5 Children's Issues

3.5.1 Poor attendance of Marginalised Children in Schools

The state reported an impressive reduction in the out of school children category from 45.0 lakhs in 2001 to 2.83 lakh in 2012. While this number stands contested, the reality of poor attendance in schools is another dimension of the out of school children issue that need to be addressed. Teachers reported that SC and Muslim children were more absent than other children. Furthermore, children's absenteeism also has legal implications given that as per the state RtE rules children who absented themselves for a month are considered to be 'out of school children'. In the light of this provision, children who were absent for one month or more need re-admission to return to school.

The 2010-11 factsheet on Bihar Education⁴³ reported 71.04 % attendance rate at primary level and 74.47% at Upper Primary level.⁴⁴ However, the following is the data from field-level observations in 20 schools. Attendance rates as against the enrolment by social groups showed that, by and large, only around 53% of the enrolled children attended school.

⁴³ Annexure

⁴⁴ DISE 2010-11

In the study of the 20 schools, attendance varied from 30% to 90% across the 20 schools. Five of these schools had less than 50% attendance on the day of the visit; 3 schools had between 50-60% attendance; 4 schools had between 70-80% attendance; and 3 schools between 80-90% attendance on the day of visit. 30% of the schools (7 out of 20) had 70% and above attendance. No school had more than 90% attendance. The average attendance across all schools on the day of visit was 53 percent. A review of the attendance across the communities also showed similar trends. 56% of the enrolled Dalit children, 53% of Muslim children and 49% of the General community children were present on the day of visit.

Enrolment vs Attendance on Day 1 in 20 schools studied									
School No	SC		General		Muslim		Total		
	En	Att-d1	En	Att-d1	En	Att-d1	En	Att-d1	%
1	48	37	59	25	0	0	107	62	58%
2	110	88	44	15	0	0	154	103	67%
3	137	87	140	70	36	18	313	175	56%
4	200	48	67	31	0	0	267	79	30%
5	0	0	153	0	227	161	380	161	42%
6	25	18	19	14	0	0	44	32	73%
7	90	55	128	90	0	0	218	145	67%
8	169	112	152	50	6	3	327	165	50%
9	173	158	79	56	0	0	252	214	85%
10	178	64	154	56	100	29	432	149	34%
11	77	70	28	26	27	22	132	118	89%
12	39	22	12	10	9	6	60	38	63%
13	105	72	143	109	0	0	248	181	73%
14	12	9	48	35	49	33	109	77	71%
15	296	135	116	58	96	30	508	223	44%
16	38	34	45	41	40	36	123	111	90%
17	386	109	382	155	133	28	901	292	32%
18	107	81	165	111	26	17	298	209	70%
19	13	5	0	0	78	56	91	61	67%
20	113	88	44	15	0	0	157	103	66%

The irregularity of children in many discussions came up as an important cause for children dropping out of school. Irregular attendance created a vicious cycle where the child then lagged behind in learning, the teacher did not appreciate the child, child was not comfortable in the class, the peer group did not appreciate the child– all of which, along with other reasons, led to dropping out. Hence, addressing poor attendance is critical for retention and implementation of the RtE in real terms, as

much as or more than efforts at bringing down the numbers of out of school children. The two are two sides of the same coin.

Poor attendance of children in schools raised many other questions too. In the wake of criticisms of corruption in the midday meals scheme, the Govt of Bihar had taken up massive effort called the 'purification of records' meant to weed out the names of children who were admitted to government schools, but attended private schools. This information is important to calculate the number of children actually studying in the government schools and the numbers in private schools for the state to make adequate plans. The question was on budgets allocated and utilised. The question was on school indicators. The question was on the definition and implementation of 'out of school' children.

3.5.2 Vulnerable Children in danger of forfeiting free entitlements

Children are entitled to free textbooks, writing materials and uniforms while pursuing their elementary education, children with disabilities to special learning equipments and other support. Boys and girls from all communities were eligible for books, uniforms and cycles, and SC, ST and Muslim children were eligible for scholarship.

School observations reported attendance taking a chaotic process where teachers read out children's names or roll numbers for attendance. The more boisterous children surrounded the teacher and ensured their attendance was marked. Girls were found to go behind the teachers almost throughout the day to ensure their attendance is marked. Given the social distance between teachers and SC and Muslim children and these children's current irregularity in attending schools, it seemed natural that the children who needed these provisions most may get excluded inadvertently and left out owing to the lack of attendance, further creating a vicious cycle for their non-attendance.

Govt of Bihar notified that only children who had 75% attendance were eligible to receive scholarships, uniforms and cycles. Parents and community were up in arms against this order and the concerned teachers and officers had difficulty managing the situation, and required a statement from the Hon. Chief Minister himself. Parents alleged that the attendance taking was flawed, that children were absent as teachers were absent, questioned the validity of mid day meal numbers in the light of the attendance data.

3.5.3 Continuing Discrimination against Dalit and Muslim children

The state rules on RtE mandates government/local authorities to ensure children are not 'segregated or discriminated against in the classroom, during midday meals, in the playgrounds, in the use of common drinking water and toilet facilities to name a few. SSA revised framework outlined various forms of exclusion and discrimination against Dalit and Muslim children.

Exclusion by Teachers:

- a. Segregated seating arrangements in the classroom with SC children made to sit separately and typically at the back of the classroom.

- b. Undue harshness in reprimanding SC children, especially in relation to upper caste children. For instance, in scolding children for coming late to school, in resolving fights between children, condoning name-calling by upper caste children, etc.,
- c. Not giving time and attention to SC children in the classroom, such as not checking their homework or class work, not answering their queries – even rebuking them for asking questions in class.
- d. Excluding SC children from public functions in the school. These include nonparticipation in the morning assembly or other public events such as on Republic Day or Independence Day. Routinely making them sit at the back of the classroom
- e. Making derogatory remarks about SC children – their supposed inability to keep up with academic work.
- f. Denying SC children the use of school facilities, including water sources. Keeping water segregated; even preventing SC children from using the school taps or containers used to store drinking water have been reported from many areas.
- g. Asking SC children to do menial tasks in school, including cleaning the school premises and even the toilets.

Exclusion by peer group

- a. Calling SC children by caste names.
- b. Not including SC children in games and play activities in the classroom or in break time when children go out to play; SC children often return to their own neighbourhoods to play with non-enrolled SC children there.
- c. Not sitting with SC children in the classroom.

Exclusion by the system

- a. Incentive schemes meant for SC children not being implemented in full.
- b. Lack of acknowledgement of SC role models in the curriculum or by teachers.
- c. Reinforcing caste characteristics in syllabi and textbooks.
- d. Lack of sensitization of teachers in teacher education and training.
- e. Insufficient recruitment of SC teachers.

Exclusion of Muslim Children:

- a. Denial of admission
- b. Unfriendly school and classroom environment
- c. Cultural and religious domination
- d. Lack of Urdu language teachers
- e. Early withdrawal of male children to enable them for self employment as discrimination in the organised labour market is a huge perceived concern
- f. Early withdrawal of Muslim girls for early marriage
- g. Inadequate number of Urdu medium schools in neighbourhood

Source: Report of the Committee on Implementation of RTE and revamp of SSA, 2010

Despite the widespread prevalence of discrimination reported by Dalit and Muslim children in schools, there was no mechanism to address such discrimination. Schools did not have guidelines on how to identify and monitor discrimination, and teachers had no guidelines on how to address discrimination incidents when children raised them. Parents had no information on how to report these incidents to schools. Thus, there was complicity and silence in these matters and children suffered discrimination silently, developed anger over it, tried to take their own revenge, and either developed a negative self-image or built resilience.

Discrimination in schools have come down among children with greater interaction. However, various forms of visible discrimination continue in many schools in the form of caste based group-seating during the midday meals. Majority of Dalit children came to school with plate for taking the midday meals as plates were not available in adequate numbers/stolen in few schools. In 11 schools, researchers found that some group of children did not eat midday meals in schools. Issues of discrimination are known to authorities, given that Bihar Education Project Council mentioned following steps were taken towards minimising discrimination and exclusion of Dalit, Muslim and other marginalised children

- Children getting Mid Day Meal without any discrimination.
- Provision of free School dress for all categories of children.
- Provision of free Textbooks for all categories of children.
- Under NPEGEL, support given to Disadvantaged groups (Hunar and Auzar Schemes).
- So far 535 KGBVs have been sanctioned which helps bridging Gender & Social gaps.
- Capacity Building of Gender co-ordinators, Meena Manch, Bal Sansad, KGBVs teachers/wardens being focused.

Discussions with nonDalit children in FGDs, they expressed discontent and anger that Dalit children are provided additional facilities. “...they came to schools only to get scholarships/uniforms and cycles” was an oft-repeated statement. The response by the government in addressing this seems to be to universalise the schemes and extend it to all children. While extending provisions to all children is desirable, it is equally important to discuss why special provisions are necessary for specific groups of children, given their historic exclusion from education and continued disabilities. Extending the provisions to all children without creating such a debate and dialogue does not address the underlying bias and stereotypes against Dalit and Muslim children. Discrimination against these children continued even after universalising the provisions. Including the concepts of social justice, social inclusion and human rights can be important means to promote such dialogues.

In conclusion, making elementary education universal has been the state mandate since independence, and more actively pursued since about three decades. However, various policies have resulted in a dichotomy of education to mean ‘quality education’ to the elite through high end private schools and ‘poor education’ to the disadvantaged and economically poor sections through government schools or low end private schools. The RtE Act is yet another attempt to improve quality

of education in government schools and promote a small window of social inclusion in the private schools. Various efforts have been initiated in this context to make schools RtE compliant.

However these efforts, particularly those directed towards reducing gender and social group gaps lack comprehensive design or holistic plan. Thus while children from marginalised sections enrolled in large numbers, an equally big number dropped out sooner or later without achieving any level of effective learning. The field study of the 20 schools highlighted serious issues to be urgently addressed to ensure RtE compliance in schools. Given that a large number of Dalit and Muslim children are currently enrolling in government schools, greater engagement of their communities are needed to meet the specific disabilities and needs of these children. These 'marginalised children' in many ways need to be brought into the centre of the education system, curriculum and processes rather than be 'mainstreamed into' the existing system and processes. A re-thinking is essential with these children in the centre and not in the periphery of the system.

CHAPTER 4

SOCIAL IDENTITY IN SCHOOL/CLASSROOM PROCESSES

The central objective of the study was to understand how children from different social groups experienced schools and how their social identity influenced their school/classroom participation and learning. This chapter reflects on how the school/classroom environment and practices facilitated or created barriers for Dalit and Muslim children in their enjoyment of the right to education, their learning and development. At the outset, the study recognized the critical role of the school/classroom environment and every engagement in the school as contributing/constraining learning and development among children and hence the enjoyment of their rights under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 in a narrow sense, and to their rights 'to, in and through education' in the broader sense.

The school level barriers and constraints that affect Dalit and Muslim children can be classified as:

- Those constraints that affected all children and also Dalit and Muslim children –eg. Lack of teachers, lack of water and toilets etc
- Those constraints where Dalit and Muslim children were greater victims even while affecting all children, eg. harsher corporal punishments, non-teaching, non-payment of entitlements, lack of midday meals, etc.
- Those constraints that were specific to Dalit and Muslim children, eg discrimination, untouchability, humiliation, stereotyping, low expectations etc

4.1 Dalit and Muslim children do not get full days of teaching-learning

On 04/09/12, Tuesday, I saw some children had already come to school and were talking among themselves; “today we are first in reaching school on time (7.45am)” – when enquired further about school opening time, they said that many children came to school on time, but teacher did not come on time. The keys were kept with MDM cook who opened the school every day.

Researcher, PWSMS 2

The above incident was not an isolated one, but was widely prevalent. In one of the twenty schools, the MDM cook opens the school daily and teachers come an hour later to school. It was observed in the study that schools situated in Dalit and Muslim habitations rarely opened on time. As discussed by the children in PWSMS 3 school, teachers did not come on time, and did not want children to come on time too. Rather than appreciating children for coming on time or constructively working out alternate ways of engaging children, teachers did not want children in school when they had not yet arrived.

Only SK (Musahar child) and NP (Muslim child) were in school at 7.50 am, they also said that they come to school every day on time but teachers scold them saying “what is the point in coming to school on time and waiting?”

PWSMS 3

Dalit and Muslim children shared many reasons on why and how they got late. They reported how they sometimes got delayed playing along the way and not keeping track

of school time. In some cases, they reported that they got delayed waiting for other children from the tola as they felt safer to go in a group to school than individually. They also had many chores at home to be completed before coming to school and got delayed completing them.

In addition, Muslim children reported that they got delayed to school as the school was far from home. Muslim children went to Urdu schools, and had to often travel farther than the 1 or 3 km distance to reach school. The study found that Muslim students preferred to study in schools that are categorized 'Urdu Schools' which were not too many in number. They did not prefer to go to other schools that had Urdu language teachers, but were not called 'Urdu Schools'. Urdu Schools are associated with Muslim children. The girls also said that *"coming late to school also meant that they did not get a seat on the bench to sit and had to sit on the floor and study"*.

A number of children reported that they also got late because they anticipated that teachers would be late. The study found teachers being late to school contributed considerably to children coming late. Some of the Dalit children reported that they came to school after they knew that teachers had come to school. They checked with each other and came to school when they saw the teacher coming to the school.

The study also found that majority of the schools did not function after the mid day meals. In addition, teachers also spent considerable time on the mid day meals and reporting and documentation. Thus, in most cases Dalit, Muslim children and other marginalized children who came for a full day of learning to school had about 2-3 hours than about 5 hours of teaching-learning.

Both children and families took considerable efforts to ensure that children went to schools. However, they were not assured that the schools and teachers were equally concerned or interested in their children studying. In optimum circumstances, teachers can be expected to come a while before school timing, get the school ready for the assembly and also prepare themselves for their first class after assembly without delay. However the experience by and large was that teachers came late to schools, were absent without information to children and did not come to the class to teach on time even when they were present in the schools. As duty bearers in providing education, their culpability in violating the rights of children to quality education in a child friendly welcome environment was serious, even as one was cognizant of the limitations they reported in fulfilling their duty. This also had the negative fallout of lack of engagement and trust between teachers and community and hence community constantly raised complaints against teachers and vice versa.

One also need reflect this from how children took viewed their teachers as role-models. Thus various values essential for their adult life and citizen's roles are shaped in the schools. It may be even more important for children who came from socially excluded and marginalized communities, as opportunities for discussing or practicing some of these dimensions may not be available within their families and communities. Hence it became important that schools started at designated times, children were welcomed to schools, they were confident about their teachers interests in their schools and their learning. It was important that communities saw teachers fulfill their duties and were accountable. The school administration need discuss school timings with teachers and monitor

it effectively through VSS and departmental mechanisms/inspections. It is interesting to note that the Govt of Bihar has included the indicators of schools opening on time and schools closing on time as part of the twenty points in 'Samjhe-Seekhein'⁴⁵ quality enhancement programme. The challenges of providing full teaching-learning days to these children remain.

4.2 Limited Leadership Opportunities to Dalit and Muslim Children in Morning Assembly

The joyful starting of school had direct impact on teaching-learning process through the day. Morning assembly was also time when certain messages were imparted to children for their day to day knowledge building, discipline in life and during school hours, learning to respect everyone, value of education in nation building etc. Observation and experiences during morning assembly varied based on school opening time, type of activities during assembly, space (school campus), and children's participation. But more or less, each school had following activities in common;

- The prayer – Tu hi Raam, tu Rahim hai.....,
- Morning pledge (preamble of constitution).
- Newspaper reading (very few schools)
- Story telling (part of moral teaching)

"I feel happy coming to school. The sound of the prayer in the morning is very sweet but teachers do not call me to sing the prayer".

DB 7th Class, MPMS 1

DB is a Musahar child studying in class 7. He was particularly energized to talk about the morning assembly and how much he liked the prayers. He knew them thoroughly and evidently enjoyed singing it during assembly. However, like in other schools, only a few designated children are called to come to the front and lead the prayer. During the five days when the researchers were there in the school, DB was neither called to lead the prayer, nor did teachers seemed aware of his interest in the assembly. He too did not take any effort to communicate this to the teachers.

All schools took 10-15 minutes for prayer. It was found that a few designated children were called to come to the front and lead the prayer and read out the preamble. Teachers clarified (was also repeated by children) that those children who were regular to school and who could memorize better were chosen to lead the assembly. Most often these were the same children and no rotation of children was seen in leading the assembly. In schools where Dalit children were in the majority, older Dalit children (only girls) were given the opportunity to lead the assembly. In some Urdu schools, Muslim children were given the opportunity to lead the assembly. However, in schools where the Dalits and Muslim children were in minority, they were not invited to lead the assembly. The larger social hierarchy seemed to prevail in this selection than objective review of children as to who were interested or who could also benefit from leading the assembly. In discussions, several Dalit children expressed their desire to lead the morning assembly but felt dejected that teachers did not call them

⁴⁵ The Bihar government has initiated its efforts in improving quality in school education through programme called Samajhe-Seekhein. Twenty points, mostly proxy indicators are identified, to be tracked by a separate quality mission under SSA at the school level.

or give them the opportunity. It was also observed that teachers did not take any effort to observe children in the assembly, the interest of children in participating in the assembly to make it learning and development process for all children. Encouraging different children, particularly those from Dalit and Muslim communities created alternate norms about children's abilities, diversity, respect and integration. While these were routine aspects of the school day, one could imagine how important these could be for the learning and development in children's lives.

4.3 Classrooms Did Not Inspire Learning

"The blackboard was broken and the class room was full of cobwebs. There were no posters on the wall. Children sat on sacks they brought from home; a few were sitting on the floor in the last row. The room did not have sufficient sunlight and there was no electricity. Boys and girls sat separately on either sides of the classroom. Children's foot-wears were arranged inside the classroom near the last row. The classroom was too small to accommodate all the children who sat crammed together. The majority of children kept moving in and out of the classroom".

*Researcher, PWSMS 3
GP, student*

On being asked what they were proud of in their school, one of the students responded "Koi aisi uplabdhi nahi hai jisse hum garva mehsus kare. Na boundary wall hai na classroom hai. Garv kis baat ki?" The observations reported in this classroom held true in many ways with other classrooms visited in the course of this study. It clearly was not a conducive learning environment for children as envisaged by education system or educationists. Given that majority of Dalit and Muslim children came to school looking for alternatives, seeking ways to fulfill their aspirations, it was one of total neglect, even 'dis-respecting' their very person and efforts. The class room was even an unhealthy place for children to spend the most part of their day and they kept moving in and out without the teacher even concerned about it.

The observations and discussions with teachers from both the districts i.e. Gaya and Patna provided ample evidence that teachers and school administration did not consider classroom environment as part of teaching learning process. As learning environment for children, class rooms need to reflect the objectives, principles and values to be imparted to children and particularly that of equity and social inclusion.

This study categorized school classroom environment in terms of:

- Classroom Spaces, TLM, posters, blackboards, sitting mats/benches, table and chairs, brightness, type of messages on the walls/posters, religious/cultural symbols, cleanliness etc.
- Educational Resources owned by children such as books/slates, pen/pencil, notebook etc.
- Nurturing and enabling environment inside classroom

Amidst inadequate number of classrooms and classroom spaces, the study tried to capture what was the physical environment in which school imparted education. Majority of schools did not have a colorful and enjoyable classroom, even if some school had meaningful and enjoyable classroom – they

were not maintained. The space was crowded with stocks of grains for MDM and other school materials making it more like store rooms.

The wall of classrooms were decorated mainly around following lines

- Panels of folk stories painted on walls
- Paintings/pictures of prominent leaders in a few schools - Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Shri. Subhash Chandra Bose, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, Smt. Indira Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.
- Paintings/pictures of Hindu Goddess Saraswati, National Flag, National animal – Lion, National bird – peacock, etc in almost all schools
- Alphabets in Hindi and English

Teachers, students reported lack of adequate class-room space to accommodate all classes and all children. Most schools visited managed classes IV-V in one room in Primary schools, and VII-VIII in one room in middle schools. While blackboards were available in the class many were in bad conditions. As the class rooms were crowded it was difficult for children from the back rows to see the blackboard. 10 out of 20 schools complained about water leaking into classrooms during rainy season. Lighting in class rooms was negligible during rainy season making it difficult for children to remain in school. Some schools were well constructed but classrooms were not organized to attract children.

The following described classroom located near Muslim habitation having large number of Muslim and SCs students along with general caste students:

“There were no posters or TLM on the walls of the classroom. Directly above the blackboard was picture of a large lotus flower, stem and leaves. A clock was painted on the flower. On either side of the flower were images of the Indian flag blowing in the wind facing outwards. Above this was a statement in Hindi, “mera Bharat mahan”. To the right of the blackboard was an image of a lion with mane that had stripes like a tiger (the national animal) and said “sher” (meaning lion) and to the left was a peacock titled “mor”. Running along the top half of the right wall of the classroom were panels of the fable “kauwa aur ghara” (the crow and the earthen pot). Below that was Hindi alphabet that ran onto the back wall as well, followed by the Hindi matras. On the top half of the back wall was five images. The image in the middle was of the Hindu goddess Saraswati (the goddess of learning) superimposed onto the image of a book. The first image on the left was of Shri Subhash Chandra Bose, followed by Mahatma . Gandhi, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. There were no women leaders represented. On the top half of the left wall of the classroom was panels of the fable “kachhua aur khargosh” (the tortoise and the rabbit). Running along the bottom was the English alphabet and mathematical symbols division, multiplication, addition and subtraction.

- *There was not enough space for the children to sit in the classroom even at current capacity, which was 26 per cent of the children enrolled in three classes. The children were cramped and*

while they all fitted themselves on the benches, the space was not enough to write. There were 6 benches for 20 girls and 7 benches for 22 boys.

- *There was no space in the classroom for the children to store their bags, books and classroom work. All children brought their books in hand or in plastic packets and kept with them on the tables in the classroom.*
- *There was one large blackboard in the front of the classroom and all children in the class room could see it if someone's head did not come in the way.*
- *There was no electricity in the classroom. If someone was not sitting near a window and if the sky was overcast, it was difficult for the children to read.*
- *There was a plastic chair for the teacher but no table. The attendance register and the notebooks that were collected for marking/checking were arranged on a low lying bench next to the teacher's chair.*
- *The classroom did not look attractive or tidy. The floor had large holes filled with dust. The wooden benches and tables that the children sat on were kept clean but were severely damaged/broken in parts and did not have a smooth surface"*

The NCF made a breakthrough suggesting everything within the schools provided potential space for children to learn something, depending on how it was presented and maintained in school campus. All spaces and operations within the school from the building, walls and assembly to play ground became effective instruments for children to learn and socially engage. Despite repeated commitments to using school space as learning opportunities, teachers and school administration did not seem interested to being creative or think from children's perspective in utilizing the spaces in and around the schools. There was not even a whiff of engaging children to think about and create the kind of environment they would like in their schools/classrooms. The lack of such interest and engagement in making schools learning and socially encouraging environment limit and take away from the learning of Dalit and Muslim children as well as all children. As they themselves may not enjoy basic facilities in their homes, schools became places where they experienced and had some of the basic needs, both physical and social met. School infrastructure can be effectively used to bear messages on values and norms, become spaces for children to be creative in many ways and these could be planned and done along with children.

4.4 Segregated and isolated seating arrangement

Seating arrangements in schools was much studied even earlier and the study found the pattern repeated in these schools too.

- Gender segregation was strictly followed in all schools, girls and boys sat separately in all the schools on separate sides. Separation of boys and girls were strictly followed and more so in the Urdu schools where girls clearly articulated '*Hum ladke ke sath nahi khelte hain, nahi baithte hain, kyu ki galat nazariye se dekha jata hai.*' They reflected and practiced the social norms in this regard and there was no alternate conversation about these norms even as gender and girls education has been on the agenda for over two decades. In some schools girls were made to sit in the front row, which is a change from the normal gender norms.

- Dalit girls, Muslim girls and girls from general castes sat together in schools. However, in few schools, where they were in majority, they largely confined themselves to own caste/religious group. They were more comfortable in their own groups *“Hum log koi alag alag samuday ke nahi hain. Hum sab muslim samaj se sambandh rakhte hain”* was how a group of Muslim girls explained their group.
- In almost all the schools, front rows among boys were occupied by general castes children who were frequently contacted by teachers during teaching learning process in class.
- Last row in all 20 schools were occupied by few Dalit children (mostly boys). They happened to be most silent and non participative throughout the day in class and did not come under the attention of the teacher.

Where one was seated was not just a matter of need or convenience, but also one of privilege and power. Children in classroom repeated the social hierarchies and norms seen outside and schools did not dialogue about changing these paradigms. In addition, as seen earlier, teacher attention towards children in the back rows were definitely wanting and it was not surprising that they tended to perform lesser and dropped out faster.

4.5 Schools Did Not Encourage Children’s Opinions and Suggestions

The suggestion boxes in the schools was one potential way of incorporating children’s suggestions and opinions regarding the school functioning. It is also important means of hearing and addressing addressing children’s grievances. There are many possible ways in which teachers can engage children through this process. However, one did not come across any report of using this mechanism effectively or positively. On the other, in one incident children reported that “suggestion boxes were not used properly and not taken by the teachers. *“Hum log Sijhaav peti me sujhav likh kar dalte hain to head madam peechhe me sabhi chitthi baccho se fadwa deti hain”* tells Shobha Kumari, *“Aisi sujhavo ka koi matlab raha kya sir? Abhi bhi aap jakar dekhenge to ek bhi patra usme nahi rahega sir!”*. In many of these cases, these interventions and suggestions come from the top and there may not be buy-in of the teachers into these processes. Teachers buy in may need to be ensured through greater collective visioning and collaboration.

4.6 Rich Diversity in Schools Not Brought into Teaching-Learning

Classrooms in the government schools in Bihar and across India today is a picture of diversity– boys and girls; children from different castes, religions, ethnicity; multiple classes accommodated in one room; children of various age groups even within one class; diverse cultures, diverse traditional talents and skills, children at different learning levels and so on. These classes in Gaya and Patna included boys and girls in almost equal proportion, large numbers of Dalit children including Bhuiya and Manjhi children who were marginalized even among the Dalits, large numbers of Muslim children, children whose parents worked as unorganized wage labour, agricultural workers, brick kiln workers, migrant workers and so on.

By and large children were comfortable in their own social groups. Religion obviously stood above other categorization in this group, regarding their friends, Muslim girls said, *“Koi aisa saheeli nahi hai*

jo ek dusre ke yahan amantrit nahi hota. Hum log koi alag alag samuday ke nahi hain. Hum sab muslim samaj se sambandh rakhte hain". Engagement within Muslim girls was more homogenous as they considered themselves as belonging to one social group. Interface across social groups are also seen on some grounds, and continue to be avoided in other forms, particularly when it comes to sharing food. as reflected in what JA, a Muslim boy said about his friend from the Hindu community, *"RK mera bohur achha dost hai. Hum unke ghar jate hain, par uske ghar khana nahi khate hain"*. However, discrimination continued to be strongly maintained against 'particularly vulnerable groups' among Dalit communities, practiced by both Dalit and nonDalit children. Sometimes these distinctions were couched in more modern terms of cleanliness and even more politically correct versions, *SK of class VII said, "Udhar (Patotiya tola) बहुत गंदगी रहता है, और दारु बंता है, इसीलिए जाने का मन नहीं करता"*.

The challenge was how the diversity in such a school environment can be facilitated to become the building block of the nation. It is often assumed that being from the same village or panchayats, children and communities had enough knowledge and insights about each other. However given the social distances and not being engaged with each other in the social, cultural or religious spaces, social distances continue across Dalit and nonDalit children, across Muslim and nonMuslim children. School is the place they come together, but any discussion about the social, cultural and historic realities of the different groups of children is rarely undertaken in the schools/classrooms. Rarely do teachers create opportunities for children to share their personal and family stories. Any mention of Dalit and Muslim children are done in derogatory and deficient terms than in encouraging or appreciative terms.

Teachers need to be encouraged to make these cultural shifts and need support and skills to do this, given their own limited exposures and the challenges they faced on day to day basis in managing and maintaining the schools. Both pre-service and in-service teacher trainings need include information about the diverse culture and contribution of different communities to the national mosaic and their contributions too. Teacher training needs to explore various myths about who contributes what in economic growth and what portion of the national resources go to whom, etc. In-service trainings should help teachers develop constructive ways of engaging marginalized children in the teaching-learning processes in their classrooms. Teachers can be helped to build their skills for this dialogue and also inclusion actions that will help them in this process.

4.7 Marginalised children are made to feel 'inferior'

"A lot of the girls spoke very softly, in comparison, most of the boys spoke quite confidently. In particular, Dalit girls were reluctant to speak. When they did talk, they giggled softly, and so did the girls around them. A girl from a Thakur family also hesitated and giggled when she said her father had a poultry farm. Some of the Dalit girls such did not know what to say regarding their father's occupations. They were mostly egged on by others and then almost universally said "kheti"

Researcher, MPMS 1

Research investigators conducted an introductory session asking children to introduce themselves as a process of knowing each other on the first day of class room observation and documented them. The session provided insights on how children constructed and articulated their identity and revealed reaction from other children about each other's identity. Attention was paid to how Dalit and Muslim children identified themselves and the reactions to them. The children were asked to share their name, which tola they came from, father's name and occupation, mother's name and occupation.

A very common observation noticed during this exercise was Dalit children felt uncomfortable about sharing their father's occupation, many children were unable/unwilling to express what their father's occupation was compared with non-Dalit children who easily shared father's occupation i.e. contractor, carpenter, business, farmer, teacher etc. It was common to find general caste children laugh at other children especially Dalit children, when they shared their father's occupation. Many of these were caste based occupation and Dalit children were uncomfortable to share. Dalit and Muslim children expressed feelings of being inferior to other children in schools.

Not having the necessary facilities in the schools, children are also required to use the local village facilities like water hand-pumps. Here again children from Dalit and Muslim communities have to face stereotypes as discussed above (see box). A common notion against Muslim and Dalit children is that they are dirty and not clean. The notion of purity and pollution are also associated with them. In this case, while other children in the school were allowed to use the water hand pump in the village near the school, Muslim children were often denied this facility. They were prevented and also humiliated in this process.

Here again, one is concerned that schools are also steeped in the existing social norms and hierarchies and do not create spaces for alternate dialogues and norms among children, in keeping with the Constitutional norms and values.

4.8 Girls did not Feel Empowered

Several slogans/wall writing on walls talk about the importance of girl's education. Teachers also acknowledged that girls faced several obstacles in learning and special efforts need to be taken by teachers and school administration for their education. Indeed, this was the only difference teachers pointed out, when questioned – whether there was difference in learning process of different social groups or not? Out of 18 teachers interviewed, 5 said that learning process was different for different social groups – and they identified differences as between girls and boys. Teachers commented in many interviews that girls were more intelligent than boys. Even children had memorized all the slogans related to girls' education. However girls continued to be given gender based tasks as cleaning class rooms. A positive change was their being asked to lead morning assembly in many schools.

4.9 Classrooms did not meet Needs of CWSN

'Children with special needs' (CWSN) are recognised category in schools and MIS data sets today. Little response to meeting their physical, emotional or learning needs, however, was found. 20 CWSN children were enrolled in 20 schools in two blocks of Gaya and Manpur district and all of them came from Dalit and Muslim community. As mentioned earlier, nineteen schools school did not have even ramps to facilitate them to attend schools. There were no encouraging messages, community meetings, special survey, inclusive activities etc. by teachers or school administration to encourage such children or sensitize the community in giving equal importance to the education of CWSN.

4.10 Schools Reinforced Caste Norms

"Whenever cleaning of school campus takes place, only manjhi (Musahar) children are told to clean waste around the toilets, and throw the garbage collected in cleaning. This is known to all children and Musahar children always do this. Other children are not even asked to do so. Only manjhi children spoil the toilet and that is why we (including teachers) never allow them to use the toilet at all."

MPMS 3

The notions of "purity" and "pollution" were developed and reinforced among children at very early stages of life, purity for general caste children and pollution for Dalit children; when they observed and experienced identity based privileges and dis-privileges in undertaking activities inside and outside classrooms. It was an accepted fact and known to all children and Dalit children performed these tasks for school cleanliness on regular basis. There were no questions raised on these practices by the teachers or Dalit children even if they thought it unfair or did not like it.

None of the 20 schools studied had staff to do the cleaning in the schools. Teachers reported that cleaning and maintenance of schools were largely done by children, and as seen above, Dalit children were asked to do tasks along caste lines. In a few schools, Dalit/EBC/OBC cooks were given some extra money from school fund or asked to clean the school campus on regular basis as part of MDM.

The observations in schools showed that girl children of respective classes were asked to clean classroom every day before school started. Teachers explained it as 'whoever came to school first cleaned the classroom'. Gender bias in tasks was prevalent and evident.

In a school without fencing/boundary situated in Dalit habitation where SC children were highest in number shared that "everyday teacher asked us to clean the campus, which was full of garbage; if any child refused to do so or showed laziness, teacher abused (*gali dete hain*) them".

4.11 Identity not Affirmed

School was the place where different cultural, religious and social groups came to learn and embrace diversity. In all the 20 schools, there were large numbers of children from Dalit community, especially

from the most marginalized among Dalits like Musahars, Bhuyian, etc, whose identity has been stigmatized due to their occupations and food habits along with untouchability and segregation in schools. However schools did not address their concerns. Messages and activities to promote dignity and human rights of all children were not visible in schools. Schools did not identify or enroll some of the most excluded children from *dom, nat*, brick kiln workers, migratory population from the school catchment area. These children were not part of schooling system. There were no messages to reach out to them for their education. No slogans or messages were found in any of the school/classroom depicting diversity and multicultural environment in schools. Except Goddess *Saraswati and Bharat Mata* (Mother India), no other religious symbols were available in any of the studied schools.

4.12 Dropping Out Process from Schools

As anticipated, children dropped out of schools for various reasons. For many Dalit and Muslim students moral obligation to economically support their families seemed a strong reason. Children discussed how their families needed their financial support and at such times, they took the decision to drop out. Among Muslim children the mental compulsion to learn a skill/trade was also strong. Eventually they had to take up a trade or skill and they argued that it is better to start early in the skill. They did not think education would support in their employment or sustenance. Many argued that as they did not anyway learn much in schools, it did not really matter if they dropped out. Corporal punishment was an equally strong reason reported by children to drop out. Discrimination per se was not reported as the reason to drop out though it was inherent in the discussion on teacher bias, nonteaching, not encouraged and corporal punishments. It also seemed that peer group had greater influence on children dropping out than family and parents. This once again reflected family interest to educate children and other factors that result in them dropping out.

In concluding this chapter, while infrastructure development has been in focus for over two decades and continues to be in focus, the infrastructure of the schools where majority Dalit and Muslim children faced institutional discrimination with lack of adequate space and facilities. In the name of rationalization some positive, even if inadvertent steps were taken to put up schools in the Dalit and Muslim habitations were being closed down and the children merged with schools outside their location. There was little to suggest that the school/class room environment healthy space or conducive to learning for children. One did not have to go too far to analyse that these limitations had greatest negative impact on Dalit, Muslim and other marginalized children who had negligible facilities and support at home in their learning processes. These spaces had little reference to the context or aspirations of Dalit and Muslim children, while the picture of Dr Ambedkar made some connect with Dalit children, there was nothing to connect the Muslim children. Schools were not informed by the culture, knowledge and aspirations of these communities from where the majority children came to government schools today. The lessons that school and class room environment were important teaching-learning spaces and instruments, though recognized by educationists was not adequately communicated to the functionaries in the system. Teachers who were at the cutting edge in the process were not oriented to respect or trained to develop the resources that children bring or motivate children and community to engage in building a process. Given that many projects have been initiated to fix the gaps from the time of the District Primary Education Programme

(DPEP), a fresh approach involving children and marginalized communities may become a way out of the current stagnation and negligence.

CHAPTER 5

SOCIAL IDENTITY IN TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESSES

Having looked at the school and classroom environment and various areas of their functioning from how Dalit and Muslim children experienced schools in the previous chapter, this chapter looks more closely into teaching and learning processes in the class room. What was being taught, how was it being taught and how Dalit and Muslim children participated and experienced the teaching and learning processes. Given that the primary tasks in the school was transacted through the class room processes, the opportunity to real-time observe class room processes in twelve schools for five days each helped gain considerable insights into teacher attitudes and behaviour in the class rooms in terms of how teachers taught, what methods did they use to explain and help children understand, how did they respond to children's questions, which children got attention from teachers, who did not get attention, etc. It helped gain insights into how children from different social group participated in the classroom, who took active interest in the proceedings in the classroom, who asked questions, who did not ask questions, how children engaged with each other across social groups, how Dalit and Muslim children engaged in the class room, did children help each other in studies, etc . The observations were further verified through focus group discussions with children in schools where separate FGDs were held with two groups of children (the top eight and bottom eight as identified by the teacher). FGDs was also done with children who are currently out of schools.

5.1 Teaching processes

5.1.1 Children not provided subject knowledge/grasp

The teacher vacancies are high at 289,473 in the state, even after 1,98,035 teachers have been recruited by the panchayat/block/urban body over the past years. The pupil teacher ratio in the state currently is at 58:1 compared to the mandated of 30/35:1.⁴⁶ The state recruited large

"The teacher was teaching about India and its history in social science subject. He told students about different religion – There are four religion in India; Hindu are in majority, after that Muslim, Christian, Sikhs and very few Jain. One OBC child asked, "What about Buddhist religion sir?" The teacher replied positively saying that, yes, they are also in some number among Hindus. Further explaining children that how people live is connected to their religion. The oldest text is Vedas and Vedas are divided in four parts. Those who can read Vedas are called "Pandits"

MPMS 1

(This school was located in a Muslim populated habitation)

⁴⁶ Presentation to the PAB, 2012-13

numbers of teachers 'niyojit' teachers⁴⁷ without adequate qualifications or teacher training. As seen from the example cited, teachers did not have deeper understanding about the issues they were teaching. They are not able to set the context of the lesson or relate it to the context of the children in the classroom. In addition, teachers are not also used to drawing out children's knowledge or experience in the context of the lesson, both for constructing knowledge together and promoting children's participation.

In majority of the schools, children reported that *'teachers did not pay attention to children in the classroom, they were not concerned about whether children understood or not and did not give any attention to weaker children'*. The 'casual attitude' of the teachers in the school about teaching learning was reported as a problem by many children, that teachers did not actually care about teaching in their schools.

While there were differing opinions on how teachers taught, by and large, the opinions of the top eight students in most schools were different from that of the bottom eight students. Top eight students felt that *'teachers taught well, explained well, asked them to come to the board and explained lessons. The bottom eight students however by and large were of the opinion that teachers did not teach well, they were partial to some students, did not like questions being asked'*.

The lack of subject knowledge among teachers shows that they need further training on their subject matter to be able to teach the children in their care. This is a matter of serious concern as there are no institutional mechanisms in place to provide subject matter training to teachers as they are expected to have the knowledge even as they come in as teachers. Discussions with teachers did not report any on-site support at hand to equip them in their teaching tasks. There also did not seem much cooperation between the experienced teachers and the newly recruited ones to support them in this regard.

Additionally, the study did not find teachers having access to/using additional books and materials to improve their subject knowledge of skills. They also did not report any other mechanism to pick up their skills on their own. Self reading and preparation was found negligent among teachers. The state has a huge capacity building task before it, not just in teaching methodology and skills, but also to equip the teachers in their given subjects.

In the class, teachers mainly played the role of "preacher" than teacher. Teachers tended to get disturbed when children disturbed the class with shouting, talking, sleeping or not listening carefully. Teachers drew upon examples from their own personal life or took the examples of particular students or other public figures to bring the class to order. Some of these occasions were also used to give negative examples of Dalit and Muslim children if they happened to be the one concerned.

⁴⁷ Niyojit teachers are permanent teachers and not teachers on contract. They are appointed through the panchayat or urban local bodies. They differ from the regular teachers in being on 'fixed salary' and not being on a salary scale. The salary varies between Rs.6000-7000/month.

Teacher rationalisation too is of concern. In some schools with a large number of Muslim children there was shortage of Urdu teachers, while in a few schools with Urdu teachers, the number of Muslim children was low. The schools visited did not have subject-based teachers or the mandated pupil teacher ratio (PTR) as per RtE norms.

5.1.2 Tuitions encouraged to supplement school teaching

RtE notification prohibits teachers taking tuitions. However, it was very disconcerting to find teachers encouraging children to take tuitions and complete the syllabus. During field visits children were found to be writing up tuition home-work in the classroom. Teachers turned a blind eye to this even when they found children doing so. It is thus not very clear whether teachers themselves took tuitions or not, but they were aware of children taking tuitions. The study found teachers asking children to take up Sanskrit language tuitions across schools. Sanskrit period was after the mid day meals, and in most cases, the schools did not function post MDM. There were no qualified teacher to teach Sanskrit too. It seemed to be matter of convenience for teachers that children had other academic support where they could learn and complete the syllabus.

Researchers did not find Dalit or Muslim children doing their tuition homework in the classroom. It can be assumed that many of them are not able to take tuitions, given the poor economic conditions and even the lack of parental awareness in this regard. This also raises the concern how Dalit and Muslim children, coming from poor families cope up with their studies. This leads to their poor performance in the classroom, resulting in a vicious cycle for them of low inputs and low performance. Thus they may soon lose interest or finding it difficult drop out of school. Or teachers may caricature them as dull or weak students.

5.1.3 Teacher attitude to work hampers children's learning

There are questions also about the attitude that some of these teachers bring to their work. The various layers of teachers, regular and niyojit in itself seem to be a point of division than cooperation. *"why should I be paid Rs.7000/- for doing the same as the other. That is why things are like this in this school"* was a comment from one of the niyojit teachers.

A major concern, as expressed by this particular niyojit teacher was that teachers in the same school, on the same job, were paid vastly different salaries. The education department justified it as the newly recruited teachers were 'niyojit teachers' on fixed salary and they had to be recruited in large numbers to meet the RtE PTR mandate. The department also argued that these teachers need further training and also had to be certified that they are able to teach. However, within the school premise, the two sets of teachers were engaged in the same tasks. Sometimes the niyojit teachers put in more time and effort than the regular teachers. In some cases, niyojit teachers had higher qualifications than regular teachers even when they were not trained to be teachers. Hence the picture was chaotic and there seemed no discussion on the matter between teachers and the administration in this regard.

This negatively impacted the teaching learning processes in the classroom. In some cases regular teachers even when trained did not care to teach and were engaged in managerial, data gathering and reporting work. Even when there were individual differences among the niyojit teachers in their attitudes, it was found that by and large they were more prone to teaching their classes.

5.1.4 Teacher Trainings do not equip to promote equity and inclusion

Newly recruited teachers are given thirty days induction training at the block resource centres. Every teacher is provided twenty days of training a year, which includes 10 days block training at the BRCs followed by ten days of monthly trainings at the Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs). The subjects covered in the trainings were reported:

- Environment building for teaching-learning process
- Activity based learning
- School Management
- Subject based training on Sanskrit, Mathematics, Science, Hindi and English
- Communication techniques
- Managing multi-grade class rooms
- Child Behaviour

While some teachers reported the training helped them to improve their teaching skills, others reported that training period also doubled up as reporting periods. They had to submit various data on enrolment of SC/ST children, mid day meal reports, reports on uniform and scholarship distribution etc which took away the training-learning time and attention. Some teachers refused to answer any of training related questions saying that, *"I don't have time to answer such illogical and futile questions"*. A few teachers were unable to articulate the content of training saying they did not remember. There was little monitoring on how the trainings were translated in the classrooms and what challenges the teachers had in translating them.

The teachers did not report any inputs or discussions in their training about first generation learners, the socio-cultural backgrounds of the diverse children that came into the class, the constraints and barriers that Dalit or Muslim children faced in their schooling. This is carried forward into the classrooms where teachers do not address discrimination or conflict issues between Dalit-Muslim students and others from general castes.

It was also not clear if the training was acquired by teachers who needed them. In the schools studied, regular teachers who were already trained and were in service for more than ten years attended trainings than the newly recruited teachers.

Thus the primary question is how capable are the newly recruited untrained teachers to perform the teaching tasks assigned to them? The next big question is the capacity and preparation of the government to train these teachers? The third question is what support mechanisms are available to untrained teachers in the school on day to day basis to do their tasks? It is also important to ask how willing trained teachers are to fulfil their teaching roles. Additionally, there did not seem to be any

focus in the training courses to prepare them to support children who come from Dalit or Muslim communities or girls coming from these communities. It seems very evident that children from Dalit and Muslim communities do not get any additional support from the teachers, rather they suffer further disabilities in their classrooms.

5.1.5 Teachers did not prepare for Daily Teaching

10 out of 18 teachers interviewed said they made monthly teaching plans and 8 of them had even weekly teaching plans. On requesting them to provide samples of the same, they did not do so and did not share any given format for preparing the teaching or lesson plans. Surprisingly four reported maintaining individual records of children in their schools. Again no samples or models could be obtained.

Excerpts from teachers' interview and class room observations suggest that teaching was a routine process, developed once a year at best. The classroom schedule was often not displayed in the classroom, but in the head-teacher's room. Teachers in one school routinely sent one of the students to the head teachers room to check the time-table before teaching. There was an element of surprise when the teacher came into the class as to what s/he will teach. In almost all schools, the teacher came to the class and then sent a student to check what subject had to be taught in the particular period. Teaching depended on the availability of teachers in the school and convenience than the mandated schedule.

4 out of 18 teachers interviewed reported that they finished only about 60 per cent of the given syllabus as they were engaged in non teaching activities such as census, Mahadalit survey, animal census etc. The shortage of teachers was reported the reason for their inability to complete given syllabus and curriculum. Another reason given was the lack of skill of 'niyojit' teachers.

Children's group discussions reported that they often did not learn anything for days in their classrooms. Some of them argued that it was ok to be absent in such context. Given that these children come from families where reading and writing is not the norm, they look to schools and teachers for providing them the necessary education skills. The current set of poor teacher capacities, their lack of motivation and preparation for teaching their classes, given the lack of education related capabilities in the child's own homes, children from marginalised communities have to struggle it on their own to educate themselves.

5.2 Poor Teaching-Learning Makes Marginalised Children More Vulnerable

"The teachers did not teach any of those 5 days, and school used to close every day before official school closing time. The teachers said, "What is the use of education for these children (majority were SC and Muslim children in this school), they don't need it. We just have to pass our time in school as its official requirement"

Researcher, PWSMS 3

An ordinary day in the school consisted of seven periods (see box) of 45 minutes each. Children expect to be taught Mathematics, Hindi, English, Science, Social Studies, Sanskrit and Games. Half hour from 11.30 am to 12 pm was allocated for the mid day meals within the school time from 8.30 am to 2.15 pm.

Researchers did not find any school to start their classroom teaching on time. Children were sent to the class after morning assembly and waited for 15-30 minutes before any teacher came to their class with attendance register. On reaching their class after the assembly, children spent the first 15 to 30 minutes shouting, fighting and finding their seat in the class for the day. The first class that was scheduled to start at 8.30 am often started at 9.30 or even 10 am in some schools.

Mandated School Schedule

8am to 2.15pm

8am – 8.30am: Chetna satra (Morning Assembly)
8.30am – 9.15am: 1st Period (Generally Mathematics in many of schools)
9.15am – 10am: 2nd Period (Hindi)
10am – 10.45am: 3rd Period (Science)
10.45am – 11.30am: 4th Period (English)
11.30am – 12pm: MDM
12pm – 12.45pm: Social Studies (History, Geography)
12.45pm – 1.30pm: Sanskrit
1.30pm – 2.15pm: Play/Games

There was little order in most classes during teaching. Children moved in and out of classroom even when teacher was teaching. In a few schools, teachers gave 5–10 minutes break to children before starting the teaching process but still children went out of the class during teaching time. By and large teachers did not seem to be concerned that children went in and out of class. Some children were found to go out and not return to class and teachers completely ignored this. It was as if their presence or absence did not matter.

Teacher pre-occupation with the MDM also took away teaching time each day. While cooks were appointed in all schools, the management and reporting were still with the teachers. Though time allotted for the mid day meal was about half hour, an hour and half of teacher time went into the mid day meal process. Teaching did not take place after the MDM in the school. In a few schools, teachers tried to keep students longer when researchers were there, but students refused to stay, as they were not used to staying after the mid day meals. One of the teachers locked the classroom with children's book/notebook during MDM to ensure that they will return after MDM. The teachers by and large demanded that the mid day meals responsibility be taken away from them, understandably so when it was mentioned that individual schools may be cooking anywhere from 25-30 to 60-70 kilos of rice every-day. This takes considerable time for even the management of such a process and in addition strict documentation and reporting is also expected. Such a huge task cannot be entrusted to the teachers over and above their teaching responsibilities, where again teacher shortage was acute.

Among the twelve schools observed, 5 were located in the Dalit habitation and 2 in the Muslim habitation. Schools located in Dalit habitation did not start on time and many closed just after mid day meals. A few schools remained open till the official school closing time, but teachers told researchers that it was due to their presence in the schools and that normally there was no teaching after the mid day meals.

5.3. Marginalised Children did not learn through Homework

Teachers gave homework almost every day but rarely followed it up next day. In some schools, a particular student was supposed to collect the homework notebooks and hand them over to the teacher just after the attendance was done. Researchers observed that all children did not give in their homework note books. Neither the monitor collecting the notebooks or the teacher checked the number of notebooks to see if all children had submitted the homework. When the monitor collected the notebooks, only those children who were interested or who had done their homework submitted their books. Others did not.

"I saw students' notebook for 20 minutes. I observed that the Dalit children's notebook did not have the signature of teachers. I found the same pattern in both the classes I observed."
Researcher, MPMS 3

The teacher sat outside in the open field or within the classroom, checked and returned them to the children. While this was part of the teaching hours, children were not engaged in the process. It was non-teaching/non-learning time for children and they waited for the note books to come back with teacher's comments. Children compared the comments and teased each other on the corrections or marks given by teachers. Correcting the note books were not used as means to track common mistakes made by children to identify their learning problems or clarify doubts or encourage the child.

The researchers checked some of the notebooks of children at random and found that there was no marking by the teacher in the books of Dalit children. On asking, they reported that they were not always able to do homework due to unavailability of notebooks, that they did not have time to do it at home, that they did not know how to do it. On further clarifying, it was found that most often Dalit children are not engaged in this important task of doing homework and getting it corrected by the teacher, thus excluding them from an important part of the classroom process. Not only did they lose out in the teaching learning process, they also were excluded from the classroom process where children discussed what teachers had commented in their notebooks, how much marks each one got, what was good and what was bad etc. Given that this was an important part of the classroom practices, these children were totally marginalized and excluded in the process.

No effort was made by the teacher to have the child before her/him and help the child understand the mistakes made. There was much chaos during these times, but it did not seem to bother the teacher or the children who were all engaged on their own. What is also evident is that teachers did not seem to consider the homework process important in the teaching-learning process, even as they engaged in it. It was not used as a tool to help children understand lessons, not used to assess children's learning and not used to guide children's understanding. Further it was not used as a tool to improve the learning of weaker students in the classrooms. The purpose of homework was thus not linked to teaching learning processes, it seemed more a routine 'pedagogy' process.

5.4 Monotonous teaching in classrooms

Teachers came to the class and often decided which subject they would teach. There did not seem any prior preparation to complete the syllabus in a planned manner. Least of all seemed any concern that students understood or learnt from the process. There was little evidence of the training they had received about managing class rooms or activity based learning in the classrooms.

Teachers adopted following methodologies while teaching in the class:

- **Verbal Teaching:** The most common methods of teaching was asking child (boys or girls sitting in front row in all cases) to read paragraph of certain chapters and teachers explained this afterwards. This method was often followed while teaching Hindi or History.
- **Use of textbooks:** Teachers often did not bring their copy of the text book to the class room to teach. They borrowed the book from children in the front rows and taught, often depriving the child of text book daily. Even here, children were asked to read sections and teachers explained them.
- **Use of black boards:** The board was used in teaching Mathematics and English in almost all schools. The teacher explained certain concepts in mathematics and asked children to solve questions written on the board. Sometimes, teacher asked children to come to the board and solve them. Teachers used this method while teaching English grammar too. Teachers also dictated questions and answers in some subjects like, history, geography and general knowledge; followed by a few questions as home work. There was no discussion or debate on what was being taught.
- **Teachers' positions while teaching:** While the majority of teachers stood in a fixed place or sat and taught, a few moved about the class room while teaching. Observations however pointed out that this moving was more to ensure that children were disciplined and not so much to check whether they were attentive and learning. Teachers did not check children's books or notebooks while they moved, did not have any question to particular children as they moved, did not help any particular child with what they were doing. All these reflected that moving about was not a strategy to ensure children learned.
- **Teacher attention while teaching:** No attention was paid to children in the back rows, nor was any child identified for special support during the teaching process. The observers did not come across any instance where teachers checked to see if the children sitting at the back of the class followed the lessons or were learning. The teacher responded to these children at the back if and when they approached the teacher. And by and large, not being regular, not being up to date with the class they seldom approached the teacher. The study found little engagement with Dalit or Muslim children by the teachers in the classes to see how they followed the lesson or if they had any difficulty in their learning or schooling processes.
- **Testing children:** According to teachers both oral and written tests in particular subject were routinely conducted (study observed only written tests). Teachers mentioned this to be a tool for assessing weekly progress of children's learning. Most of all this seemed an effective method to keep children engaged for almost 2 hours. These tests did not seem to be regular, teachers did not seem to come prepared for it or do it in planned manner. It served the purpose to keep

children engaged when teachers had tasks to complete in the office or just did not want to teach. In some cases it was an effective tool to create fear among children too.

Teaching was found better in some upper primary schools. Even here, it was routine and non-participatory. There was an element of surprise every time a teacher came to the class as to what s/he would teach. In some cases, after settling down in the class, the teacher asked children what they would like to learn that day. Indeed, it was more appropriate to use the word “reading” than “learning” to describe what went on in the class in the name of teaching-learning. The glimpse of a day in class is reported in the box below. Dalit, Muslim or other marginalised children seated in the class were little respected “learners” in the class. They were rarely noticed, included or encouraged to participate in the classroom processes. This kind of non-teaching, and disrespect to Dalit and Muslim child may be a prime reason for them getting “pushed out” from education system.

5.5 No Teaching in Mixed Classrooms

“Due to mixed classes, children are unable to learn. Children keep fighting with each other in the class, boys participate better compared to girls. Boys are first in solving any kind of questions than girls. SC and Muslim children are most irregular children in class; they are absent almost 50% of the days in a month”

Teacher, PWSMS 4

In majority of schools, children of two or more classes were taught in a single classroom. During such times, children may not be segregated based on the class they studied in, but were seated together on the basis of gender or caste/religious identities. Children also changed their seating within some given broad frames and hence did not seem to sit as per their classes in the mixed classes. Teachers reported difficulty in teaching due to multiple classes sitting together. They found it difficult to attend to two classes within the given 45 minutes. To follow syllabus of two or more classes at the same time according to them was difficult. Most of the classroom teaching time went in managing children, making children read out or copy from the black board. Very little, if any, of the training on class room management and multi-grade teaching techniques that were part of the CRC/BRC training modules seemed to be brought into practical use in managing the classroom. Very little thought seemed to be on what children had to learn or how to ensure children comprehended the lessons.

5.6 One Day in a Classroom

78 Muslim and 5 Dalit children were enrolled in this school. I sat in class 4-5 which were combined. 16 children came into the classroom after the assembly at 10.30 am. Children kept themselves engaged talking among themselves. At 11am, Head Mistress entered the classroom and started hitting Akhtari Khatun (5th class) with wooden hand fan for not cleaning the classroom properly. She shouted “why have you not cleaned the entire classroom and not thrown the garbage out? Tum bekar ho (you are a waste)” She said, and left the class.

Another male teacher arrived at 11.15 am, along with a mechanic from CRC for some repair work. The mechanic left the school after 10 minutes. The male teacher also left the school after marking his attendance at HM.

At 11.33am, the Head teacher and another teacher (male) again entered the class and started arguing with researcher rudely. The teacher threatened the researchers saying that, “Do not try to report any thing about us, you are coming from NGO and learn to behave like NGO. He further elaborated his points shouting, “I also am a rich person; I have 13 bigha land. Why should I be getting just Rs 7000 for teaching where as other teachers get Rs 32,000 and that is why everything is like this in school”.

Both teachers left the class once again.

Children were shouting and fighting with each other. Arsalan, who also studied in a private school was undisturbed, writing in his notebook. Firduas, a student of 5th class, brought some books from library (given by local NGO) and distributed among few students. Children got engaged in reading and writing from these books on their own.

It was 12.40pm; no teaching had taken place in the school like many other days.

Two boys left the school with their books,

Another girl left the school saying that she had to go for tuition,

Few girls were still in classroom and played till 2.30pm,

Children from 1st, 2nd and 3rd class left at 12pm,

Teachers closed the school at 2.30 and left.

Government Primary Urdu School, Bhusaula Danapur, Patna

5.7 Some of the prominent teacher-teaching related issues reiterated:

Unequal salary payment is major cause for discontent among teachers. Nijojit teachers, particularly those that came from the dominant sections in the village did not take interest in teaching and were open about it with both the observers and also with children “why they should be teaching when they were paid less and were not paid on par with other regular teachers when we do the same work? They demanded payment on the principle of ‘equal pay for equal work’. Thus while the purpose of recruiting contract teachers were to address the shortage of teachers, the purpose was not served as they did not take interest in teaching.

Lack of capacity among large number of nijojit teachers was evident. They lacked necessary knowledge about the subjects they were to teach or teaching skills and thus were not effective in their teaching. The head teacher along with one/two other regular teacher were trained and experienced, but they did not extend support to the nijojit teachers nor shared their teaching skills and knowledge of teaching. The role of the head teacher here was critical in promoting and ensuring a healthy learning environment, but ‘child learning was clearly not at the center of schools and teachers’.

Poor teacher attendance, particularly in schools, which were located in Dalit or Muslim habitations. This was combined with poor teaching and poor children attendance. Various incidents reported in the field visits showed teachers were biased against Dalit and Muslim children's interest in education. They strongly believed that education was of no use for these communities and even communicated this directly.

Teacher complaints and issues were not addressed by the administration on time or adequately. Teachers did not feel they were respected/heard even by the education administrators and resented it. They reported that even when they reported issues/needs of the schools, there was no response from the administration. They continued to raise issues in the CRC/BRC meetings that took place every month, but there were no plans made by the CRC/BRC to address them. The conditions in these schools were pathetic and can be said to face "institutional discrimination" by school administration. The teachers also lost interest in improving the school or engaging in teaching children.

Nexus between government and private schools is another concern. Govt. of Bihar had undertaken the "purification of enrolment register (removing the names of those children who were enrolled in government schools but attending private schools, and also removing the names of children who were absent for long). However the practice continued with children registering themselves in the government schools, but attending private schools. Teachers were comfortable that a portion of their students would perform better in their lessons. While one would imagine this to negatively affect the teacher's self dignity, it did not seem to be so, rather worked out conveniently for the teachers. Thus there was nexus between the government and private schools and those who could afford attended the private schools. Those who could not depended upon the government schools alone, and much teaching did not seem to go on there.

Tuitions seemed to have become mandatory supplement to school learning even in rural areas and even lower grades. While teachers reported that they did not engage in private tuitions, teachers were found to help children complete their tuition work during classroom teaching time. This made one suspect that the teachers themselves were engaged in private tuitions or they were in liaison with the private tuition teachers. The situation was also strange in that teachers allowed children to complete their tuition homework during class hours. Both the above situations informed and shaped the attitude of teachers that they did not have to really worry about teaching in schools, because the children who wanted to study took tuitions and went forward in their studies. Dalit, Muslims and other marginalized children were most affected as they often could not afford these tuitions and even if they do, they did so for some subjects and intermittently or go to teachers who charge less, also compromising on the teaching and learning.

Teacher concern or sensitivity to Dalit and Muslim students was minimal to say the least. They were discriminatory and derisive telling them that they only come to school for food, scholarship and uniform. This de-motivated them and many of them did not show interest in coming to school and even altogether gave up any efforts to learn. The teacher training programmes did not seem to address teacher beliefs and attitudes about caste or religious identities or about these children.

One may define some **classrooms non-functional**. They did not have blackboards, had leaky roofs or were used as storage places etc. Teachers accommodated all children in available class rooms and there were no mechanisms of managing these multi-grade class rooms or multiple classes managed by different teachers in the same room.

Community was not engaged in the school processes. While the adhoc SMC was put in place, schools were not interested to let them function. Some of them did not know they were members, and nobody knew how to fulfill their roles and responsibilities even as the state reported that training had been provided to SMC and PRI members under RtE. Teachers did not feel themselves accountable to SMC or community and this was least where the teachers were dominant castes and community Dalit or Muslim. The community also did not have the confidence or the mechanism to engage with or monitor the school as mandated.

5.8. Children's perceptions about their school/classroom

5.8.1. Teaching is Not efficient or Interesting

Discussions were held with children about their opinion on their schools and class rooms. Children by and large expressed that they liked coming to school and they liked some teachers who taught well. Indicators for teaching well were that the teachers repeated what they were teaching several times, ensuring children understood it. Interestingly children liked some teachers who gave them homework! However, almost all children described their school as "inefficient and unattractive" place and that, 'lots more needs to be done to improve our schools'.

Children repeatedly expressed concern about nonteaching in schools and their not learning. On one hand teachers had genuine constraints as shortage of teachers, lack of class room space, burden of non-teaching work etc. However the study found no teaching in many schools even when number of children in the class room was limited and manageable and there were adequate number of teachers. What seemed to come forth were children's own concern to understand and learn and their willingness to go through some discomforts (like homework) in the process of learning. What seemed unacceptable was that they did not understand and that made schooling irrelevant to them. Added were various dimensions of dignity, recognition, participation and lack of teacher concern for them.

5.8.2 Corporal Punishments

While corporal punishments have been banned, it continued to be the reality for many children. Children uniformly spoke about this in both the districts. The type of corporal punishment varied from beating by hand, canes or shouting

"Sir, always use canes stick to punish us, even if some child has committed silly mistake, he hit them hard! Many teachers in school keep telling us that we are not good students. I understand one thing very well that, " no teachers in our school teach us properly, that is why people always say that private schools are better than government schools. It is just because of government teachers' careless attitude towards teaching, they (teachers) some how strongly believe that they will keep getting their payments and they don't have to be accountable for teaching in school"

RK (student) MPMS 4

on children badly. There was two divergent perceptions on corporal punishments. Children who were considered bright and considered the top 8 in the class, felt teachers were justified in giving corporal punishments when students were not attentive, did not do their work and created mischief. Children who were considered weak and the bottom 8 in the class were of the opinion that teachers were biased in giving harsh punishments to them, they considered teachers to be partial to 'bright' students. They resented being the victims of corporal punishments almost on daily basis, even when they were not at fault. One of the prime reasons for dropping out of school stated by Out of school children was the undue and harsh corporal punishments.

5.8.2. Children's concern about attendance

Attendance was important to children as they needed 75% attendance to receive some of the entitlements like scholarship, cycles etc. Teachers followed two patterns while taking attendance: in some schools teachers read out the roll number such as 1, 2, 3.....etc. and in some schools teachers read out names of the students. The roll number calling was fast and attendance was marked without actually verifying the child's presence in the class. In this process children were not clear if they were marked absent or present. Many times, attendance-taking process was chaos when children surrounded the teacher, were shouting and trying to get their attendance marked. All active children manage to get their attendance marked and rest depended on the teacher to read out their names/roll numbers. The researchers found girls following the teachers till the last hour checking if they were marked present or absent. Given the social distance and hesitation of the Dalit and Muslim children, many of them did not approach the teachers to check if they were marked absent or present.

5.8.3. Marginalised children were not able to follow the teaching

As mentioned earlier, blackboard was the only medium used for teaching students. In many schools children sitting in the last row could hardly see the board or what was written on it. As also mentioned earlier, even when not regularized or fixed, observations in 12 schools showed that the last rows was occupied by Dalit children. In addition, it was also found that the teachers voice, beginning from attendance taking, rarely reached the last child in the class, nevertheless, teacher continued teaching without checking with the children. Teaching both oral and on the board reached primarily children in the front rows and teachers concentrated primarily on their learning. Invariably they were boys from dominant⁴⁸ communities or girls from dominant communities. These children actively participated in the teaching learning processes while those at the back hardly were paid any attention by the teachers.

⁴⁸ It must be kept in mind that 'dominant community' here do not imply the fixed notions under caste being Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysyas etc, rather communities that come higher in the ladder in the particular context. In many cases Other Backward Castes constituted the dominant communities in these contexts too.

5.8.4 All children did not receive books

Many Dalit children complained about school not providing books on time and even when provided, not to all Dalit children; resulting in them attending school without books for a significant part of academic year. In some cases Muslim children also came to school without books. Instead of understanding the children and addressing the administrative delays in distributing books to schools on time, teachers did not hesitate in rebuking the child who continued to come to school every day even without books and with whatever learning materials he/she had. Children also anticipated and braced oneself for the scolding or abuse for no fault of their own.

5.8.5 Teacher Attitude to 'non-learners'

"A child from Majhi (Musahar) community had books but he was unable to read when asked by teacher, teacher scolded him rudely saying that if he doesn't know reading, what was the point in bringing bundles of book every day in to class"

PWSPS 5

The attitude and behavior of teachers in not understanding the constraints of these children and appreciate their interest to access learning can be part of 'default' caste bias and attitudes, even when not intentional. Dalit and Muslim children may not be perceived as individual learners or pursuers of knowledge, rather as members of communities that were not traditionally considered worthy of knowledge and learning and hence intruders or misfits into the school space. In the case of Muslim children, community also known for artisan and entrepreneurship than formal learning, many other 'default' mindsets may be active among teachers against their participation and learning. Children from these communities were not valued as active creators or seekers of knowledge and this was constantly transmitted to children in the form of their interactions, behaviors, academic and non-academic tasks allocated to different group of students within school hours.

5.9 Peer relationships did not support cooperative learning

When asked of a group of children about their friends in school, SA said that he would not like to have friendship with two classmates because they always talked to him, "either you go to Pakistan from Hindustan on your own, else we will send you". He said he did not like it.

Student, PWSMS – 2

Children interaction within and outside the classroom was interesting and insightful. They always found numerous spaces within school hours to express their feelings about each other or about teachers or about school functioning. Their engagement could also be facilitated towards increased participation and cooperation, friendship in academic and non-academic activities. Researchers interacted with several children from Dalit, Muslim, general/others to understand their feelings and attitudes that shaped their mindset and behavior within and outside the school. By and large, children followed teacher's attitudes and behavior towards other children. Thus it was not surprising that attitude of general caste children towards Dalit and Muslim children were derogatory and derisive.

It was common to find a stated and visible distance between girls and boys. Girls had their own group largely based on which habitation and community they came from. Many girls during FGDs stated that they did not wish to interact with boys inside or outside the class, because they generally passed bad comments and misbehaved with them. While there were messages about girl children's education and abilities, these were not reinforced by teachers in their classes or day to day interaction with children. Hence they remained on the walls, even as all children could also repeat them.

Dalit or Muslim children were not recognized by teachers as being capable, worthy or having skills and knowledge that are appreciable. They were often linked to their caste/community identities, stereotypes and occupations. There was thus little interest in other

children to engage or build friendship with these children. All children thus remained in their own ghettoized and isolated groups. Being considered privileged groups, children of general castes did not suffer as children from Dalit and Muslim communities. This led to complete isolation or non participation by Dalit and other marginalized children during teaching process.

"Teacher engaged with OBC boys throughout the class. Students asked to leave and did not return to class and teachers did not care. An SC spent five minutes asking permission to leave the classrooms and teacher did not even notice it. She returned to her seat and while doing so, accidentally brushed against non-Dalit girl with wet hands. The non-Dalit girl started to scold her, but she did not notice and went ahead to her seat. Only OBC students asked questions in the class. Teacher did not call any girl by name. Teacher referred a child "panditji" and interestingly all children in the school call that particular boy panditji too".

Researcher, MPMS 5

Their lack of participation in addition to identity got mixed with the concept of "merit", where school (teachers) created the perception that 'good children' were synonymous with 'meritorious' children who will be valued and given opportunities to participate in school based academic tasks. Other children who are not good in studying ("non-meritorious") will be asked to clean the classrooms, throw the garbage out from school campus, clean the toilets, chase animals out from school boundary, water the plants etc. These were carried on from morning assembly until school closing time. The same perceptions were also brought into teaching where teachers were clearly not interested in building self-esteem or capacities of children from communities who were not worthy of it. Dalit or Muslim children also did not feel interested or pushed to do their best in these contexts. Caste study from first draft

The religious identity of Muslim children overrides their caste identity and, by and large, the Muslim community continued to deny exclusion within the community on the basis of caste. There have been some initial enquiry and acknowledgement of caste in more recent times. While discussing with a group of Muslim girls at Urdu Middle school in Gaya; they too shared, "We all are friends and visit each other houses almost every day. Don't you know? We do not belong to different caste community; we belong to Muslim society!"

Non-Muslim children had several prejudices against Muslim community and children and against their occupation/living conditions. Trivial mistakes of Muslim children invited derisive comments

and violent reaction from non-Muslim children including from Dalit children. Comments were always based on religion against Muslim children. In Gaya, when a Muslim child pinched his classmate, an OBC child, child violently reacted shouting, “oye, Miandiyee wala ki...”. In another school in Patna, children made fun of a Muslim child in class who helped his father in running a provision store near the school.

As reported many times in this report, attitudes and values in the schools were mere reflections of social norms and values in society at large. The central role of education should be to evaluate social values and norms, challenging them where necessary and evolving ones along Constitutional values and norms does not seem an agenda for the schools today. In such context, Dalit, Muslim, girls, and other marginalised children would sooner or later get alienated from the system.

5.10. Dalit Teachers

Based on our methodology of sample selection, there was only one SC community teacher who was interviewed. In one of the schools, the study came across the situation of a particular Dalit teacher,

“During the field visit, a man from the local Rajput community abused the head teacher who belonged to SC community regarding a hand pump in the school compound that was not working. On discussing the issue with the dominant community (Rajput community), they complained of irregularities in the schools. The teacher was castigated on grounds of mismanagement of the school. They also told that he (teacher) did not visit the community and there was high drop out from the school. Later on checking with the Dalit community on the issue, they reported that the school was located in dominant castes (Rajput Basti) and the land belonged to Rajput family. Rajput families used the hand pump for their domestic purpose and at times did not allow school children to use it. The teacher tried to negotiate on behalf of the school. They threatened and abused him that they will not allow MDM to be cooked in the school until hand pump was repaired and at last, the MDM was not cooked that day.”

Researcher, MPPS 5

once again pointing to how social identity plays role in their school performance.

In concluding this section, as seen from enrolment data, large numbers of Dalit and Muslim children were entering the schools at class one. It is also a fact that non-Dalit, non-poor children were not attracted to government schools and opted for private schools and considered it better quality schooling. As schools and classrooms were not transacting their primary task of teaching, children were of the opinion that they did not learn much even when they came regularly to school and attended classes. Schools were the prime source and space for learning for Dalit and Muslim children who did not have persons to encourage and support them at home nor could they afford good quality tuitions. They thus depended upon the schools for providing them quality education and both children and parents were concerned this was not happening in the schools.

Teachers were not found to teach during the entire class or complete their syllabus. Teachers perceived some children being 'good or meritorious' and further affirmed them and encouraged their learning. Those considered 'non-meritorious' were not given opportunities to learn or participate, creating a vicious cycle of disabilities for these children. In addition a large number of teachers were not professionally qualified. Despite these obvious limitations in the school system, the onus of not learning was put on children and then labeled 'not interested or non-meritorious'. Teacher capacities in subject content and their ability to transact the curriculum was also poor in many instances.

Many Dalit and Muslim children who enrolled into schools left within a year or two, particularly Musahar children, who left even in classes 2 and 3. About half stayed on till class 5 and more than half left by class VIII. This huge wastage of resources and the resultant loss of human resources in the country is a serious concern. Various factors from shortage of teachers to lack of trained teachers to lack of class room spaces, lack of academic support, lack of monitoring – in fact everything that went on in and around the school contributed to this, but at the cutting edge were the teachers, and parents held them responsible for their children not learning. It is imperative and urgent to take measures to improve the teaching-learning processes in the class rooms.

It was evident that there were serious issues about teacher perceptions and attitudes towards Dalit and Muslim children in schools. While teacher attitudes and behavior was complex, clear dichotomies were visible across different binaries: girls and boys, children from dominant communities and children from marginalized communities; children who were meritorious and non-meritorious children to name a few. Their own affiliation and affinity to certain social groups, distance from other social groups was also perceptible in their attitude and behavior. Teachers holding the position they have in the minds of children, created similar attitudes and behavior among them too. Their given attitude and behavior towards Dalits, Muslims and other marginalized children being discriminatory and derisive, general caste children repeated the same behavior. The Muslim children fared the worst as also some of the more vulnerable Dalit children as the Musahars as even other Dalit children discriminated against them and did not engage with them. The CRC/BRC trainings on building class room environment and multi-grade class room management did not seem to have the necessary content on conviction to change these patterns and need review with experts from within these communities. Teachers did not seem to take any effort/or did not have the skills to promote inclusion in schools, which was narrowly understood as providing ramps and rails for CWSN, excluding the other sections of children who also needed to be brought into the frame of social inclusion in schools.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Dalit and Muslim children experience exclusion, discrimination and unfair treatment in schools linked to their devalued and stigmatized social and cultural identities based on caste location as 'ex-untouchable' (Scheduled Castes), and Minority (Muslims) status and gender (which is cross cutting) compounded by poverty, unequal relations of power and regional inequalities. Prejudices are prevalent about food habits, cultural patterns, cleanliness and even their nationality. Even within these social groups, certain sections of children are more marginalized/excluded (Musahar children, children of parents engaged in leather work, engaged in cleaning occupations, temporary migrants, children of sex workers etc). Stigma is also experienced in specific conditions such as disability or other illness such as HIV, leprosy, and so on. Migration and destitution are also situations where children are unable to access schools and are therefore excluded. Given the vastness and diversity of our society and the uneven nature of development there are likely to be general as well as context specific issues that relate to exclusion and discrimination in the society and how they are manifest in schools. Efforts towards social inclusion with equity need to be addressed accordingly. The rights based approach under the RtE will strengthen the equity-inclusion perspectives in its implementation.

From the perspective of Dalit and Muslim children, social accessibility rather than mere physical availability of schools is important. The absence of basic facilities and functional conveniences in schools such as adequate classroom space, furniture to sit, toilets and drinking water are also equity issue as they reflect 'unequal treatment of schools', and denies children the experience of education in conditions that respect their dignity and well being. Further, these are promoted through exclusions and discriminations within the institutional policies and mechanisms. Within schools exclusion and discrimination may be reflected in school norms, practices and social relations that deny children opportunities to participate within the institution in the curricular and extra-curricular spheres as well as in teacher-student and peer relations. Many of these practices may not be visible and are often normalized. While there should be zero tolerance for any forms of discrimination and exclusion within the school it is equally important that the school pro- actively creates opportunities to break down barriers, creates opportunities and encourage the participation of children together in all spheres of school life. This is an area that could give teachers an agency in developing this kind of ethos/environment. These are important concerns that must be integrated into an understanding of quality education and the RtE implementation.

This study interrogated the social identities of Dalit and Muslim children in relation to their experiences and engagement in the elementary classrooms and schools in Bihar. Going beyond the commonly used indicators of infrastructure and school provisions, it focused on the teaching-learning processes in class rooms and how Dalit and Muslim children engaged with the same. The study also explored peer relationships between Dalit, Muslim children with General Caste children in terms of perceptions about one another, academic collaboration and support, engagement inside and outside the classrooms.

The educational limitations of these children are commonly attributed to their family and community backgrounds. Lack of educated parents, poverty, engaging children in income and production activities are common perceptions. However, studies have highlighted growing community interest and commitment to education. This study underscores the need for more school level studies to understand the experiences of Dalit, Muslim as well as other marginalised children and the barriers and constraints they face in schools, particularly in relation to their identities. These are essential to both address school level limitations as well as to supplement family/community limitations, wherever applicable. Greater and more systematic engagements are essential between the parents/community and the schools in this regard.

Some studies have highlighted discrimination and exclusion issues of Dalit children in schooling. There is very little information about the experiences of Muslim children in schools. The state provisions as well as civil society engagements with the Muslim community in the realm of education is coloured by various perceptions about the community in terms of preference for religious education, the need for 'urdu medium' schools, perceptions about Muslim girls education, etc. Given that Muslim children constitute sizeable population in the state, further dialogue with the community is important to promote better access and facilities for Muslim children in schools.

While reducing gender and social group gaps in education have been under focus, the interventions are not holistic and comprehensive. Provisions have invariably been to subsidise school costs in terms of uniforms, books and scholarships as well as provide food and nutrition. While these are important, they have not been adequate to address the large proportion of Dalit and Muslim children dropping out from various levels of school education. The system is yet to value and appreciate their knowledge and experiences to make them integral to the learning for all children. There is increasing recognition of the need to incorporate their cultural and identity issues into school system, curriculum, and teaching learning processes to make it more relevant and contextual to these children. A more holistic approach integrating their knowledge and experiences as well as addressing their specific limitations and historic deprivations are essential to ensure their rights under RtE. Better allocation and utilisation of budgetary resources with greater transparency and accountability to the marginalised communities need to be put in place. Special budgetary provisions under SCSP and MsDP need to be fine-tuned to address the special limitations of Dalit and Muslim children in education. Better use of equity funds under SSA need be explored.

The study is important for the school system in Bihar as well as at the national level in going beyond corroborating proxy indicators with quality education to observe and understand the teaching-learning practices inside class rooms. Given that the 12th FYP recognises quality education as the central need for the education system, this study is important and a first of its kind in understanding what goes on inside class rooms in promoting/not promoting quality education in the government schools. It can thus provide important indicators as we search for policy and strategy options.

The RtE Act makes broad commitment to providing not just equitable quality education, but also to provide conditions under which children from marginalized communities can access equal opportunities. The Act and rules however fall short in detailing these norms, rather fall into detailing infrastructure and school management norms as proxy indicators towards equitable quality

education. Ensuring non-discriminatory and inclusion in the school system in terms of providing welcome environment, curriculum that includes marginalized children, teaching-learning practices that can promote greater participation and leadership building of the most marginalized children.

The study underscores that discrimination and exclusion are naturalised and difficult to capture in our context. They need focused attention and efforts to identify and address. In this context, the study provides a frame to capture various dimensions of exclusion and discriminations in schools. These are provided as possible checklists and are useful for teachers and schools to track marginalised children in their participation and within the teaching-learning processes inside schools and classrooms. The indicators cover six dimensions as representation, recognition, affirmation action, non-discrimination, participation and learning outcomes. The frame explores two levels of compliance as 'minimum and essential standards'.

The study makes the following recommendations, based on the insights from Dalit and Muslim children, general caste children, teachers and head teachers in diverse spheres of school management and teaching-learning processes. The study considers them necessary first steps in promoting better participation and learning outcomes for Dalit, Muslim and other marginalised children in the long journey to translating the Constitutional values of equality, liberty, fraternity and social justice.

Recommendations

1. Expand the equity-inclusion frame with regard to school education

A major limitation of the inclusion frame within the education department is its narrow focus on CWSN. Given our context, large sections of children need to be brought within the purview of inclusion; Dalit, Muslim, Tribal, Nomadic and De-notified tribes, Migrants and other children who are at risk of not gaining education or gaining poor quality education. Teachers and school management committees should be oriented towards understanding this broad frame of social inclusion than the narrow focus on including children with special needs.

Recommendation 1: Expand the framework on social exclusion-equity-inclusion within the education system beyond addressing CWSN issues and develop necessary instruments and mechanisms to improve understanding among education administrators, teachers and VSS members. Review formats and mechanism for effective implementation of equity-inclusion measures.

2. Promote better representation of Dalit and Muslim community in curriculum and class room processes.

Dalit and Muslim children constitute considerable population in the state as well as at the national levels. The objective to reduce social and gender gaps in education has been more or less equated to greater enrolment than a holistic perspective on reviewing education content and systems and make it best suited to the needs and aspirations of these children. Except for some reference to Dr B. R Ambedkar, there is little in the curriculum and content that can connect these children to education. There is hardly any content that Muslim children can identify with or take pride in.

Recommendation 2: Set up an academic committee with higher proportion of Dalit and Muslim representatives to review the current text books and curriculum to identify any forms of exclusion, discrimination or stereotype and remove them. Mandate the committee to develop/collate materials that can promote better understanding and appreciation of these communities to be included in the curriculum and text books.

3. Move beyond understanding to real-time inclusion

There has been enhanced recognition of the large numbers of hitherto excluded sections coming to government schools as first generation learners. The need to orient and sensitise teachers to understand the issues and needs of these children have also been underscored, even though there has been little efforts on the same. It is recommended that the perspective be pushed further to go beyond understanding to real time inclusion. A much deeper debate is essential on the rationale and process of inclusion. A strategy reported by SSA is that ‘entitlements are universalised to remove discrimination’ meaning that textbooks, uniforms given earlier only to SC and ST students have been made uniform now so that other children will not discriminate against those that had received these entitlements. While the step to universalise these provisions is appreciated, discrimination does not go away without efforts to address the basis of discrimination and create genuine appreciation across social groups.

Recommendation 3: Include experts from Dalit and Muslim communities in developing and reviewing teacher education modules and in their trainings too. Create additional reading materials on these communities that can be used by teachers and also provided to children. Encourage and support teachers to positively present the culture, knowledge and contribution of these communities to the larger class so that all children understand and recognise these children and communities for their real strengths. Build shelf of inclusion activities and orient teachers for promoting active engagement of children across communities inside and outside class rooms. These need also be included into the teacher self-monitoring formats currently being promoted.

4. Prioritise Infrastructure investments in Dalit and Muslim tolas

The RtE norms for infrastructure and the NCF guidelines for using infrastructure as teaching-learning tools and spaces provide us fairly robust frame for infrastructure investments, quality and usage. Bihar had in most cases, fulfilled and complied with the distance norms in providing primary and secondary schools while other challenges remain. The study observed that there is lesser provision of schools in tolas with high Muslim population and infrastructure provisions are poorer in Dalit dominated tolas. The presence of a school with good infrastructure and welcome colourful environment in the habitations of Dalit and Muslim tolas has social benefits in addition to education. It will go a long way in enhancing connect between these communities with schools and build confidence in them to further encourage children to access schools.

Recommendation 4: Expand the provisions of elementary schools in Dalit and Muslim tolas where the distance is greater than 1 km and 3 kms. Make higher investments on priority basis in schools

located in Dalit and Muslim tolas to ensure that they comply with all infrastructure norms under RtE in time bound manner to fulfil not just the distance norms but also the social benefits of social inclusion and equity. Upgrade primary schools located in Dalit and Muslim habitations to include upper primary sections and promote children from general castes to access them.

5. Develop and implement 'Usability Audit' for Infrastructure facilities

Availability of schools may not be an issue any more in most part of Bihar where schools have been either upgraded or made available in the vicinity of almost all population. The challenge is to ensure they are functional. A suitable means would be to develop tool that can assess the 'usability' of these infrastructure than their mere presence.

Recommendation 5: Develop indicators and audit infrastructure facilities from the 'usability' perspective and incorporate it into the school checklist that is currently on the anvil.

6. Map vulnerable children and track disaggregated data at all levels

While RtE mandated children be mapped within six months of the Act, this is yet to be done in Bihar. Incongruence between data sets is high and doubts are expressed about the DISE which is the prime data set on school education. Further, the DISE and other departmental data do not currently track all the different groups of marginalised children. It is desirable that disaggregated tracking is done with as much details as possible in the said context at the school/block and district levels. It is important to have information on 'particularly vulnerable groups' be they among STs, SCs or Muslims in our context.

Recommendation 6: Identify and track the enrolment, participation, retentions and learning outcomes of vulnerable groups of children on all possible indicators of social exclusion and education disabilities including 'particularly vulnerable groups' of children within SC, ST and Minority communities. Entrust the task to head teachers and VSS members.

7. Adopt effective ways to ensure OoSC are identified and enrolled.

The study found considerable confusion on how to identify out of school children. There was also unwillingness to identify them given the complexity of tasks associated with ensuring their enrolment and support in schools. While state reported a small number of OoSC and outlined measures to enrol them, the numbers are much larger and efforts are needed at every school level.

Recommendation 7: Head teacher and VSS president are empowered to take measures to ensure that no child is out of school in the catchment areas. This identification and tracking need to be important agenda for VSS meetings. Partnership with local civil society organisations, particularly those led by affected communities, may be engaged in this process.

8. Adopt innovative ways for capacity building and engagement of Dalit and Muslim VSS representatives.

VSS is mandated to have oversight of schools and develop school development plans. The current two-days one time trainings are hardly sufficient to do this. It is suggested that local civil society organisations be identified and encouraged to provide consistent handholding support to the VSS. Special support may be needed to bring in issues of Dalit and Muslim children into the VSS deliberations and a mandatory agenda of the VSS meetings may be on issues of social exclusion-equity-inclusion. VSS members may also be brought together at the block level periodically, once in two months along with the civil society organisations to share experiences, learn lessons and develop effective strategies to improve their schools.

Recommendation 8: Develop mechanism in collaboration with civil society organisations to provide continuous training and handholding support to VSS members, with particular focus on SC, ST, Minority VSS members to address social exclusion and promote equity-social inclusion. Ensure that VSS members track and address issues of discrimination and exclusion. Specify representation from Muslim and parents of CWSN in the VSS constitution.

9. Community Mobilisation and functioning of Tola Sevaks/Talim e markaz

Bihar state rightly identified the need for community awareness and mobilisation and additional support to Dalit and Muslim children to enhance their retention and learning in schools. The Tola Sevaks and Talim Markaz are innovative ideas in this direction and had been effective in enhancing children's access to schooling even from Musahar communities. However the structure in which these education facilitators are located and function is not conducive to the tasks entrusted to them. Having already the experience and success of Mahila Samakya in promoting girls education and reducing gender gaps in the state and across the country, it is suggested that similar structures are evolved to organise and support these volunteers to their tasks. A semi autonomous body linked to the school education department can be created bringing together the strength of the government and voluntary sectors which will coordinate and oversee their training and functioning. The structures need to be at state, district and block level. Accountability to the education system need to be built up at larger levels than to individual schools and capacity building needs to be invested in too.

Recommendation 9: Re-organise the Tola Sevaks and Talim Markaz functioning as semi-autonomous structures similar to that of the Mahila Samakya which has been successfully promoting girls education and women's engagement in education in the state and at the national levels.

10. Code to promote inclusion behaviour in schools

The state has been putting efforts to train teachers and this needs to be enhanced. Teacher training module/content compulsorily needs to have gender, caste, religion and cultural sensitization module. SSA revised framework and several field studies and experiences already recognized different forms of exclusion based on caste, religion and ethnicity. It is important to recognize these forms of

exclusion and develop certain behavioural code of conduct at within school premises. School and school administration needs to write down its code of conduct on the main wall of school.

Recommendation 10: Evolve code of conduct to incorporate values of equality and fraternity for teachers and children in schools. Incorporate these into school monitoring systems like Samjhe-Seekein to ensure their integration into quality interventions.

11.Redress Mechanism to address discrimination at all levels

School in collaboration with VSS members should develop certain mechanism to address any kind of complaint related to gender, caste, religion or any kind of identity based discrimination. State should provide guidelines to promote non-discrimination to all schools and facilitate them to address it. The current guideline from the MHRD can be a beginning. The VSS should set up a sub-committee to take up these matters on priority and time-bound manner. NGOs/educationist, CWC members should be member of this committee.

Recommendation 11: Build the grievance redress mechanism identifying responsible authorities at all levels for addressing various kinds of grievances in the school as well as the education system. Ensure issues of discrimination and exclusion and unfair treatment are captured and addressed in the grievance redress mechanisms.

12.Convergence with other departments

The SC/ST welfare department, Minority commission, SC commission are engaged in education as well as promoting the welfare of the concerned communities and children, Convergence between these departments including budget allocation and utilisation can go a long way to synergise the different efforts in a holistic frame for promoting education of SC, ST and Minority children.

Recommendation 12: Build convergence mechanisms under the RtE Act implementation for building synergy between the efforts of Education department with the SC welfare, ST welfare and Minority Welfare departments.

13.Utilisation of SCSP, Minority and Innovation funds

The SCSP and MsDP funds have been set up to reduce development gaps between SCs and Muslims and other communities. Innovation funds is designed to identify special needs of Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim and other marginalized children and develop inclusive activities to (re)integrate them in to schools. These funds need to address the specific disabilities of children from these communities at school and habitation levels. Civil society organisations may be engaged wherever necessary.

Recommendation 13: Develop context specific and need based schemes and programmes under the Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP) and Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MsDP) funds to address the specific barriers and constraints faced by SC, ST and Muslim children in enjoying equal rights to, in and through education. These may include campaigns against discrimination, untouchability, stereotype against these children and communities. It may include additional

scholarships to meet education needs, may include community based academic support, may include community learning spaces in the habitations with adequate infrastructure and facilities, may include libraries in the habitations, may include special exposure and personality development programmes, may include conscious inclusion activities etc.

14.GO- NGO Collaboration

There are a number of NGOs in Bihar, some of their leadership from SC and Muslim communities too. These leaders are better educated and have engaged with the education system and are in a position to be the best interface with the community. They are also located within their own communities and continue to have day to day engagement with the community. They can be effectively engaged to become role models and promote education within the community in a systematic partnership with the government through the RtE mechanism. Similar efforts in the NREGA implementation in Andhra Pradesh may be reviewed in this regard.

Given that educated youth from the affected communities are taking up development efforts for their communities, recommended that they are looked upon as experts on the issues of the community. Investing on these leaders will have better outcomes given that they are locally located, have indepth understanding of the issues of the community and have longterm stakes in the community. A pro-active approach is needed to promote their engagement in the sector.

Recommendation 14: Develop a GO-NGO collaboration platform to promote the Right to Education for All children. The modalities can be worked out at all levels from schools, clusters, blocks, district and state levels where the GO and NGOs come together periodically to analyse the challenges in enforcing RtE and take adequate measures in collaboration. It is recommended that this collaboration is not based on funding individual NGOs to begin with, but supporting collective engagements in the light of RtE implementation. It is suggested that nodal organisations from NGOs and nodal officers from the department are identified to carry the process forward.

15.Deepening Understanding

There is need for further enhancing and deepening understanding on issues of exclusion and discrimination. It is recommended that participatory and advocacy oriented studies are taken up engaging members of the community at all levels of the study. They should lead to developing strategies and advocacy. Further NGO members themselves need sensitivity building. It is suggested that such opportunities be given for exposure, study, immersion etc with the communities. It is also recommended that staff sensitivity and understanding of these issues are also part of the recruitment and human resource policy of the organisations.

Recommendation 15: Undertake research studies to unravel different forms of exclusion-discrimination and their impact to inform policies and strategies to address them. Collaboration between academic institutions and civil society organisations and including teachers and education administrators will prove effective in enhancing the knowledge base as well as grounding the recommendations towards building necessary strategies and interventions.

To conclude this study, what is it that children expect from the education system and families, who are duty bound to ensure they enjoy their right to education. In their voice, they look forward to – want schools to open on time and have more ‘discipline’, individual classrooms for every class and not mixed class rooms, to get ALL books on time, they want their schools to be cleaner, want adequate toilet facilities, want more teachers to teach them, want all schools to be till class X, want science laboratory in schools, boundary walls in schools, proper school building in schools. While these were common to all children, Dalit and Muslim children expressed their expectation for teachers to be more empathetic and understanding (change in attitude), they wanted schools to provide space to bring their siblings who are currently not in school, and that Urdu be taught as a language in all schools.

At the home front, children from marginalised communities wished their parents would provide them more time to study, that parents and family can provide them calm environment to study, that their homes could have doors, electricity and fans. Other children expressed that they can have a separate study room to themselves at home, a good uninterrupted environment at home to study...

The efforts of the government focused on MahaDalit and Muslim children are appreciative and in the right direction recognising the particular vulnerabilities children from these communities have with regard to education. Quality education is beginning to figure in discussions and initial indicators, however proxy, are being put in place. However, much of these initiatives and strategies are being evolved without adequate consultation with teachers and communities, much less children. There are many gaps in the communication of these strategies across the different layers of school administration, teachers and teacher education institutions. Education officers on the field and teachers seem to have very little buy-in and ownership to these strategies resulting in non-implementation or even active resistance to these strategies. It would be of great value to create opportunities for collective visioning and strategy building across the different institutions and chains of command. Teachers, community and children necessarily need to be brought into the process. During FGDs children expressed their happiness to be involved in the study and their perceptions and responses are as grave and important as that of the policy makers themselves.

The study is a first of its kind in exploring school level issues to understand the education gaps among Dalit and Muslim communities, education inequalities between Dalit, Muslim children and children from general communities. It lays emphasis on class room environment and teaching-learning practices to understand why and how large number of Dalit and Muslim children, enrolling in class 1 sooner than later drop out. The rich class room observations and sensitivity and openness of the research team and their concern to raise issues helped gain insights and interpretations. We are hopeful that this will be a beginning in taking up such studies. More studies are needed with particular group of children and we hope that this will be done. We look forward to taking these insights and building advocacy and strategies for RtE implementation. We are fully conscious that RtE is the first step in a long journey.

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Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion

Aligning People to Policy & Policy to People

The Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion (CSEI), established in 2009 in Delhi, India, focuses on promoting social equity for marginalized communities, particularly Dalit, Tribal, and Minority youth.

CSEI envisions a just, inclusive society where everyone has equal opportunities and capabilities to reach their potential. The organization has evolved through internal and external reflections, leading to three primary streams of work: the Youth Equity Forum (YEF), youth skill development and entrepreneurship, and social policy, research, and advocacy.

Key interventions include promoting Youth Equity Forums, which provide marginalized youth a platform for leadership and action. CSEI also initiated the Girls Learning and Leadership Program (GLLP) in 2020, which supports adolescent girls from marginalized communities through gender and social inclusion curricula, digital literacy, career guidance, and community building. The program has engaged over 2,500 girls and aims to build a girls' collective.

CSEI further supports sexual and reproductive health education, facilitates citizen-generated data for marginalized communities, and partners with community-led organizations (CLOs) to drive transformative social change. Through research, collaboration with curriculum experts, and a focus on civic action, CSEI aims to evolve and empower youth to challenge social inequities continuously.



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