

WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL INDIA

Jyotsna Jha, Neha Ghatak,
Niveditha Menon, Priyanka Dutta
and Shreekanth Mahendiran

ROUTLEDGE



Women's Education and Empowerment in Rural India

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Women's Education and Empowerment in Rural India, as its title suggests, is about understanding women's empowerment in rural India.

In this extremely important book, Jyotsna Jha, Neha Ghatak, Niveditha Menon, Priyanka Dutta, and Shreekanth Mahendiran explore the pathways and roadblocks to women's empowerment. They do this through an evaluation-centered research on Mahila Samakhya in Bihar, a Government of India-funded scheme of the Education Department, aimed at providing 'education for women's equality'.

The book evaluates the impact of the scheme and its interventions on the lives of women from the most marginalised communities. It traces the meaning and the process of the various facets of empowerment as well. These include how women's empowerment effect their mobility; savings; participation in economic activities; self-efficacy; decision-making and political participation. The empowerment of women goes beyond these and has an intergenerational impact as well through the choices they are able to make, about their daughters' education and marriage; And still beyond these, once empowered, they are able to adjust to and negotiate with regard to the dominant social institutions such as the family, and policy processes and their outcomes.

Women's empowerment raises some searching questions about the developmental implications of women's education, and social policy, planning and implementation.

This book will be of enormous value to government departments, and all university departments teaching social sciences specially those teaching politics, education, sociology and gender studies.



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Jyotsna Jha, Neha Ghatak,
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Abbreviations

AIPW	: Augmented Inverse Probability Weighting
AIPWA	: All India Progressive Women's Association
APPEP	: Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project
ATT	: Average Treatment Effect of the Treated
ATE	: Average Treatment Effect
BDC	: Block Development Committee
BEO	: Block Education Officer
BEP	: Bihar Education Project
BIMARU	: Acronym for Sick States of India (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh)
BJP	: Bharatiya Janata Party
BPL	: Below Poverty Line
CBPS	: Centre for Budget and Policy Studies
CM	: Chief Minister
DISE	: District Information System for Education
DPEP	: District Primary Education Programme
DFID	: Department for International Development
EBB	: Educationally Backward Blocks
EPW	: Economic and Political Weekly
FGD	: Focus Group Discussions
FIR	: First Information Report
FW	: Formula Weights
GDI	: Gross Domestic Income
GDP	: Gross Domestic Product
GPI	: Gender Parity Index

GSDP	: Gross State Domestic Product
HDI	: Human Development Index
HH	: Household
HM	: Head Master
HRD	: Human Resource Development
ICDS	: Integrated Child Developments Scheme
IDS	: Institute for Development Studies
IIMA	: Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad
INR	: Indian Rupee
IPW	: Inverse Probability Weighting
IPWRA	: Inverse Probability Weighted Regression Adjustment
JD	: Janata Dal
JK	: Jagjagi Kendra
JP	: Jayaprakash Narayan
KGBV	: Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
KM	: Kilometres
MDM	: Mid-day Meals
MGNREGA	: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MHRD	: Ministry of Human Resource Development
MPI	: Multidimensional Poverty Index
MS	: Mahila Samakhya
MSK	: Mahila Shiksha Kendra
NABARD	: National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
NAC	: National Advisory Council
NDA	: National Democratic Alliance
NEP	: New Education Policy
NFHS	: National Family Health Survey
NGO	: Non-governmental Organisation
NH	: National Highway
OBC	: Other Backward Castes
OPHI	: Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
POCSO	: Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act

PRI	: Panchayati Raj Institutions
PTR	: Pupil Teacher Ratio
RJD	: Rashtriya Janata Dal
RTE	: The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act
RTI	: Right to Information Act
SC	: Scheduled Caste
SCR	: School Classroom Ratio
SDMC	: School Development and Monitoring Committee
SEC	: Sangha Education Committee
SEWA	: Self Employed Women's Association
SHG	: Self Help Group
SPD	: State Project Director
SSA	: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
SSRN	: System Software Reference Number
ST	: Scheduled Tribe
STATATA	: Statistical Software for Professionals
SUTVA	: Stable Unit Treatment Unit Value Assumption
TLM	: Teacher Learning Material
UEE	: Universalisation of Elementary Education
UKODA	: UK Overseas Development Agency
UNDP	: United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	: United Nations Children's Fund
UPA	: United Progressive Alliance
USA	: United States of America
USAID	: United States Agency for International Development
USD	: US Dollars
VAW	: Violence Against Women
VMC	: Village Management Committee
VSS	: Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti



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1 Empowerment, Education and Social Change

Understanding the Conceptual Context of Mahila Samakhya

1.1 Introduction

She told us that she is empowered because she is fearless and she doesn't feel hesitation in doing anything ... Today, she has knowledge and information... for women, knowledge is more important than money. (Personal interview, 23 February 2017)

An empowered woman is [one] who can take decisions, understand the difference between right and wrong things, is educated and has the knowledge on various issues... (Personal interview, 16 April 2017)

Previously, I was not confident enough to express myself and was always reluctant to go out. But now, I have enough courage to face opposition. Now I know what I should do for my rights. Now I can express truth without any fear or hesitation. (Interview, 12 May 2017)

These definitions of empowerment eloquently capture the self-respect, determination, and strength exhibited by women in Bihar who participated in a government programme called Mahila Samakhya. Started in 1986, the Mahila Samakhya (MS) programme mobilised vulnerable women at the grassroots level, using a collective action approach to help women become empowered agents of

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society. By 2014, MS was one of the world's largest government-funded women's empowerment programmes and had served over 1.2 million women across 10 Indian states.

To understand more clearly the ways in which the MS programme was able to transform the lives of millions of women and to document the continuing impact that the programme has had, we embarked on a three-year mixed-method research study that had two broad objectives: (1) to evaluate the impact of the MS programme on the economic empowerment of women, and (2) to use the lessons learned in the study to raise awareness and influence policies that could benefit women. One of the reasons we chose to engage specifically with economic empowerment was to engage more critically with the definition of economic citizenship. If we define economic citizenship as all those economic activities that function in the service of greater political participation and contribute towards building and sustaining mechanisms for social justice and democratic citizenship¹, then it is extremely important to understand women's roles and actions as economic citizens. Given that any model of economic power and citizenship has to be based on structural transformation, rather than a mere entry into the neoliberal market space, we felt that MS offered an ideal ground to study and map the processes by which women become economic citizens through a larger empowerment process and collective action.

In order to engage with this investigation into the nature and process of economic citizenship, we used both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand the long-, medium- and short-term effects of the MS programme on women's social and economic change in three districts – Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar – in Bihar. The quantitative component used data from a one-time survey to analyse the changes in the economic empowerment of women in three districts. The qualitative component used methods of ethnography in the form of narrative analysis through case studies,

¹ APSA Report. 2012. Democratic Imperatives: Innovations in Rights, Participation, and Economic Citizenship: http://www.apsanet.org/Files/Task%20Force%20Reports/TF_DemocracyReport_Final1D_150.pdf

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/jennifer-allsoopp/women-defining-economic-citizenship>

participation observation, and unstructured informal interviews. Together, we were able to map and piece together stories and patterns of women's empowerment that provided insight into the ways in which collective action was able to spark life-long changes in women's view of themselves and their abilities to change the social worlds around them.

To understand more clearly the background on which Mahila Samakhyas operated and the goals which the programme had set for itself, we will first examine the conceptual and historical understanding of women's empowerment itself. Through this, we can more clearly understand the ways in which the different discourses of feminism and development gave rise to conditions suitable for the establishment of a programme such as Mahila Samakhyas. In doing so, we will also examine the philosophy underlying the programme, and the ways in which the structures and processes advocated by the programme directly drew upon the larger socio-political context to create a methodology of empowerment. Finally, we will illustrate the rationale for our research study, the research questions that we wanted answered, as well as the methods that we used to answer these research questions.

1.2 Women's empowerment: Conceptual and historical understanding

The word 'empower' literally means to attain power. In academic discourse, the concept of empowerment has come to indicate unequal distribution of power especially when it comes to marginalised communities and minority groups, while acknowledging that there are other individuals and groups experiencing some form of disempowerment in their everyday life. The concept of empowerment has also been seen as a process of change from an initial state of disempowerment to a state where one is able to effectively encounter power deficiencies, develop strategies and attain empowerment (Solomon 1976; Kabeer 1999), as indicated in one of the testimonies in the previous section. However, Kabeer (1999) rightly points out that there is 'fuzziness' in the way empowerment has been defined and this fuzziness increases when we move from the broader concepts

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of empowerment to narrowing it down in terms of measuring it. Some have advocated for the retention of this fuzziness, so as to ensure its diversity and ability to represent several situations:

I like the term empowerment because no one has defined it clearly yet; so, it gives us a breathing space to work it out in action terms before we have to pin ourselves down to what it means. I will continue using it until I am sure it does not describe what we are doing (Batiwala 1993: 48 as cited in Kabeer 1999).

In some ways, the concept has continued to be interpreted differently by many and has come to mean different things to different stakeholders (Prah 2013). Originally, the term 'empowerment' appeared in Barbara Solomon's book *Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Communities* in 1976. Solomon (1976) defined empowerment as "*a process whereby the social worker engages in a set of activities with the client or client system that aim to reduce the powerlessness that has been created by negative valuation based on membership in a stigmatized group*" (19: *ibid.*). Since this particular use of the term largely applied with respect to minority racial and ethnic populations², it to gain/gaining popularity in contexts of other marginalised groups as well primarily because of its central engagement with the concepts of power.

² The model of intervention related to empowerment, discussed here, constitutes of seven sequential steps '(i) orientation to problem solving, (ii) problem definition and formulation, (iii) generation of alternatives regarding probable causes, (iv) decision-making, (v) implementation, (vi) verification and (vii) termination' (Solomon 1976: 25) where the primary focus and effort of social worker and individual, acting as the causal agent, is confined to identification of power structure and in developing a strategy to solve the problem. Although the author demonstrates the complex relationship between powerlessness and negative valuation, the framework laid down concentrates around processes and mechanisms that tackle negative valuation; and less on development of the individual's capacity, ability and resilience to meet the day-to-day demands of life. This highlights one of the many debates in conceptualisation of empowerment: should empowerment be confined to tackling existing power structures and dominant social organisations or should it be more holistic where the objective is to equip the individuals to be aware and able to formulate their own contingent principles (values), and make informed decisions?

1.2.1 *Conversations of power*

Earlier, women would call her if they had difficulty in solving their own problems. But now, women are able to solve their problems themselves. They are more confident and can work on resolving their own problems.
(Interview, 1 September 2016)

There are multiple ways in which power manifests itself and it can often be the hardest to define. One of the accepted definitions in Sociology has been that of Weber's: 'the ability of an individual or group to achieve their own goals or aims when others are trying to prevent them from realising them'. In this context, power is seen as authoritative where subjugation has been internalised and the power legitimised. This kind of power is distinct from coercive power where the subjugation is by force. Another framework that has been accepted widely categorises power relations into four types – power over (ability to influence and coerce), power to (organise and change existing hierarchies), power with (power from collective action) and power within (power from individual consciousness) (Luttrell 2009). These concepts have been heavily debated upon, especially given the way in which power is dynamic and re-created anew in some relationships, but can also be stable and entrenched in social institutions in terms of the way in which power shifts depending on the relationship (Pantazidou 2012; Singh 2007). All conversations of power also engage with the concept of agency, which can be defined as an individual's ability to act independently and the capability to make choices, even if they are limited by operative social structures (Santos 2011). Because power is not always visible or obvious and can be hidden behind social norms and practices, it is often harder to engage with it in lived experience (Gaventa 2006). Often, this means that engagement is often done with visible power holders, instead of those that are created within entrenched relationships (Pantazidou 2012). The social systems in which individuals and groups operate abounds with values, principles and norms envisaged by the dominant groups that aid in discriminatory practices, which over time, can become systematic, rigid and pervasive in nature. As for the individual, the process of

social conditioning and internalisation of these constructs permeates into one's consciousness and forms a world view, judgements, social actions and self-esteem.

One of the foremost experts in engaging with the ways in which the social discourse of power results in the practice of oppression and discrimination was Paul Freire. Freire (1968)³ theorised that typically, the one who held power often could manipulate those without into creating an incomplete and fragmented view of the issues afflicting the. This instilling of the belief of inferiority was often accomplished with a permeating social discourse that influences not just individuals but also social institutions. He also contended that the ways to break these cultural and social norms was to critically examine the social narratives that form the basis of these norms. He called this radical approach, 'creating critical consciousness'. The idea of the 'critical consciousness' was simple: it was merely a tool that allowed those without power to critically examine the social discourses, practices, and norms that bound them to their social norms.

The principle idea was to allow those who are oppressed to reflect on their experiences of powerlessness and to gain insight that their disempowerment is the result of a complexity of social forces that results in their own devaluation (Fischer 1987). A critical consciousness involves continuous examination of one's own knowledge and values, not only to counter forms of oppression but more importantly, to revise one's position in the social system. This results in a state of raised consciousness which then aids in the identification and development of strategies to counter structural forms of power. This central concept of examining social discourse as the foundational process of addressing oppression was also appealing to many social movements, including the feminist movement, precisely because it laid emphasis on engaging with the most marginalised and oppressed of populations.

Given any kind of feminist politics has engaged fundamentally with the notion of power, this idea was particularly appealing.

³ Paul Freire's work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in Portuguese in 1968 and later translated by Myra Ramos into English in 1970, is seen as one of the first influences in theory-building and activism around empowerment.

Although the translation of the theoretical understanding of power into the lived realities of programmatic practice can sometimes lead to essentialising the ‘subject’, and obfuscating the power inherent in representation, the engagement with power has been a constant theme within feminist politics (Akerkar 1995). For example, when we talked to women about the kinds of attitudinal changes that they experienced, one of them told us:

It should not happen that you are working and your husband is taking decisions for you. If a woman is the head of the village, then she should understand her rights and duties both. She should have equal rights at home also. We should take decisions on family matters. And further we should not follow our male folks at home. They can also be wrong.
(Interview, 25 January 2017)

Empowerment, for many feminists, was not just about pushing back on the practices of patriarchy, but to provide the space to examine the notion that their husbands could be wrong, in a patriarchal framework that never questions the authority of the husband. For feminists, the idea of the critical consciousness was very useful because it allowed them tools and ways to fight the traditional hegemonic boundaries of patriarchy without alienating the women themselves. So, these conversations of power that Freire (1968) brought to bear allowed feminists movements in many countries, including India, to engage with the *systems* of oppression, instead of the objects of oppression.

1.2.2 Influence of the feminist movement

My work is done whenever I go out to solve my problem and it proves that I am strong. I go to block and district offices and to courts without my husband. I don't have anyone with me; still, my work gets done and that shows that I am an empowered woman. (Focus Group Discussion, 23 April 2017)

One of the central tenets of the feminist movement is to ensure that there are organisational as well as discursive use of resources that can ensure that women of seemingly diverse interests and

identities are imagined into a particular constituency and can use that engagement with the imagined community to restructure the current status quo (Marx Ferree and McClurg Mueller 2004). So, while women's movements themselves might have targeted other constituents apart from women, the various feminist movements all over the world have often used the figure of the 'woman' as the imaginary onto which any discursive action is hooked upon. Even with this singular imagination, the different feminism and the ideologies underpinning the differences have led to certain forms of inclusion and exclusion over the years (Akerkar 1995). This has meant that certain kinds of conversations about the feminist subject have been legitimised over the years.

In fact, some feminists claim that the ideological conversations between feminists, for example, between liberal, radical or socialist feminists, have not necessarily been used to create a dialogue but to draw sharp boundaries of exclusion and condemnation (Akerkar 1995). But these conversations have illustrated a fundamental understanding of women's empowerment and emancipation and it is that women are a diverse group and creating a uniform understanding or engagement with women is bound to fail. Instead, women's issues should also be seen as social constructions that are propagated by oppressive social and discursive structures that influence and mitigate the stating of the needs and requirements of the subject (Marx Ferree and McClurg Mueller 2004).

In the case of India, particularly, the physical, historical and political diversity of the country has led feminist movements to engage with women's issue in different ways (Ray 1998). This has historically meant that there have been concerted efforts within the feminist movement to create broad-based movements, and a combination of efforts has been made to ensure that the needs of the women are not imposed from a position of power. Another broad tactic that emerged within the Indian feminist movements (characteristic of feminist movements all over the world) has to do with the recognition of the legal recourse, and working with the State to provide women the legal platform through they could fight for their rights.

For example, liberal feminists all over the world engaged primarily with the notion of empowerment through legal, political

and constitutional reforms (Lorber 1997; Rowland-Serdar and Shea 1991); they were less interested in political and societal transformation as catalysts of women's 'empowerment' (S. G. Turner and Maschi 2015), unlike the radical feminists. Radical feminists, for a time, were primarily interested in engaging with the discursive and powerful social imposition made by various social institutions – household, nation, state, sexuality – on the lives of the women and called for a total transformation of social structures in order to achieve women's empowerment (Rowland and Klein 1996). While the politics of the origins of these feminist movements influenced the emphasis laid on certain kinds of processes, what was clear was the emphasis on women's needs. The various feminist movements insisted on engaging with women's experiences and women's needs as the starting point to creating a more equitable social space, and this influenced the manner in which 'empowerment' as a process was perceived.

This notion of putting women's needs as the front and centre of any conversation of empowerment came also because of the various trajectories of the women's movement in India.

1.2.2.1 A brief history of the women's movement in India

The roots of the Indian women's movement in engaging with the ideas underlying women's empowerment dates back to the 19th century, the period known as the Indian social renaissance. Notable in this period were the efforts of men who pushed for women's education, widow remarriage and critiqued practices like sati⁴ and child marriage. Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833), for instance, spoke openly against sati, *kulin* polygamy and in favour of women's right to property. By the end of the 19th century, some of the first women-led organisations emerged such as the Bharat Mahila Parishad, the women's wing of the Indian National Congress, which was established in 1905. In 1910, the Bharat Stree Mandal

⁴ Sati is a ritualistic burning of the widow into the funeral pyre of the dead husband. This ritual signifies the existence of women only secondary to that of men and the idea that without a husband, the wife's life is not worth living. This practice was abolished in 1829 by Lord William Bentinck who was the Governor-General of British India at that period.

was established with the objective of bringing together women of all castes, creeds, classes and parties on the basis of their common interest in the moral and material progress of the women in India (Bagal 1964 as quoted in Basu 1976).

As with the other women's movement around the world, women also formed associations such as the Women's Indian Association that was formed in 1917, to demand for women's right to vote. An all-India women's conference was organised in 1927 and discussed issues that were of significance to women: education, purdah and the practice of child marriage. The struggle for freedom and the nationalist movement also paved way for women's participation in the public spaces in India. With the launch of the Swadeshi and Satyagraha movements in India, Gandhi called for women from all communities to step out of their homes and support the struggle for independence. Although the increase in participation of women in the freedom struggle did not lead to a separate movement for women in India, it did contribute immensely to their experience of public life and a break away from their everyday, domestic life. Parallel to this was the increase in participation of women in labour movements such as the Ahmedabad textile mill strike (1917) and the Bombay textile mill strike (1928–29). The nationalist consensus symbolised in the fundamental rights resolution of the Indian National Congress, 1931, postulated freedom, justice, dignity and equality for women as essential for nation-building (Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1995). The Constitution of India and the passing of the Hindu Code Bill in the 1950s fulfilled some of the basic demands that the women's movement had been advocating – universal adult franchise and reforms in social laws.

After independence, the women were active in various struggles for social justice. The Tebhaga and the Naxalbari movements in Bengal and the Telangana movement in Andhra Pradesh witnessed participation of women in increasing numbers. The anti-alcohol agitation also gained momentum and women started protesting against domestic violence by drunken male kin (Kumar 1993). Smaller and independent organisations also emerged. For example, in 1972, the Self-Employment Women's Association (SEWA) was established with an aim to improve the quality of life for women in

the unorganised sector by providing technical skills and promoting collective bargaining. Women also participated in the nascent environmentalist movements such as the Chipko movement, where women played a major part in creating awareness around the concepts of sustainability and livelihoods.

A more organised engagement with the State and public policy began with the UN declaration of 1975–85 as the decade of women. Women activists all over the country brought to notice various problems that were faced by women such as custodial rape, dowry deaths, and violence against women. A number of feminist groups such as Progressive Organisation of Women in Hyderabad, the Forum against Rape in Bombay, Stree Sangharsh in Delhi started calling on the State to take action against social practices such as sexual oppression of women, rape, dowry and dowry killings. Focus was also increasingly paid to rural areas where questions of sustainability and poverty started to play an important role in the conversations within the women's movements. For example, in local and national social discourse, women repeatedly brought up the lack of access to food, safe drinking water, sanitation, education, health care and employment as part of the various problems that they faced not only as women, but as women in marginalised communities.

Given the women's groups were diverse in their ideologies, they also struggled with the notions of power, primarily in two ways – power bestowed through identity and power of representation. Many women's movements were accused of being 'elitist' and representing those who were not allowed the space to speak. In response, one of the central tenets of any feminist movement within these women's movements has been the recognition that (1) women's interests are diverse and (2) the foundation of any collaborative action has to be based on the socio-political location of the woman. In recent times, even the category of 'woman' has been deconstructed, and shifts have been made to move away from the foundational category of a woman to invoking an imagination of a woman to transgress the traditional boundaries of social progress and change (Mohanty 1991).

Part of these shifts in the discourses both in the feminist and in the women's movement has been in reaction to the larger social dialogue happening in the world and in India, particularly in the area

of development. One of the reasons for the term 'empowerment' gaining popularity in the 1990s was the parallel rise of NGOs and civil society organisations who were gaining prominence in the national and international discourse. With the influence of many women-oriented organisations such as Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and Working Women's Forum in India, Gabriela in the Philippines, Proshika in Bangladesh, and the Green Belt movement in Kenya, notions of empowerment were heavily influenced by these actors who were prominent in the development arena.

1.2.3 *Discourses of development*

The term 'empowerment' was formally mentioned by the United Nations in the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in the year 1994 and thus was indoctrinated into the dictionaries of development agencies. The conference focused on increasing world population and demographic changes, but women's empowerment was seen as critical to population. The International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) and Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), active participants in the conference, made the issues of gender equity, gender-based violence and the rights of women central to all conversations on demography. This was followed by the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace in Beijing in the year 1995, which declared that:

Women's empowerment and autonomy and the improvement of their social, economic, and political status are essential for the achievement of transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life. The power relations that impede women's attainment of fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public. (United Nations 1996)

Through the 1990s and well into the 2000s, the development discourse did concentrate on the idea that the notion of power was central to the term of empowerment, and that the notions of empowerment are multiple and diverse (Batliwala 1993; Kabeer 1995; Rowlands 1996). León (2003 as quoted in Calves

2009) observed that, in Latin America, the discussions moved beyond the idea of women as victims and engaged with women as productive source of change. During this period, the concept of *empoderamiento* advocated by several feminist NGOs provided a feminist methodology, largely based on Frieré's work that could provide the space for women to be included in the policies relating to their own lives.

This move to include women into the development discourse from the ground up came largely as a reaction to the systematic exclusion of women prior to the 1970s. Ester Boserup's work on women's role in economic development published in the 1970s critiqued the 'trickle down' approach of development and the lack of awareness of the role of women in the economy among developmentalists⁵. The development policies left women and other marginalised groups out of the programmes that used modern technology and trained only men to make use of these technologies. Termed as the Women in Development (WID) approach, activist, policy makers, and scholars concentrated on income generation, reproductive health, family planning, and nutrition as critical to women's concerns and focused on ways to women's access to resources and their participation in development (Muyoyeta 2007). The WID approach, as it were, also led to the UN declaration of 1975–85 as the decade of the 'woman'.

However, even this approach was heavily critiqued for its myopic vision of women's 'empowerment' as it assumed that social relations of gender will change as women become economic

⁵ It is important to note here that analysis to examine the role and participation of women in the economy explained the differential rates between men and women as 'individual preferences', 'choices', 'productivity', 'efficiency wage rate', 'competitive labour market' and other factors under the neoclassical framework. However, Beneria and Sen (1981) note that Ester Boserup's work on the gender-based division of labour in agrarian societies shows that 'wage is not just a payment for productivity—the result of market forces of labour supply and demand. It is determined as well by the costs of maintaining and reproducing the labour force. This supports a Marxist theory of the wage rather than the neoclassical explanation, and is a concept that is compatible with a patriarchal vision of the male wage as the main source [...] Her empirical insights appear to support a theoretical model of fragmented labour markets rather than a model of a competitive labour market, which would suggest a neoclassical framework' (ibid: 283–84).

partners of development and it did not strive to break any kind of structural inequality. Because the WID concentrated narrowly on the inequalities between men and women and ignored the social, cultural, legal and economic factors that give rise to inequalities in society, it was critiqued for not addressing the fundamental systems that lead to the subordination and exploitation of women. This critique, termed as the Women and Development Approach (WAD) focused instead on engaging with the social structures that produced inequality and stressed on ensuring women be seen, treated, and included as active participants of development policies (Tasli 2007; Dagenais and Piché 1994). This approach is based on the assumption that women's position can be improved greatly by providing access to educational infrastructure, participation in income-generating activities and addressing other structural barriers, so as to attain equitable society. But even the WAD approach had its critiques. The WAD approach neither focused its efforts on shifting the social relations of gender, especially within class, race or ethnicity, nor examined the role of patriarchy in influencing the actual social status of women (Rathgeber 1990).

In general, it was observed that despite the theory-building around the notions of empowerment, whether it was the WID or the WAD approach, these positions did not always call for a radical change in the social structures that can overturn or diminish the structures of patriarchy (Calves 2009) nor did it engage with the intersectionality of the social structures (Sen and Grown 1985). In order to address this gap, theorising by Sen (1976, 1987, 1992, 1999) provided insight into the relationship between the individual and social structure. The capability approach, as it was later termed, placed the 'individual' at the centre stage of development and argued that an individual's well-being has to be evaluated through the level of their valued functioning or 'beings' and 'doings' that a person can attain. Sen speaks of valued functioning that are attainable as substantive freedoms, emphasising the intrinsic value of the freedom to choose among alternative sets of functioning (Hill 2003). If we view this approach with respect to women, values such as the dignity of personhood, integrity of the body, basic political rights, and liberties then start to get highlighted as part of the developmental

goals (Nussbaum 2000). In fact, if we view empowerment in this framework, we can start to see empowerment as the as the process by which individuals are given the ability to make choices and the absence of this ability/opportunity to make choices as a state of disempowerment, as advocated by Kabeer (1999, 2005).

In fact, Kabeer provides three ways to truly understand and measure empowerment: (1) resources, (2) agency and (3) achievements. She argues that the way we understand resources has to move away from a limited conception of materials for economic use to incorporate social and human capital that enhance agency or the ability to exercise choice. Agency, we know, is the ‘power within’ or the ability to understand what one wants in life and act upon those goals. Also, it is the process that transforms resources into achievements and encompasses meaning, motivation and purpose that individuals bring to their social actions. A lot of work on empowerment have used these concepts to expand and understand the relationships between resource, agency, and achievement. For example, an approach solely focused on breaking structural inequalities without any intervention towards building agency does not serve the interest of empowerment (Luttrell 2009) and adds:

Focusing only on transforming underlying power structures, such as the promotion of democracy or equity in political participation, is meaningless unless people are in the condition (in terms of health or economics) to take advantage of the opportunities. (Larrea 2005 as quoted in Luttrell 2009)

This expansion into understanding of the inter-relationships has other implications – what does empowerment look like? How can we truly measure empowerment? What are the relationships that give rise to empowerment? In order to answer these questions, we also have to engage with the debates around the definitional aspects of empowerment.

1.2.4 Definitions of empowerment

At first, I didn’t even know what violence against women meant. Later, after going to the field many times, I understood that apart from physical

violence, verbal abuse and not giving women proper food is also violence... It is important to go out to the field. If you don't get out, you become a frog in the well. You don't get to know a lot of things... (Interview, 1 September 2016)

To understand women's empowerment fully, it is also important to understand the different ways in which it is measured. This is because the measurement and definitions of empowerment can often go hand in hand. In general, indicators of empowerment can be divided into two categories. The first category tries to measure empowerment at a broad societal level and the second category has been developed to measure the effects of specific programmes/interventions and the resultant outcomes (Oxaal 1997). For example, the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) used in the Human Development Report (HDR) falls under the first category. In fact, the HDR introduced two kinds of indices to measure empowerment of women in 1995, the Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The GDI takes note of inequalities between men and women in terms of basic capabilities – life expectancy, educational attainment and income – while the GEM is a composite index that looks at women's representation in parliament, women's active labour force participation and their share in the national income. While the GDI focuses on the expansion of capabilities, the GEM is more concerned with the use of these capabilities to take advantage of the opportunities in life (Oxaal 1997).

More recently, other indicators have also emerged that capture women's disadvantage in the dimensions of empowerment, economic activity and reproductive health. A prominent example is the Gender Inequality Index (GII), formally adopted by the UNDP in its Human Development Report in 2010. It has broadly three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and labour market participation. The GII allows these dimensions to be defined dynamically on the basis of the context that it is being calculated in, as long as three dimensions are captured.

A critique levelled against the GDI, especially in relation to poor rural women in the Global South, has been that factors that

influence women's specific circumstances are often not taken into consideration in the GDI (Hirway and Mahadevia 1996; Kelkar 2005). For example, the general pattern of women's employment in South Asia indicates that the large majority are agricultural labourers, their numbers being slightly larger than that of men who are the dominant cultivators (Kelkar 2005). Similarly, the unorganised sector, excluding agriculture, accounts for 90 per cent of the women employed (Kelkar 2005). Women's education as a criterion for their empowerment – even as much as it allows them (in theory) to participate more meaningfully in social, political and economic structures of society – is of limited value to the extent that it is not matched by the transformative education of men which will enable them to share care work in the domestic sphere and support women on their journeys (Hirway and Mahadevia 1996). Along the same lines, the GEM has been critiqued for measuring only women's presence in economic and political institutions and not the actual ways in which their agency or power manifests (Acharya and Ghimire 2005). To address this, other indices have been used to ensure that both power and agency are measured in relationship to empowerment (Mosedale 2005; Pradhan 2003).

Despite the fact that the definition and measurement of women's empowerment including economic empowerment have drawn good attention from researchers and analysts, the issue remains unresolved in terms of the acceptability of a single or unique definition or method (Scott et al. 2016). This is reflective of not only the complexity of defining such a phenomenon but also the politics involved in such definitions. While it is amply clear that the narrow definition of participation in economic activities alone does not refer to the economic activities, it is less clear which of the constituents of all the dimensions of economic empowerment ought to be included while defining it. (Kabeer 1999; Scott et al. 2016). This is also because measurement of a social phenomenon almost always is seen through the perspective of a linear pathway, whereas the realities of women's lives and journeys are rarely so.

As one of our interviewees stated, the definitions and measurements of empowerment cannot be learned unless one is in the field, and cannot be divorced from the context in which it has emerged.

To specifically understand the ways in which empowerment was conceptualised in Mahila Samkhya, we now turn to the history and the philosophy underlying the MS programme.

1.3 The Story of MS

1.3.1 Genesis, coverage and objectives

The initiation of MS and of empowerment as a matter of state policy was the outcome of several interesting factors, including the political mobilization of subaltern groups in India by grassroots organizations and political parties, feminist activism directed at Indian state agencies, Southern feminist debates about gender and development issues, and the transnational circulations of Paulo Freire's radical pedagogy. (Sharma 2008)

Initiated by the Indian state in 1989 under Anil Bordia, a high-ranking Indian civil servant, Mahila Samakhya was the first national-level, state-funded and state-run women's empowerment programme for rural women in India (Sharma 2006; Ramachandran et al. 2012). The origin of MS can be traced to the National Education Policy (NPE), 1986, a landmark document in the field of women and girls' education policy in India. The NPE of 1986, as revised in 1992, provided the context for the origin of the MS programme located at the Department of School Education and Literacy under the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD).

The NPE, which emphasised women's empowerment as the critical pre-condition towards their equality and empowerment, first used 'empowerment' as a concept *and* as a technique. It was the first official policy that recognised persistent gender imbalances in education and the continued marginalisation of women and girls. It recognised the need to move away from mere provision or improvement of educational infrastructure alone and privileged the radical role of education (in and of itself) in redressing gender imbalances and empowering women. This sensitivity of the policy to persistent gender inequality resulted from a long consultative process in which the role and participation of the activists of the women's movement was very critical (MHRD n.d.; Jandhyala 2003;

Das and Agrawal 2004; Sharma 2011; Ramachandran 2012).

The MS programme was launched simultaneously with the drafting of the 'Programme of Action' (POA), 1992 of the NPE, 1986. The POA translated the guidelines to empowering women through education (as identified in the section 'Education for Women's Equality' of NPE, 1986) into an action strategy. It was based on an exploratory study by Vimala Ramachandran and Srilatha Batliwala titled '*Education for Women's Equality*'. The report, influenced by the philosophy and functioning of the Women's Development Programme (WDP) in Rajasthan, was commissioned at the behest of the Royal Netherlands Embassy with the cooperation of the GoI (Ramachandran 2012).

The MS programme, at its foundation, was a 'programme for the education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly women from socially and economically marginalised groups' (MHRD n.d.). The programme filtered the essentials of NPE and identified 'SC/ST women belonging to landless and marginalized families' as its principal subjects, because these were the groups most alienated from educational and other government programmes (ibid.).

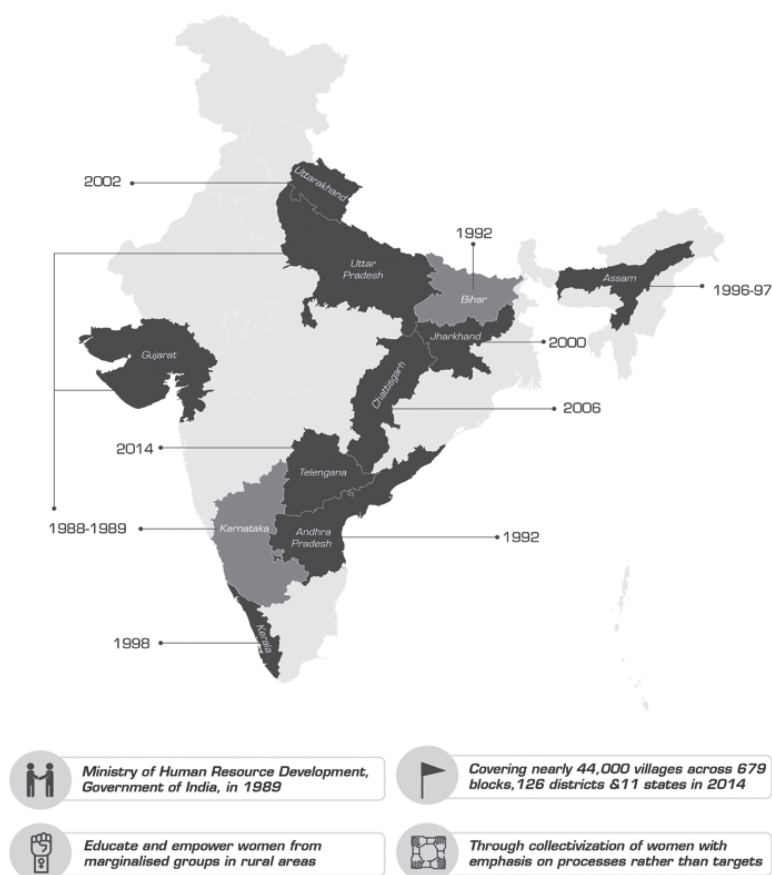
The programme was launched first on a limited scale during the Seventh Plan period (1985–90) of the GoI in 10 districts in the three states of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka, representing three regions of the country. From the Eighth Plan period (1992–97) onwards, it was extended to Andhra Pradesh and Bihar in 1992 and subsequently to other states like Assam, Kerala, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand. As of April 2014, it was functioning in 11 states⁶, working in 126 districts across 124 blocks covering about 44,000 villages (MHRD n.d.; Sharma 2011; Jandhyala 2012; Jha and Menon 2016).

The districts for the MS programme were selected after consultation between the Department of Education (DoE), GoI, and its state-level counterparts based on the several criteria. Low female literacy, poor enrolment rates, and poor retention of

⁶ The states are Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

girls in the school systems were some of the primary criteria for selection. Additionally, the low socio-economic development of the district, the cooperation and availability of inputs from other development programmes such as the Development of Women and Child in Rural Areas (DWARCA) was also seen as critical. Finally, the availability of cooperating NGOs was also seen as

Figure 1.1: Presence and Coverage of Mahila Samakhyas in India



Source: Qualitative data collected by CBPS

important partners for the launching of the programme (MHRD n.d.; Sharma 2011).

The programme's mission was to 'neutralize accumulated distortions of the past' and realise the goals of gender equality as enshrined in the constitution. Its objectives are stated below (GoI 2008)⁷:

1. Create an environment for empowerment and education of rural, poor, marginalised women; ensure access to information and knowledge and enable them to play a positive role in their own and society's development.
2. Enhance women's self-image and self-confidence; helping them to recognise their contribution to the economy as producers and workers.
3. Redress traditional gender imbalances in educational access and achievement; create alternate learning pathways and opportunities for women and adolescent girls; enable *Mahila Sanghas* to access and monitor various educational initiatives at the village level.
4. Establish a decentralised and participative mode of management, where decision-making powers devolve to the district level and the *Mahila Sanghas*.

In a number of ways, these objectives fit closely with the feminist agenda of engaging with women to create an equitable society. This radical move to locate a feminist agenda within the boundaries of the state reflected the optimism of the time (1980s) that was widespread not just in the civil society, but also in the bureaucracy and reflected in the programmes in areas such as rural development, labour, and other areas (Ramachandran, Jandhyala and Govinda 2012).

1.3.2 *Funding and withdrawal: Refection of wider pattern*

The GoI started the programme with bilateral aid from the Dutch government. In April 1989, the Government of Netherlands agreed

⁷ What is striking, as noted by Jandhyala 2012, is the use of the 1986 education policy statement as the programme objectives of the MS programme. This articulation of objectives has continued unchanged in all MS documents through successive plan periods as well.

to fund the programme as it was envisaged and it supported MS from 7th Five Year Plan to through the 9th Five Year Plan periods (MHRD n.d.). Bihar was the only exception where it was a part of Bihar Education Project funded by UNICEF (Jha and Menon 2016: 21).

Funding by the Dutch Government ended in 2001, as a result of two things: (1) the decision of the then-GoI not to take bilateral aid from smaller countries, and (2) because Dutch ended their support after India conducted nuclear tests in Pokhran in 2005. During the 10th Plan year period, the programme was run with spill-over funds from the previous plan periods and GoI funds. The Department of International Development (DFID), United Kingdom, funded the programme from the 11th Five Year Plan period for a span of seven years on a 90: 10 cost share basis (Jandhyala 2012) between union and state governments.⁸

It was also decided to fund MS in states through creation of a separate Mahila Samakhya Society under the Societies Act and transfer the funds directly from union government to the state MS society. This meant that the funds would not be routed through the state governments' treasuries and would not be included in the state budgets. This acted as a shield in preventing state governments in diverting the funds for other purposes or priorities. All states except Bihar followed this route. In Bihar, MS functioned as part of the

⁸ MS started in 1989 and continued till 2015–16 – a period during which GoI funded programmes through Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS). CSS in India are schemes that are funded entirely, 100 per cent, by the Government of India. This assumes significance due to the federal nature of the country where the Constitution has determined financial responsibilities and rights of union as well as state governments, and the revenue raising capacities vary widely among the states. The union government has control over significant taxes and revenue resources, which is then shared with state governments through various modes including in the form of CSS. CSS is a mode where state governments do not need to share any financial burden and therefore, it is usually easier to gain their support for the programme. Even when CSSs are sourced through external funding, either through grants or in the form of development loans from bilateral or multilateral agencies, the burden, if any, is not shared by state governments; the union government alone is responsible for pay backs. In this case, the Dutch government and DFID support were entirely in the form of a grant and therefore, had no component of payback or interest involved (Jha 2017).

Bihar Education Project, which acted through an independent society for many years and then MS formed an independent MS society (ibid.).

Towards the end of the DFID support in 2012, the GoI committed union government funding for the programme for the next three years. However, the new government that took power in 2014 following the general elections withdrew this commitment and support for the programme was officially withdrawn from April 2016. The withdrawal was also not smooth as the process of withdrawal was not clearly announced to states and uncertainties prevailed even during 2014 and 2015. In spite of this withdrawal, few states have continued to support the programme through their own funding using a variety of institutional mechanisms. In some cases, the MS federations, women's associations that evolved out of MS *sanghas* or *samooths*, are trying to continue functioning independently of the MS structure with some NGOs playing an active role in supporting federations in this process.⁹

1.3.3 *The philosophy and structures of MS*

The programme title 'Mahila Samakhya' etymologically means '*Mahila*' [woman in many Indian languages] and '*Samakhya*' implies *sam* [equal] *akhya* [voice]). Thus, MS can be interpreted as women speaking with 'equal voice' or as 'dialogue among equals' (Ramachandran et al. 2012: 12; Jandhyala 2012: 230). The name of the programme was carefully and purposefully chosen to reflect the objectives of 'empowerment' as a transformative process that would challenge patriarchy as well as various other social structures and barriers (Sharma 2006; Ramchandran et al. 2012).

⁹ In the wake of MS closure, a coalition of civil society members, researchers, and organisations was formed to support the federations to be sustainable. A series of workshops and dialogues have been initiated in six states – Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Karnataka, Kerala, and Telangana. The purpose of these workshops and dialogues is to provide the federations a space to review their strengths, the challenges that they face (including the institutional barriers), and possible ways to collaborate between themselves. What has been clearly articulated from all of these dialogues and workshops is a strong stated need by the federations to build a strong solidarity-based network of interdependent and self-reliant institutional entity that would function independently towards the mission and vision of MS.

Thus, MS defined empowerment as:

Movement from a passive state where women accept their predicament and relate to the world around as recipients of welfare and charity to one where they become active agents in their own transformation is the essence of empowerment (MHRD n.d.; 1).

Although located in the Department of School Education and Literacy within the Ministry of Human Resources Development, MS took a broader view of education and covered the entire gamut of women's empowerment covering aspects of self-image, critical thinking and reflection, decision-making capabilities, access to information, knowledge and skills and opportunities for participation in governance, political and economic spaces. It focused on mobilising women from the most marginalised and poor communities into collectives or *sanghas* or *samooths* where they would come together, discuss, reflect, organise, and analyse and articulate their needs to address them jointly (Jha and Menon 2016). The programme worked primarily with lower caste, poor, rural women because they are considered to be the most oppressed, but it did not want to be an implementing agency that would distribute material resources to its clients (Sharma 2006).

MS is considered to be an innovative programme not only because of its non-material focus on empowerment but also because of its hybrid GO-NGO model. The activists and bureaucrats who designed MS desired a partially non-governmental programme structure that would mitigate the problems associated with state development models and bring in NGO advantages like decentralised planning, participatory and democratic ways of working, motivated workforce, flexibility and at the same time retain the 'authority of a government structure' (MHRD n.d.; Sharma 2006, 2008; Sharma 2011; Ramchandran 2012). This 'marriage' resulted in MS's crossbred GO-NGO structure as shown in Figure 1.2.

At the national level, the programme though located within the MHRD was initially headed for the first five years by a feminist who had played a major role in designing the programme. Thereafter, a woman bureaucrat was made the head and the practice continued

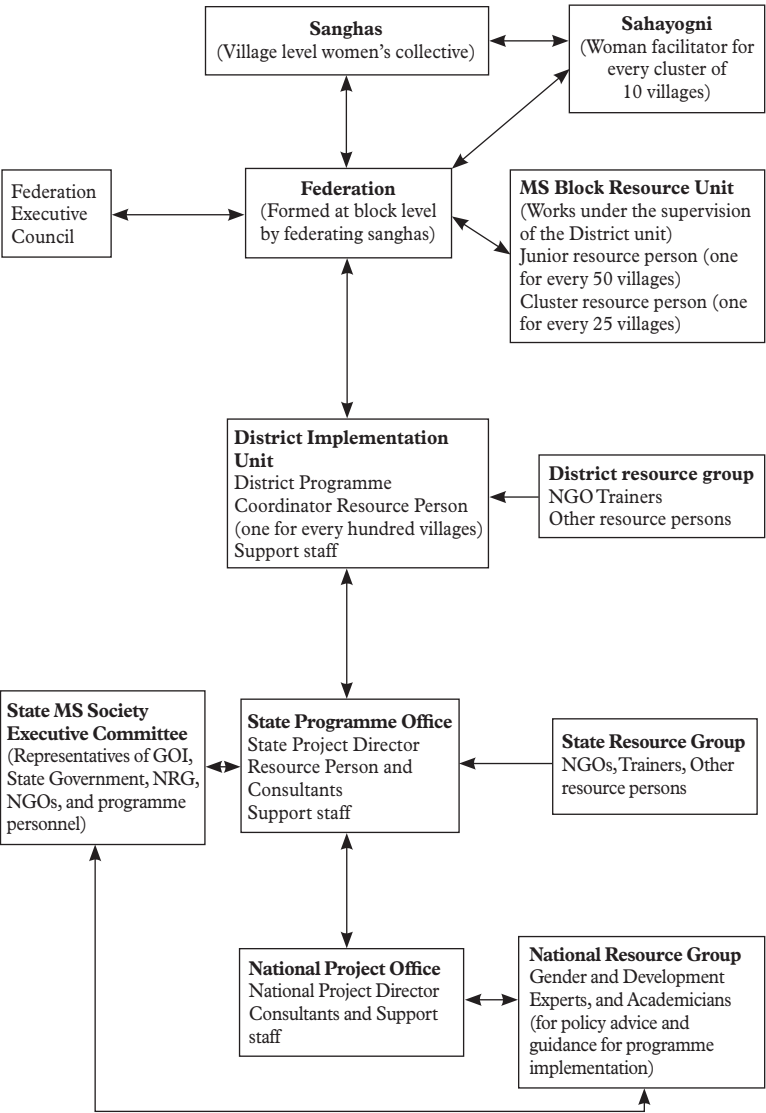
till the end of the programme. She was supported by a group of civil society members constituting the National Resource Group (NRG). State-level MS offices would oversee the work of the district-level offices, which in turn would support the work of the village-level women's groups, called the *mahila sanghas*, which form the core of the MS organisational structure.

Village-level activists or *sakhis* were instrumental in collectivising the *sangha* or *samooch* (as it was known in Bihar) of their villages in terms of taking up of issues, discussing problems, and holding village level meetings. These women were usually non-literate, poor and low caste. *Sahayoginis* (programme supervisors), who generally had some formal education and were intensively trained, mentored and guided by the MS district/state officials, coordinated the work of the *samoochs* of ten villages. They provided leadership, played a catalytic role in building and sustaining the *samoochs* and acted as links to the district office. Staffed by a district coordinator and a resource person, the district office co-ordinated, planned and oversaw the work of the entire district.

Though the boundaries and structures were well-defined, the programme, at least in the initial phase, did not lay down either targets to be achieved or specific agenda to be followed but let the programmatic cues come from the women in the *sanghas* (MHRD n.d.). The early MS vision, which 'conferred upon the programme a radical potential for transforming women's agency and their lived realities' (Gurumurthy and Batliwala 2012: 456) is suspected to have changed over the years for a variety of reasons, including the shifting policy focus in the international and national spheres and the inherent tension and contradiction between a radical approach and the need for a state-sponsored programme to toe the line (Sharma 2006; Gurumurthy and Batliwala 2012) as will be discussed in subsequent sections.

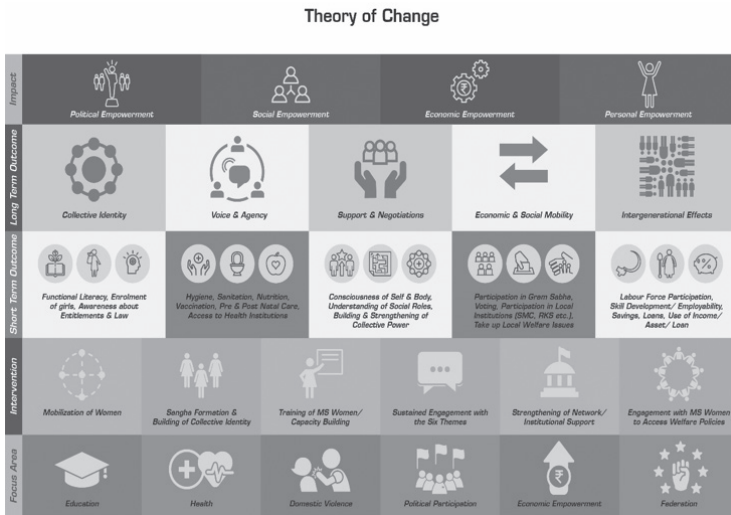
However, the essential process of collectivisation of women from marginalised communities and prioritisation of the collective, i.e. *sangha* or *samooch* does not seem to have undergone any radical shift since the inception of the programme. Women who form the *samooch* or *sangha* were associated with and helped by a *sahayogini* – an MS field worker – who was tasked with establishing *samooch* and

Figure 1.2: Structural Hierarchy of MS Programme



Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)
http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/Organogram.pdf
Accessed on 3 April 2018

Figure 1.3: Ex-post Reconstructed Theory of Change for MS¹⁰



Source: Authors conceptualization.

facilitating its meetings. A *sahayogini* was responsible for all the *samooths* located in her cluster, usually consisting of 10 villages. Thereafter, with the help of *sahayoginis* working in collaboration with *samooth*, MS worked to develop women's knowledge and capacity for action in six identified core domains or focus areas as evident from Figure 1.3.

While there was clarity in terms of conceptualising the whole approach at the time of initiation, there was also an attempt to refrain from over-designing and pre-determination, especially because of its

¹⁰ This is conceptualised from our consultations with MS officials and members at the national, state, district and sangha levels and also based on our review of official documents and literature related to MS. Pancharatham, P. and N. Menon. 2017. 'A Descriptive Analysis of Employment and Savings Patterns in Haveri, Karnataka.' Centre for Budget and Policy Studies. Unpublished working paper.

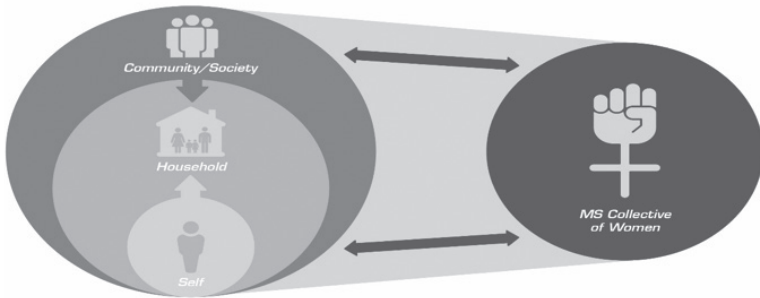
Mahendiran, S., Jha, J. and N. Ghatak. 2017. 'Understanding the Impact of Mahila Samakhya on Women's Economic Empowerment in Bihar.' Centre for Budget and Policy Studies. Unpublished working paper.

Menon, N. 2017. 'The Methodology of Mahila Samakhya: Understanding the sangha as a space for Empowerment.' Centre for Budget and Policy Studies. Unpublished working paper.

emphasis on the natural evolution of a collective and the priorities therein. The design also reveals a clear focus on indivisibility of empowerment and interconnectedness of subjugation in different spheres of life. It was believed that if one aspect of empowerment is initiated, it would also influence others, though the pathways could be different. In order to keep the programme open-ended and yet give it a boundary, the programme identified certain non-negotiables such as 'building partnerships between non-governmental and governmental organisations', selecting local-level 'programme functionaries, trainers and resource support', who showed 'commitment, aptitude, and quality' (MHRD n.d.; Ramachandran 2012; Sharma 2011).

While the problem identification by the *samooh* is located within the collective, there is a particular methodology, structure, and approach that MS follows which are fairly consistent across *samooh*, district and state. The programmes used to take about six months to a year for preparation and then, about three to six months for *sangha* formation, followed by the cycle of regular meetings, training, visits and other activities depending on the choice and direction that the particular *sangha* took. The methodology derives from the feminist principles of collectivising women through the processes of sharing, reflection, re-examining and re-reflection of individual experiences, which has been discussed in detail in Chapter 3. The *sahayogini* enables women to share their own problems and experiences followed by a process of facilitation that help them recognise the commonality of experiences, especially with regard to those of unequal treatment and subjugations faced in various domains and also the problems that they are dealing with, followed by strategies to resolve those and identification of activities to go forward. This was an evolving one that has no fixed time frame; different groups arrived at various milestones at different paces.

Figure 1.4 shows the influence process of the MS. A woman, as part of the MS collective, goes back to her household and has the potential to influence her own as well as intra-household choices, decisions and actions. The women in MS collective are also part of the larger community and through collective action they carry the potential to influence actions, choices and decisions at the community

Figure 1.4: Process of Influence in Mahila Samakhya¹¹

Source: Authors conceptualization.

level and the community too has the potential to influence the choices, decisions and actions at the household level. MS believes that the woman who joins the programme can become an agent of change for herself, her household and the community at large.

Based on the lessons learned from the feminist movement, the framework of MS was not directed towards changing society's view of women; instead, it was focused on changing women's view of themselves. In many ways, the conceptual base can be traced to both Freireian and feminist ideas about education and empowerment. The primary idea was to 'redress centuries of marginalisation' (Jandhyala 2012: 107) and the women who conceptualised the project, based on their involvement with the feminist movement, understood three primary lessons: (1) solidarity is central to individual empowerment (2) empowerment cannot be defined

¹¹ This model is also conceptualised by CBPS based on the understanding of MS processes gained through literature review, consultations and field visits in two states of Bihar and Karnataka.

Source: Pancharatham, P. and N. Menon. 2017. 'A Descriptive Analysis of Employment and Savings Patterns in Haveri, Karnataka.' Centre for Budget and Policy Studies. Unpublished working paper

Mahendiran, S., Jha, J. and N. Ghatak. 2017. 'Understanding the Impact of Mahila Samakhya on Women's Economic Empowerment in Bihar.' Centre for Budget and Policy Studies. Unpublished working paper.

Menon, N. 2017. 'The Methodology of Mahila Samakhya: Understanding the Sangha as a Space for Empowerment.' Centre for Budget and Policy Studies. Unpublished working paper.

from outside and (3) empowerment processes cannot have a set boundary or time limit. Another primary influence, as mentioned earlier, was the observation of these principles in practice within the WDP. The main focus of the WDP programme, also influenced by the feminist movement, was the practice of consciousness-raising activities, encouragement of political participation and questioning of the status quo by the women, including traditions, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices.

MS programme was able to incorporate the following lessons learned from WDP:

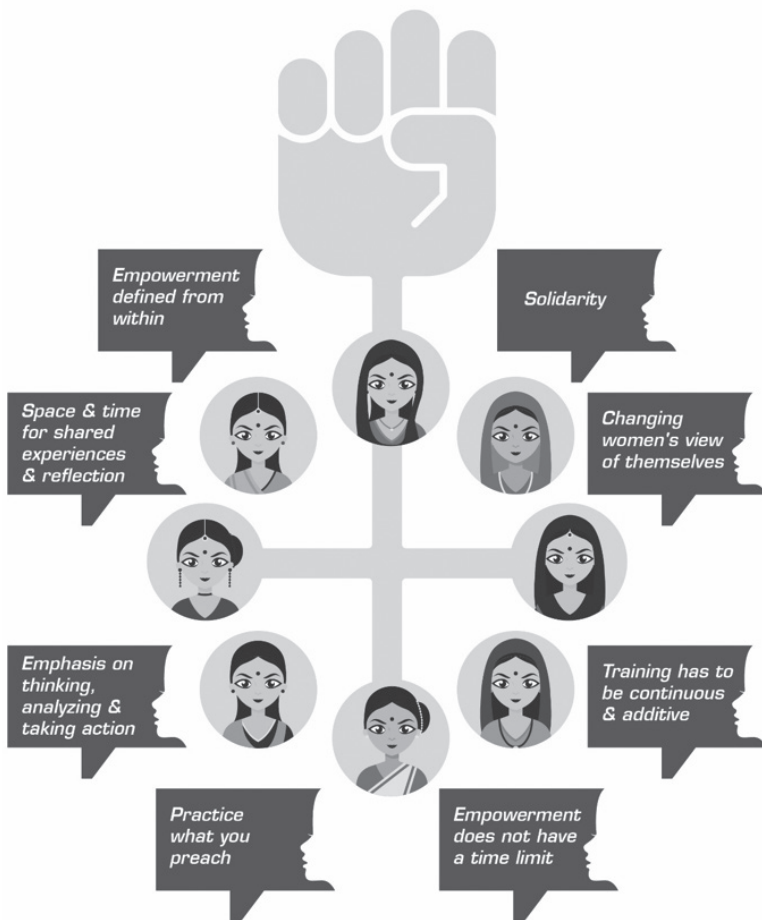
- Women need space and support to articulate their needs and once that happens they will be able to find ways to challenge the systemic forms of oppression that they face.
- Education can enable and create leadership within the ranks of the village-level groups.
- Facilitators or helpers should be drawn from within the village-level contexts.
- Partnerships with different types of organisations provide a good support system as well as an extended learning environment.
- Training has to be continuous and additive, instead of being one-time and piecemeal.

The MS's methodology builds on the idea that education and empowerment of women will bring about a change in their understanding, in their mind, 'attitudes, practices, social relations and structures' (Jandhyala 2012).

Empowerment, in essence, was understood as a process that would enable people to take greater control of their lives, be aware of one's environment and one's society and make informed choices. It was perceived as a process of becoming stronger, more self-assured and confident and negotiating the world from a position of strength. It is not about 'giving' or 'doing good' to others, but enabling people to take charge of their lives [...] When the Mahila Samakhya programme was conceptualised it was made very clear (by MHRD GOI) that the programme should view empowerment and education as two sides of the same coin. Meaningful education empowers and the very process of empowerment is one of education (Ramachandran, 2018, forthcoming)

Empowerment, as MS defines it in their foundational documents is an amalgamation of several factors. Women's access to knowledge (through information and education), mobility (physical and social) and access to justice cannot be serviced through a few disparate government schemes or through locally functioning NGOs. Instead, any empowerment programme must be conceptualised as a woman-

Figure 1.5: Principle of Mahila Samakhya



Source: Authors conceptualization.

centric endeavour that takes into consideration complex social, personal and community relationships. It needs to recognise the present realities of women in order to create 'active agents' (Menon-Sen 2012: 143). Women were also taught to engage with the question of their own selves and their own identities (Menon-Sen 2012). The slow building of confidence, ability, and fearlessness meant that they were able to re-negotiate relationships within their households, participate more actively in public matters, including the panchayat and experience more physical mobility (Menon-Sen 2012).

Education in MS was conceptualised in two ways: knowledge of the alphabet, and knowledge of the mind (Krishnamurthy 2012; Ramachandran, Jandhyala and Govinda 2012). Knowledge of the alphabet was useful instrumentally but was also important in creating a shift in self-identity. The demand for literacy was often the focal point of the empowerment process that gave rise to longer and deeper discussions around 'self' within the family and exploring power dynamics within the family. Education of the mind, on the other hand, was interpreted as the 'gathering of information which is relevant to their lives' (Krishnamurthy 2012: 85), and was considered no less important for creating a self-confident conception of the self.

While organising women into groups, raising questions around their own lives and recognising the problems they were facing were the first step towards empowering women in the MS design, it was followed by more structural support in the form of *Bal Mitra Kendras* (children's centres), and *Mahila Shikshan Kendras* (MSK) (residential schools for young girls and also in the form of training of women in non-stereotypical skills such as agricultural techniques or masonry. The participating states also responded differently. For instance, Bihar opened village-based *jagjagi* centres for education of girls and women locally as all of them could not have gone to MSKs. Later, the positive MSK experience is believed to have resulted in the formulation of a national scheme of residential schools, the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs). The MSKs (and later, KGBVs) were institutions meant for girls who had failed to complete the primary level of education because of various familial and societal constraints and they focused on merging formal schooling skills with empowerment focused experiences.

Education within MS has been the primary means through which the goals of empowerment were articulated. While it was clear that education is an important conduit through which women enhance self-esteem and confidence, the power struggles around literacy and education were also used to raise gender-based issues. For example, when women first encountered texts, they were able to contest the content, which often depicted their poverty or themselves as ‘unhealthy’, ‘dirty’ and ‘aggressive’ (Bhog and Ghose 2012). They realised that rural women were not present or represented in the texts that they were learning from. MS was able to use this opportunity to engage with this articulated power dynamic between individual and text and began to produce books that came from the stories of women themselves and used words that were used by rural women, often not included in the nomenclature of the available texts. It meant that the stories and narratives represented in the MS-produced texts reflected the vitality, the knowledge, and lived realities of the women reading the text (Bhog and Ghose 2012) as indicated in the following example:

Nirantar, a women’s educational resource group, worked closely with MS Uttar Pradesh to develop the curriculum for MSK. They focused on developing a curriculum that is relevant to rural women and also design material that reflects their situation, their culture and their daily struggles. While literacy and numeracy skills were central to the curriculum – they “focused on developing women’s information base [...] the fundamental principles that guided the selection of content, teaching methodology and material preparation was that it should be learner-centred, holistic and informed by the feminist perspective. The five main content areas were: water, land, forests, society and health”. (Nirantar 1997: 12) (Ramachandran 2018: 11)

Learning in many parts of the world and in India is a political act, and MS understood that for women, the act of educating oneself (the alphabet or the mind) is also an act of defiance (ibid). Because ‘the choice of language, the selection of words, and the text are all acts of power that can be productively mobilised to challenge existing knowledge hierarchies’ (ibid.: 257), MS attempted to use

these opportunities to create new forms of pedagogy and training, and perhaps, new forms of empowerment for women. In order to understand how MS was able to expand and grapple with the notions of empowerment, we embarked on a three-year study of three districts in Bihar, and our research question was primary with regards to the impact that MS had on the most marginalised women in rural India.¹³

1.4 Rationale, research questions and the research sites

The rationale for our research came from two developments witnessed in India and other developing countries in the post-1990s era: (1) the high priority accorded to microcredit-based livelihood schemes that also used women's collectives as the focal point for women's economic empowerment, and (2) the entry of cash transfer programmes in the policy space for impacting household and individual behaviour in education, health or age of marriage-related choices. While such programmes used the language of empowerment similar to the one used by MS, the programme designs do not give much importance to processes linked with such empowerment (Jha 2018). Therefore, the broad question that the research wanted to answer was whether an empowerment-process-focused programme such as MS, which does not view economic empowerment in isolation, actually leads to economic empowerment. If it does, we were interested in the processes of this impact, and if not, in what ways were things unaffected. The specific research questions might be clubbed in five categories and included the following:

1. Labour market participation: Does the MS approach improve labour market outcomes⁴ for women in low-income contexts? Does the MS approach decrease gender inequalities in the labour market? Does the MS approach improve potential for future labour market outcomes for women in low-income contexts?

¹² Nirantar. 1997. *Windows to the World: Developing a Curriculum for Rural Women*. Nirantar: New Delhi.

¹³ The research was funded by IDRC, Canada. The project titled 'Together We Can: The Role of Women's Action Groups as Agents of Social and Economic Change in India.' Project number 107818-001 was approved in September 2014.

2. Awareness, access and use of entitlements: Does the MS approach increase women's access to and utilisation of entitlement programmes and other sources of financial security? Does the MS approach and process lead to greater gains in economic outcomes for women, as compared with traditional, targeted programming, like self-help groups? These outcomes included aspects such as wage inequalities, entry and participation in male-dominated work and skill areas, greater participation and/or better workplace environments, commitment to girls' education and greater voice in demanding gender-responsive governance.
3. Duration of exposure and sustainability of outcomes: Is there a significant and positive relationship between the long-term engagement of MS in a district and indicators of social and economic change among women? Does the longevity of an intervention, especially when it is part of a bureaucratic framework, translate itself into deeper and stronger effects or is the progression of empowerment in a particular location relatively weaker in cases where it is either too new or too old because of fatigue, on one hand and newness on the other?
4. Enablers: What are the factors/processes of the MS approach that play a role in advancing women's economic empowerment? How are these factors/processes similar to or different from other economic empowerment programme models?
5. Barriers: What are the various barriers to economic empowerment of women that the MS approach helps women overcome? How are these barriers similar or different from those targeted by other economic empowerment programme models? How are these barriers similar or different across sites?

The research followed a cross-sectional approach. The study was conducted in Bihar, one of the poorest and most challenging of Indian states and the sample covered three districts that had been implementing the MS programme having started at three different time periods. In other words, MS was of three varying ages in these three districts: ranging from five years to 23 years in 2016. The rationale for choosing three districts across varying time periods was to understand the effects of the MS programme on

social and economic change and especially on women's economic empowerment across varying durations of exposure.

This cross-sectional approach helped in examining the transformative nature of the MS programme and in understanding whether these transformative effects are sustainable over a long period of time. The MS programme was initiated in Bihar in 1991, which made it possible to have three neat time-periods by which to assess the impact of MS (See Table 1.1). The selected districts included Muzaffarpur (started in 1993) for the first time period, Kaimur (started in 2001) for the second and Katihar (2011) for the third time period. Although representing three geographical areas, these districts are comparable in terms of socio-economic indicators (refer to the map and Chapter 2).

Table 1.1: Year of MS Entry in Districts in Bihar

Starting Year	Districts covered by MS
1992	Rohtas, Sheohar, Sitamarhi, W. Champaran
1993	Muzaffarpur
1998	Bhojpur, Darbhanga, Gaya
2001	Kaimur
2005	Vaishali
2006	Banka, Jamui, Kishanganj, Supaul
2011	East Champaran, Katihar, Purnia

Source: Authors compilation from qualitative data collected by CBPS.

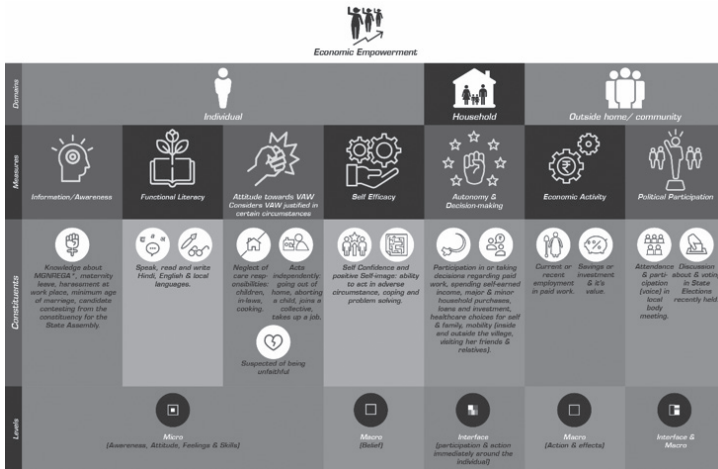
1.4.1 *Boundaries and definitions used in our research*

Given our study is primarily a study of economic citizenship of women, as stated in the first section of this chapter, we have defined it as the right to hold a job of one's own choice and access to economic resources to sustain an average household (Kessler-Harris 2001). In recent years, the economic citizenship approach recognises the role of political participation, social justice and democratic citizenship, framing a broader view of economic empowerment. We also use other frames of reference to engage with the qualities of economic citizenship. For example, the capability approach as propounded by Sen and Nussbaum leads one to aspects of ability, freedom, choice, capacity and opportunity while Kabeer focuses on agency and the process of change in a given context. Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) emphasise

aspects of information and influence at three levels: micro (attitude, feelings and skills), interface (participation and action immediately around the individual) and macro (beliefs, action and effects).

There are indeed overlaps in these concepts and frameworks determined by the context and the objectives with which the issue of women's empowerment is being examined. For instance, those coming from the context of structural poverty examine it differently as compared to those coming from multi-lateral financial institutions. Nevertheless, there is agreement that economic empowerment is multi-dimensional and that there is a need to further refine the measurement of women's economic empowerment. There is also enough literature to suggest that the subjective experiences of women matter, implying that context also plays an important role in both the understanding and measurement of empowerment. What might be a valid indicator of empowerment in South Asia may not be relevant for South America at all and vice versa (Scott et al. 2016). While issues of definition and measurement remain alive, we have used the following framework for examining the impact of the MS on the economic empowerment of rural women in Bihar. We are using seven measures to define economic empowerment

Figure 1.6: Measures of MS Impact on Economic Empowerment in Bihar



Source: Authors conceptualization.

as a multi-dimensional construct: economic activity, political participation, intra-household decision-making, information about and awareness of laws and entitlements, functional literacy skills, attitude towards violence against women (VAW) and self-efficacy (Figure 1.6).

While using these seven measures, we are also implicitly arguing that there are more similarities than dissimilarities among these approaches that promote multi-dimensional and multi-layered approaches to understand women's economic empowerment. The seven measures in our framework cover three domains of individual, household and community. The last four – information about and awareness of laws and entitlements, functional literacy skills, attitude towards violence against women (VAW) and self-efficacy – fall in the individual domain. The third one – autonomy and participation in decision-making – gives us the intra-household dimension. The first two – economic activities and political participation – are indicative of participation in activities outside home. Seen from the perspective of the capability approach, the first three point to a combination of opportunities available and choices made and the last four build abilities and capacities. Similarly, these can also be categorised based on the three levels of micro (attitude, feelings and skills), interface (participation and action immediately around the individual) and macro (beliefs, action and effects), as suggested by Ibrahim and Alkire (2007). We now explain the construction of these measures; we draw the rationale for the constituents of the measures from the existing literature and the context of Bihar.

Economic activities here include two indicators: women's employment in paid work, whether inside or outside home and her savings. Evidence from different parts of the developing world have clearly indicated that participation in paid work, even when it is inside the home, shifts the 'balance of power' in favour of women (Kabeer 2005); though the evidence for such shifts are stronger for employment in non-agricultural wage-work (Kabeer 2005). In an almost entirely agriculture-based economy such as Bihar's, any access to paid work gives a woman an opportunity to have access to her own income. The control over that income matters as well and that is being examined in terms of autonomy and decision-making.

Similarly, the micro-finance literature, especially from India and Bangladesh, shows that access to savings and loans have wide-ranging impact on women's access to income-generating activities and skills as well as participation in community and public life, even if it is not a magic bullet for women's empowerment (Kabeer 2005a.)

In terms of political empowerment, recent research in India examined whether political empowerment of women affects their economic opportunities and labour force participation (LFP) and concluded that women's participation in politics could be a useful policy tool to increase both the supply of and the demand for labour market opportunities for women in rural India (Ghani et al. 2013). We measured political participation through responses related to participation in recent state elections in Bihar and active participation in the local body – panchayat activities. For state elections, it included responses on (a) engagement in discussions about the candidates contesting during the Bihar state elections in 2015 and (b) whether they voted in the state elections. At the local body level, we made use of responses on (a) participation/attendance in gram sabha (local community meeting); and (b) whether they voice their concerns in the gram sabha or not.

The measure on autonomy and decision-making includes financial as well as non-financial aspects of decision-making roles that women have in the household. Kabeer and others have argued that there is a difference in women's abilities to access wages through employment and their abilities to control those wages (Kabeer 2000; Kibria 1995; Kabeer et al. 2011; Salway et al. 2005) and have suggested the use of various indicators to understand women's financial autonomy. The literature, however, is also full of the constraints in measuring women's control over their incomes given their own attitudes, patriarchal structures, and high poverty levels, especially in the South Asian contexts (Amin et al. 1998; Kabeer 2000; Salway et al. 2005). We have included responses to six questions relating to work, income, expenditure and investment to understand women's participation in these decisions at the household level: these not only include control over their self-earned income and borrowings, but also their participation in work and in other decisions related to minor and major purchases

using money that may have been earned by her or her husband or others in the household.

In addition, we have added responses to three questions pertaining to mobility or freedom of movement and response to one question on healthcare choice for self or family to the same measure of autonomy and decision-making. Unlike many other contexts, women's physical autonomy or control over decisions regarding movement outside the home or unaccompanied freedom of movement in public places is very relevant to South Asian contexts. Kabeer et al. (2011) and Salway et al. (2005) use women's public mobility as an indicator of the broader impacts of paid work for women in Bangladesh.

Access to information and the ability to process information leading to awareness of rights and entitlements is an important precondition to the next stage of using the information to seek the entitlements and act autonomously. Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) identify information as an important component of empowerment which, in collaboration with other components, enables individuals to identify and express their own preferences and fight for them. Information is also the key to the capability approach as well. In this framework, information contributes to empowerment by both widening the knowledge about entitlements and opportunities and in enhancing the capability to access and use those opportunities and entitlements for expansion of freedom (Sen 2001; Nussbaum 2001).

India has often been identified as a country with progressive laws and social policies with tardy implementation; the lack of awareness about entitlements being one of the important reasons that discourage the use of such policies and services (Drèze and Sen 2002). Hence, we have included responses to five questions in this measure: one is about Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Assistance (MGNREGA) that guarantees at least 100 days of employment every year to every willing adult in rural areas, two are about laws relating to harassment and about maternity leave at the work place: one is about the legal age of marriage and the other about candidates contesting state elections. The first three are directly linked with paid work outside the home. The fourth one is important because of the prevalence

of early marriage, especially among girls in India in general and in Bihar in particular. Early marriage severely curtails the individual's control over her own choices (ICRW n.d.), and awareness about legal age could be the first step towards changing this practice. Awareness about the candidate in state elections is also reflective of the knowledge of and interest in one's democratic rights as the choice of elected representative plays a major role in the direction of future policies as also the quality of implementation at local level.

Functional literacy, in the sense of ability to read, write and speak the mainstream language is not only a useful skill when it comes to rural women from most marginalised communities, it also opens up many more opportunities and is known to have ripple effects (Ramachandran 2000). The literature on literacy movements, especially adult women's literacy, has shown how literacy programmes have given them opportunities to talk about themselves, their lives and therefore providing them an opportunity to collectivise, take positions and act (Khandekar 2004). In a context where the illiteracy levels are very high among women, literacy skills are also critical for raising the social status of women and have potential to be an important contributor to self-efficacy. In Bihar, though Hindi is the main official language as well as the common language of communication outside home, it is not necessarily the home language for the majority. The ability to speak, read and write Hindi enhances women's capacity to access information and also participate in public life including local governance. Therefore, we have included this as a separate measure.

The experience of violence, physical or verbal, is unfortunately very common for women in South Asia. A number of studies in the region have included the experience of violence and its linkages with various aspects of work and well-being (Kabeer et al. 2001; Heath 2012; Salway et al. 2005). However, the literature on VAW in South Asia also suggests that it becomes difficult to examine the incidence because of the associated shame in reporting and acknowledging it (Solotaroff et al. 2014). We, therefore, decided to understand the woman's attitude towards VAW rather than the experience of VAW; this is in the form of her response to questions where she is asked whether she considers violence against women justified in any of

those circumstances: if a woman neglects her care responsibilities – children, the house, disrespects in-laws, refuses to cook; if a woman acts independently by going out of the home on her own without permission, aborting a child, joining a collective, taking up a job without taking husband's permission; finally if a woman is suspected of being unfaithful. We believe that this is better measure as it de-links her position from her experience and therefore there is no shame; by de-personalising it, the responses were expected to be reliable. The range and diversity of contexts covered by these questions are deliberate so as to understand if women themselves consider VAW justified in certain circumstances or not.

Self-efficacy has emerged as a measure of one's own agency in the context of women's empowerment. It draws mainly from the human rights and feminist perspectives and rests on the idea that 'inner transformation', is essential to the formulation of choices; making the realisation by individual women about their own abilities and beliefs that they can act, a critical measure of empowerment (Malhotra et al. 2002). Some argue for greater use of psychometrics tests and scales, especially as they allow inter-regional comparisons (Scott et al. n.d.). We have included some simple questions regarding self-confidence and positive self-image, related to the ability to act in adverse circumstances, coping and problem-solving.

1.4.2 Research methods

The study mainly used three methods for primary data collection: survey, ethnography and document review. For the quantitative analysis, we analysed the results based on these seven measures, first independently and then used a composite economic empowerment index using seven measures together with equal weight assigned to each one. Chapter 3 provides details of construction of indices, estimation strategies, and the analysis. We also used document review, to analyse (i) the inter-generational impact of MS – what was different about women's decisions pertaining to their children's, especially daughters', education and marriage, who have had the MS exposure, and (ii) the political economy of choices and negotiations as observed through the adjustments and negotiations

that women have to continuously make with respect to their lives. The information collected from the qualitative data through extensive field interviews, focus group discussions and participation observation were analysed following appropriate methods of coding, collating and inferences.

With respect to identification of villages, we used propensity score matching (PSM) technique to identify the non-intervention villages comparable with the intervention villages in Bihar, adopting a quasi-experimental approach and aid in estimation of the effects of the MS programme on economic empowerment of women in Bihar varying by duration of exposure. The study objectives and its quasi-experimental nature determined our sample size calculation and sampling strategy.¹⁴

The minimum sample size was calculated to ensure that statistical power exists to detect the effects of MS on rural women in each of the three districts, with varying duration of exposure to MS. We made conservative assumptions about the minimum detectable effect size, standard deviations, intra-cluster correlations, type one and two errors to estimate the required sample size. We wanted to be able to detect a minimum of 10 per cent change in the economic empowerment of rural women in India due to the presence and efforts of MS.

We assumed a type-one error of 5 per cent, type-two error of 80 per cent. Further, an intra-cluster correlation of 0.25 was considered at the village level to account for homogeneity in the responses of respondents. This was to ensure that we have the statistical power to detect the desired difference between the members of MS and non-members of MS (non-MS). Our calculations stipulated that the minimum sample size required for the study had to be 840 respondents from 84 villages in each of the three districts if we

¹⁴ The quasi-experimental nature of the study relates to the non-random allocation of units to the treatment and control unit. Rosenbaum and Rubin (1983) discuss the use of propensity score matching in a quasi-experimental set-up to elucidate cause and effect relationships. Further, they specify three main assumptions which need to be met in order to elucidate the relationship. The sample size and strategy were considered to ensure that these three assumptions are met thereby enabling us to estimate the average treatment effects.

choose to survey 10 respondents per village and the sample is divided equally between MS and non-MS.¹⁵

Another factor to consider was the fact that the accurate estimation of average treatment effects on the treated (ATT) was dependent on the overlap assumption which states that each respondent should have a positive probability of receiving treatment. While the sampling strategy was designed to ensure that overlap assumption was met, it was certainly not possible to determine *ex ante* that all the survey respondents would satisfy the criterion.¹⁶ Thus, we decided to increase the sample size by 6 per cent to ensure that there would be enough observations in each of the districts to be able to estimate the ATT of MS. The sample was increased by about 5 per cent taking the total to 900 respondents from 90 villages in each of the three districts. Further, we decided to increase the sample by another 10 per cent to negate the problem of non-response. Therefore, our targeted sample size constituted of 3,000 respondents from 300 villages or 1,000 respondents from 100 villages in each of the three districts, divided equally between MS and non-MS.

The ethnographic research which used a tiered approach incorporating multiple methods of local immersion in the field was conducted only in MS areas. The rationale behind the ethnography was to be able to understand the MS processes and go deeper into the results that emerged from the quantitative analysis. The methods used included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, reflexive workshops and focus group discussions (FGDs) and the development of individual narratives. The qualitative analysis attempted to understand the relational and institutional aspects in greater depth and explored (i) change in social relationships as a

¹⁵ For more details on sample calculation, refer to Glennerster and Takavarasha (2013).

¹⁶ Despite the presence of positive probability weights, Shadish et al. (2002) remind us of the possibility that the probability weights of the treatment and control group can be concentrated at exactly opposite ends. To explain, it is possible that matches can be obtained from the lower end of the treatment group and the upper end of the control group (or vice versa). This matching of dissimilar groups, or individuals, can result in the biased estimation of the magnitude and significance of the average treatment effect. Thus, it is important to undertake measures to ensure that there are enough equivalent units, or individuals, under treatment and control group.

result of the intervention, including intra-household relationships, gendered relationships and roles, communal relationships and relationships with self; (ii) institutional and political dynamics both in public and private domains covering the change in family dynamics, effective participation in community networks and political efficacy of institutions.

Through the ethnographic work, an effort was made to understand the implications of economic, social and cultural attributes for participation and outcomes such as caste, class, ethnicity, linguistic affiliation, subculture for the change in dynamics in relationships. The analysis took note of the fact that a retrospective narrative bears the risk of becoming a linear story, which the participants have constructed based on outcomes, leaving out contradictions, nuance, and layers of discovery, failures and strategies. This was even more important to take note of as the ethnography did not cover non-MS areas and the period of our entry happened to coincide with the closure of MS in Bihar.

In addition, we also conducted a review of certain source documents as part of the primary research. The review of literature suggested that women's participation in governance processes in the MS intervention village tends to be higher. We included document review as an important method to assess that relationship. Using documents like the minutes of the meetings held for governance structures such as (i) Village Education Committee/Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti/School Management Committee – SMC (known differently at different time periods) and (ii) Gram Panchayat, we sought to understand the participation of women in locations where MS had been operational.

These structures generally have assured representation of women because of the affirmative action measures such as reservation of seats but that does not necessarily translate itself into voice; women remain mute spectators or many times do not even attend meetings. The objective of this review was to gauge if women with exposure to MS are more active in attending, more confident in expressing their voices and asserting their right to know, govern and claim entitlements. This analysis, carried out systematically for a small sub-sample of the survey, enriched the analysis and helped in understanding institutional processes and relationships better.

2 Women in Bihar

The multivalent contexts of deprivation and struggle

2.1. Introduction

Located in the most densely populated part of the ‘Hindi heartland’ with a population of 104.1 million, the land-locked state of Bihar is the third most populous state in the country (Census 2011). Bihar is also one of the poorest¹ Indian states with the lowest per capita Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of about Rs 4000–5000 per annum (Census of India 2011; Datta 2016). This is nearly one third of the all-India average and about one-seventh to one-eighth of the per capita GSDPs of the top-ranking Indian states (World Bank 2005; Government of Bihar 2016). The Planning Commission estimates are higher but even in that report, Bihar has always been the state with lowest per capita income (Rs 16,805 in 2014–15 at 2004–05 prices) in the last three decades.

A number of studies also refer to its poor infrastructure and governance (Kohli 1991, 2006; Sharma 1995; World Bank

¹ As cited by various scholars (eg., Sharma 1995; World Bank 2005; Datta et al. 2012; Sharma and Rodgers 2015), the reasons behind this acute economic poverty and the corresponding social backwardness of Bihar can be traced to natural or technological factors such as floods, poor development of infrastructure and high population density as well as socio-economic and political factors like iniquitous and exploitative socio-economic structure, lack of political leadership and almost total collapse of the administrative and law and order machinery in the state.

2005). With regard to social indicators (especially pertaining to women), Bihar has a low incidence of female literacy and a high incidence of child marriage, maternal mortality rates, and low employment opportunities. Overwhelming dependence on agriculture and lack of industrialisation has resulted in large-scale male out-migration² from Bihar to other states for wage work, leaving women primarily in charge of running households. Caste and gender hierarchies have been quite oppressive in Bihar and, until recently, economic and political power was exclusively confined in the hands of upper caste men (Sanyal et al. 2015). Although not exclusive to Bihar, such oppression coupled with widespread poverty and low levels of development make women's lives very difficult.

However, this is only one side of the story. Bihar also has a rich history of progressive political and social movements that have over the years mobilised the citizenry at the local, state, and national levels. A student movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan, popularly known as the JP movement, led to a major shift in national politics with a non-Congress-led national government coming to power in 1979 for the first time in the independent Indian history. Later, Bihar also led the change that brought representation of backward castes dominating not only state politics, but also shifting norms and discourses at the national level. Although often seen as a largely regressive society, it has been one of the few states that has actively promoted and promulgated 33 per cent reservation for women in panchayats and later became the first Indian state to implement 50 per cent reservation for women in panchayats (Kumar and Prakash 2012). The political history of the state has grounded itself in rural areas which has had a positive impact on the ways in which panchayat systems work (Viswanathan 2008). In essence, Bihar, perhaps much more than other Indian states, is a land of contradictions.

² Studies (eg., Datta et al. 2012; Singh et al. 2014; Sharma and Rodgers 2015) have shown that although male out-migration has brought profound positive changes in the lives of women in rural Bihar, patriarchy and caste continue to be institutions which define and govern them in profound ways and dictate the terms and conditions of their workforce participation.

2.1.1. *A land of contradictions*

In order to understand the contexts in which Mahila Samakhya (MS) was operating in the three decades, we also have to understand the intense contradictions and the implications of these contradictions in the state. While there are multiple realities operational in most societies, it is especially important to pay attention to them in Bihar because of two reasons. First, because of the sharp inequalities in terms of access to facilities and services, it is important to examine structural inequalities, especially related to caste and gender, built into the system that MS had to struggle with. Second, because of the rich historical past of progressive social movements, it is important to keep in mind the resilience and strength already built into these rural landscapes.

One of the primary influences that we have to pay attention to in Bihar is the long history of marginalisation as well as mobilisation. Bihar has been documented as part of the larger history of the marginalised peasantry (Chakravarti 2001; Kumar 2009; Sharma 1995; Mukherji and Mukherji 2012). Bihar's exploitative agrarian relations bear much responsibility for rural stagnation and poverty over a long period of time. They are inextricably linked with caste, class and landholdings – the three major, visible dimensions of inequality in rural Bihar. Land and ownership of land have been at the crux of major reform. Historically, a part of the Bengal Province during the British Imperial Rule, Bihar followed the *zamindari* system of land revenue that led to the rise of a parasitic class of landlords who had little interest in agricultural productivity in the region. This system of serfdom led to a distorted development of these regions in terms of the evolution of a local bourgeoisie. Consequently, the phenomenon of de-industrialisation (during the colonial period) in the Bengal province was most marked among all the regions in India with a decline of the traditional small-scale industry and establishment of a distorted industrial structure.

Unfortunately, post-independent policies in India did not do much to mitigate this colonial influence of regional inequalities on the national economy due to political-economic factors. For example, highly unequal land distribution marks Bihar despite

the fact that Bihar became the first state to bring out a law against zamindari immediately after Independence in 1948 through the Zamindari Abolition Act. The government issued notices to *zamindars* asking them to surrender the documents of their estates but most *zamindars* did not respond to the government's demand and no major change took place as the political machinery was largely composed of individuals hailing from affluent zamindar families. Other reforms such as the ones ensuring roads, education, and healthcare were largely concentrated along urban areas and were often of little benefit to rural areas.

Without the absence of a radical programme of restricting property relations or any major reforms, land relations and women's rights (in particular) did not change much in rural Bihar in the early post-independence years. This was in contrast to what one witnessed in neighbouring state of West Bengal, where the Left front government had aggressively pushed the tenancy reform agenda through the famous Operation Barga leading to redistribution of land to tenants in the 1980s. In the absence of basic land reforms, agriculture in Bihar could not and did not pave the way for modern industries either. Therefore, in the absence of alternative livelihood opportunities to dependence on the local land-owning class remained limited both in rural and urban areas. To this day, landlessness among the lower castes in Bihar remains high with the National Sample Survey data showing that 75 per cent of the poor were landless or near-landless in 1999–2000.

In a move parallel to this systematic social and economic deprivation or perhaps because of it, Bihar has also seen a long-standing history of social and political movements that has constantly challenged upper caste/class hegemony, as mentioned earlier. Starting from the early 19th century, the state has witnessed a number of anti-colonial peasant and tribal movements including Mahatma Gandhi's famous Champaran Satyagraha in the early 20th century, to the famous 1974 students' movement (known as the JP movement) and the Naxalite movements in the post-independence period (Omvedt 1993; Shah 2004).

Women have played an important role in each of these national and reform movements in Bihar (Rai 2009), and the state has

seen significant participation of women in social movements pre- and post-independence. However, though many of these social movements such as the JP movement did raise women's issues with regards to equal participation of women in every sphere, none of these ever-integrated genders into the main objectives of the movements. Instead, what these social movements gave rise to was the 'silent revolution' (World Bank n.d.), characterised by an upsurge of identity politics that succeeded in giving dignity and political power to lower caste groups but did not often provide space or voice to women from these groups. Though this is typical of most social movements of the country, this had some dire consequences for women in Bihar, especially given their already marginalised conditions.

Therefore, it should not be surprising that Bihar continues to rank low in the Gender Inequality Index and that women are still largely relegated to the private sphere of domesticity. For women, the lack of land in their name is particularly limiting, as land in these spaces is the pathway to some forms of social and economic mobility. This is especially problematic given that work opportunities are particularly restrictive. Participation in the workforce is considered to be an extension of family, class, and caste statuses, so the work that women do has been highly regulated. This has resulted in the systematic exclusion of women from any form of economic independence (other than ownership of land, which is very rare), and any form of participation in the public sphere. Even when women do participate in work (that almost all rural female workforce is landless), they are often given petty or casual labour for which they are paid minimal wages (Datta and Rustagi 2010; Hussain 2008). It is in this context of the marginalisation of women in rural Bihar that we want to explore MS presence and its effects on women's lives over the period of last three decades through our study.

2.1.2. Status of the economy

Bihar is one of the states included in the acronym BIMARU by demographer Ashish Bose in the early 1980s, identified as sick states with significant population size and performing poorly in terms of economy, poverty eradication, standard of living, access to

infrastructure, education, health, law and order and in the human development index (Mukherji and Mukherji 2012; Sharma 2015). Bihar's GSDP at factor cost, at 1980–81 prices, was of Rs 73.53 billion contributing about only 6 per cent to the country's GDP in 1980–81. The state had the lowest per capita income of Rs 1,062 in 1980–81, which was about 59 per cent of the per capita income observed at the national level. With the economy registering an annualised growth rate of 3.62 per cent during the 1980–93 period, almost half the growth rate observed for the country, the per capita income grew only at about 1.06 per cent. This implies that it would take 94 years for per capita income to double for those in Bihar, whereas it would take only 30 years for an individual's income to double for the rest of the country. In other words, an average individual residing in Bihar will never get to experience his/her income doubling during their lifetime while the rest of the country will experience it at least twice during their lifetimes.

The poor performance of Bihar in terms of GSDP continued during the 1993–2001 period despite the economy growing at an annualised rate of 6.41 per cent, which is similar to the growth rate observed for the country. Despite this relatively higher growth rate, the state economy contributed to only about 2–2.3 per cent to the country's GDP and the state's per capita income was only about 28 per cent of the per capita income observed at the country level. Bihar's status as the poorest state in terms of economic growth and per capita income remained unchanged during the next decade (2001 to 2010) as well.

Bihar's poor economic performance is often attributed to its dependence on agriculture and its dismal growth rate (World Bank 2005). However, the structure of the economy has undergone significant changes from 1993 onwards with a higher contribution from the service sector. The agriculture sector constituted about 40 per cent of GSDP during the 1980–92 period, which increased to an average contribution of 44 per cent during the 1993 to 2003 period and reduced sharply to 27 per cent during the 2004 to 2011 period. From 1993 onwards, the service sector constituted more than 45 per cent of the GSDP with majority of the economic value generated through trade, hotels and restaurants (about 40 per cent

of the service sector). Mukherji and Mukherji (2012) note that poor performance is due to state's inability to capitalise on the economic liberalisation in the 1990s, and the non-expansion of the manufacturing and service sectors. The state's capacity to absorb funds also remained limited as it did not spend even 50 per cent of the approved planned expenditure transferred by the central government for investing in development activities (Mathew and Moore 2005).

2.1.3. Status of development

Poor economic growth, deficient governance and non-expansion in the manufacturing and service sectors resulted in lower levels of development in the state. Poverty reduction and growth in the agriculture sector is intrinsically linked in Bihar, as about 70 per cent of those who are employed are in the agriculture sector in 2011–12, relative to about 13 per cent in the service sector which contributes to about half of the GSDP. The economy of Bihar is still characterised by the economic output and growth attained in the agriculture sector even though its share to the GSDP has reduced significantly over time. As mentioned earlier, non-expansion of the non-farm sector has meant limited employment opportunities for individuals within the state. This has resulted in male out-migration in search of employment opportunities, where majority find employment as casual labourers. Consequently, as referred to earlier, this has led to the women being left behind to take care of the household and work in the agriculture sector.³

In 1993–94, about 62.3 per cent and 50.1 per cent of the population was below the poverty line in rural Bihar and India

³ The Central Statistical Organization reports for Bihar show that work participation rate in the agriculture sector for rural women was about 92 per cent in 1993–94 and reduced to 77 per cent by 2011–12. During the same period, the work participation rate in the manufacturing and construction sectors have increased only by 4.30 and 2.70 percentage points. On the other hand, the work participation rate in the agriculture sector for rural men was about 82 per cent in 1993–94 and reduced to 66.70 per cent by 2011–12. During the same period, the work participation rate for rural men in the construction sector increased by 9.50 percentage points, followed by 3.40 percentage points in wholesale/retail/trade sector and 1.50 percentage points in the transport and communication sector during the same period.

respectively. The percentage of population below the poverty line in urban Bihar and India was lower at 44.7 per cent and 31.8 per cent respectively. During the period 1993–94 to 2004–05, a poverty reduction rate of 1.38 and 1.59 per cent was observed for the country as a whole in rural and urban areas respectively. The same was not observed in Bihar where the rate of reduction was much lower at 0.88 and 0.18 per cent for rural and urban areas respectively; about half of the population in Bihar was still poor and unable to meet their daily basic needs in 2004–05. As mentioned earlier, the dependence on agriculture and its growth rate combined with non-expansion in other sectors, resulted in the lower poverty reduction rates observed for Bihar. Conversely, the higher growth experienced in the manufacturing and service sectors facilitated the relatively higher level of poverty reduction observed for the nation as a whole. However, the state later registered higher poverty reduction rates of 4.84 and 3.57 per cent in rural and urban areas respectively between 2004 and 2011, significantly bringing down the population below poverty line by about 34.2 per cent and 31.2 per cent in rural and urban areas respectively. The higher reduction was primarily due to the higher growth rate observed in the agriculture sector

Table 2.1: Percentage of Women with Anaemia by Marital Status and Caste Group in 2005–06 and 2015–16

Selected Groups	2005–06		2015–16	
	Bihar	India	Bihar	India
Marital Status				
Never Married	62.8	51.9	60.2	52.3
Currently Married	67.8	56	60.3	53
Widowed/Divorced/Separated/Deserted	80.1	59.05*	60.8	55.4*
Caste Groups				
SC	71.8	58.3	62.9	55.9
ST	N/A	68.5	64.4	59.8
OBC	67.4	54.4	59.7	52.2
Other	64.1	51.3	58.2	49.6
Don't Know	N/A	55.9	65	55

Source: National Family Health Survey – respective years

during 2004–11, relative to the earlier period between 1993–2004. Nevertheless, Nachane (2011) notes that STs, SCs and landless agricultural labourers continue to bear the brunt of poverty more than others.

Poverty has a strong negative effect on the consumption of nutritious food (Nachane 2011). However, higher consumption of cereals (74 per cent) and higher proportion of expenditure going to food (65 per cent) implies that the incidence of calorie poverty (those consuming lower than 3000 calories in rural and 2600 calorie in urban) is lower than incidences of poverty (ibid.). But the statistics also show that in general there is a high prevalence of nutritional deficiency among women in Bihar and the nutritional problems are particularly serious for women in SC/ST and Muslim communities and for women engaged in paid labour or even those working on a family farm or in a family business. According to NFHS 3, anaemia is particularly high for women who are widowed, divorced, separated, or deserted, women from the Scheduled Castes and women in the lowest wealth quintile. However, at least three out of five women are anaemic in every population subgroup in Bihar. Further, Jha and Jhingran (2005) point out how poverty and

Table 2.2: Selected Indicators of Development – Bihar and India

Selected Indicators	Bihar			India		
<i>Human Development Index</i>	1991	2001	2006	1991	2001	2006
Value	0.308	0.367	0.507 [^]	0.381	0.472	0.530
Rank	32	15 ^s	35 [^]	-	-	-
<i>Population Characteristics</i>	1991	2001	2011	1991	2001	2011
Female Population (%) ***	47.95	47.9	47.86	47.2	48.26	48.53
Female (Under 6) Population (%) ***	21.48	20.51	18.56	15.94	15.88	13.4
Female (SC) Population (%)***	15.23	15.76	15.98	12.07	16.22	16.65
Female (ST) Population (%)***	8.44	0.92	1.31	2.36	8.4	8.85
Female Literate (%)***	14.09	26.32	41.94	53.84	45.15	55.97
Sex Ratio***	907	919	1062	927	933	991

(contd...)

(Table 2.2 continued)

Selected Indicators	Bihar			India		
<i>Marriage and Fertility rate **</i>	1992	2005	2015	1992	2005	2015
Per cent of women age 20–24 married before age 18	69.1	69	42.5	54.2	47.4	26.8
Total Fertility Rate	4	4	3.4	3.39	2.7	2.2
<i>Enrolment*</i>	2003	2009	2015	2003	2009	2015
Girls Enrolment from 1–5th Std (%)	43.3	47.8	49.44	47.47	48.46	48.21
Girls Enrolment from 6–8th Std (%)	36.56	46.44	50.58	45.02	48.12	48.63
SC Girls Enrolment from 1–8th Std (%)	N/A	46.28	48.91	N/A	48.09	48.55
ST Girls Enrolment from 1–8th Std (%)	N/A	46.91	49.12	N/A	48.33	48.36
OBC Girls Enrolment from 1–8th Std (%)	N/A	47.55	50.02	N/A	48.42	48.62
Muslim Girls Enrolment from 1–8th Std (%)	N/A	48.42	51.78	N/A	49.34	49.77
<i>Attendance **</i>	1998	2005	2015	1998	2005	2015
Rural (% of 6–14-year-old girls)	51.3	54	88.3	69.7	73.4	90.4
Total (% of 6–14-year-old girls)	54.1	56.2	88.6	73.7	76.4	91.6
<i>Mortality Rates****</i>	2011	2013	2014	2011	2013	2014
Infant Mortality Rates	44	42	42	44	40	39
Under Five Mortality Rates	59	54	53	55	49	45
Child Mortality Rates	12	11	12	12	11	11

Source and notes: 1. 1991: Planning Commission (2002), National Human Development Report, 2001, March. Reproduced from Nachane (2011).

2007–08: India Human Development Report 2011, IAMR and Planning Commission 2011: Inequality Adjusted Human Development Index for India's States 2011, UNDP, – www.undp.org.in/sites/default/files/reports_publication/IHDI_India.pdf

*this is inequality adjusted HDI unlike the earlier two years reproduced here.

2. Census of India (1991–2011), Government of India.

3. National Family Health Survey; International Institute of Population Sciences, Different Rounds (1998–2015).

4. District Information System for Education – DISE, Government of India (2003–15).

5. National Family Health Survey; International Institute of Population Sciences, Different Rounds (1998–2015).

6. Bihar Economic Survey, Government of Bihar (2016–17).

– World Bank (Indicators at a Glance Bihar 2016).

deprived life situations exacerbate marginalisations faced by girls vis-à-vis schooling, especially among social groups such as Dalits, tribals and Muslims, where the social norms for schooling are not as strong. They found strong linkages between poor health status of women and non-schooling of girls, as they often dropped out to take care of siblings and fulfil other domestic responsibilities that their mother could not fulfil due to ill health.

Given the economic conditions, it is not surprising to observe that level of human development is the lowest in Bihar among all states in India. The Human Development Index (HDI) in 1981 for Bihar was 0.308, much lower than the index value of 0.381 for India. While the HDI value improved by 0.073 percentage points in 2001, the rate of change was significantly lower than that observed for the national HDI value (about 0.105 percentage points). Even more worrisome is the fact that female literacy rate was only about 14.09 and 26.32 per cent in 1991 and 2002 respectively, whereas almost half of the women's population was literate at the national level. Nevertheless, the level of literacy, enrolment rate and school attendance have improved since 2001. To illustrate, female literacy rate in Bihar went up from 26.32 per cent in 2001 to 41.94 per cent in 2011, leading to a significant narrowing of the gap with the national literacy rate. Similarly, the percentage of women aged 20–24 years old married before age 18 has reduced drastically from 69 per cent in 2001 to 42.5 per cent in 2011, again narrowing down the gap with at the national average. It should be noted that both the direction and magnitude of movement towards development has increased considerably after the early 2000s.

In sum, the state of Bihar was denoted as a 'sick state' and 'basket case' due to its poor performance in economic and social indicators especially during the period before early 2000s. However, the narrative slowly changed with the state registering higher economic growth rates during 2010–15. It was therefore hailed as one of the fastest growing states and also registered positive movement in terms of basic social indicators indicative of improved overall well-being.

2.2. Empowerment and inequality indicators

The higher economic growth rate and improving social indicators do not necessarily translate to equitable distribution of growth for women and marginalised groups. As argued in Chapter 1, the assumption of better development indicators does not translate into improved well-being of women, especially with the existence of strong patriarchal and caste-based power structures in Indian societies. Klasen and Lahoti (2016) point out that the individual-based deprivations may be neglected by examining measures such as poverty rates which assumes a unitary household with an equal distribution of resources within the household. In their work, the authors estimate an individual-based multidimensional poverty index⁴ (MPI) and show that adult women and marginalised groups experience higher levels of deprivation relative to men and children. For Bihar, specifically, the household MPI for male and female was estimated to be 0.33 and 0.36 respectively, the highest among all the states⁵ considered in the analysis. Comparison with the individual-based MPI indicates that the deprivation for females is higher by 0.10 percentage points relative to male deprivation levels (0.32 points). In other words, the MPI at the household level derived by assuming equal distribution of resources underestimates the deprivation of women by 0.10 percentage points. This may

⁴ The authors make use of Indian Human Development Survey conducted in 2012 as it collects both household and individual information for ownership of assets, education, health and standard of living indicators. The Individual MPI is estimated using: education in terms of years of schooling; health indicators which assess mortality among children and nutrition and standard of living which includes floor, electricity, sanitation (access to private toilet), and access to safe water, water collection time, cooking stove, cooking time and consumer durables. The Household MPI is estimated using: Education in terms of years of schooling; health indicators are nutrition and mortality among children; and standard of living indicators include electricity, floor, sanitation (access to private toilet), safe water, water collection time and consumer durables.

⁵ States considered for the analysis include Kerala, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Assam, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Table 2.3: Gender Equality Index (1981 and 1991) for Bihar and India

State	1981	1991
Bihar		
Value	0.471	0.469
Rank	30	32
India		
Value	0.620	0.676

*Source: Reproduced from Nachane (2011)

be even higher for women belonging to rural and marginalised groups. This clearly illustrates that (a) our argument in Chapter 1 that improvements in development indicators do not necessarily translate into improved well-being for women holds good and (b) there is a need for understanding observed levels of gender inequality and perceived levels of empowerment.

Bihar ranked lowest in the Gender Equality Index in 1991 as the value declined marginally by 0.002 percentage points relative to 1981. In 1981, Bihar was performing better than two states, Assam and Tripura, but then slipped to the last rank in 1991. A similar picture emerges in terms of HDI if one refers to Table 2.2. It underscores the fact that a consequence of being a low Human Development Index (HDI) state is far worse for women as reflected in the lowest GDI position of the state. It means that women suffer not only as a result of being from families that have lower access to opportunities and capabilities but also on account of their gender which deprives them from accessing basic social and economic opportunities.

In Table 2.4, we provide the level of gender inequality defined as female to male ratio for work participation rates, average wage rates, literacy and school attendance rates. The work participation rate in the agriculture sector indicates higher participation of women than men, reflective of the high incidence of male out-migration observed in rural villages in Bihar where women are expected to take care of the household. In essence, the employment opportunities for women are limited to jobs available in the rural areas, mainly in the agriculture sector. The ratio of female to male literacy rates and the difference in average wages indicates existence of high levels of

Table 2.4: Gender Inequality (Ratio of Female to Male) for Selected Indicators in Rural Areas

<i>Work Participation Rate</i>		1993–94	2004–05	2011–12
Bihar	Agriculture	1.12	1.14	1.15
	Secondary	0.79	0.96	0.71
	Tertiary	0.29	0.35	0.68
India	Agriculture	1.16	1.25	1.26
	Secondary	0.75	0.66	0.76
	Tertiary	0.37	0.36	0.45
<i>Average wage rate for wage / salaried employees</i>				
Bihar		NA	0.55	0.42
India		0.64	0.59	0.63
<i>School Attendance (6 to 14 years)</i>				
		1992–93	2005–06	2015–16
Bihar		0.56	0.80	0.99
India		0.72	0.74	0.76
<i>Literacy Rate</i>				
		1991	2001	2011
Bihar		NA	0.52	0.64
India		NA	0.65	0.75

Source: Authors compilation.

Note: (1) Calculated based on data for Male and Female indicators for: (a) Work Participation Rate and Average wage rate for wage/salaried employees – National Sample Survey; (b) School Attendance (6 to 14 years) – National Family Health Survey and (c) Literacy Rate – Census – from respective years. (2) Average wage rate was deflated using 1993–94 Consumer Price Index (Agriculture Labourer)

gender disparity. The only exception is the near equal participation of boys and girls (aged 6 to 14 years) in schooling in 2015–16 which could partially be the result of long presence of BEP implementing various targeted projects such as DPEP and SSA followed by the implementation of the Right To Education Act.

Next, we move on to the empowerment indicators, limited to decision-making and attitude towards violence and gender roles primarily due to lack of data availability for other measures. These indicators only provide an indicative picture of the actual status of empowerment. From Table 2.5, it is evident that only those belonging to ‘general’ caste groups and educated 12 or more years show some difference. All others, irrespective of years

Table 2.5: Empowerment Indicators – 1 – Decision-making and Action in Bihar [2015–16]

Selected Groups	Percentage of currently married women who alone or jointly with husband				Percentage of women			
	Decide how their own earning are used	Decided how their husband's earning are used	Own Health care	Major household purchases	Visit to her family or relatives	Have a bank or savings account that they themselves use	Know of a microcredit programme	Taken a loan from a microcredit programme
<i>Residence</i>								
Urban	86.8	89	68.5	70.4	67.9	36.9	33.5	3.9
Rural	82.8	64.1	65.7	63.2	60.1	24.6	27.5	5
<i>Schooling</i>								
No Schooling	81.4	61.2	65.4	62.6	59.2	23.5	25.3	5.7
< 5 years complete	[84.8]	58.8	66.4	64.4	61.5	19.8	25.8	5.9
5 to 9 years complete	86.9	59.8	64.2	62.4	60.5	22.6	28.3	4.4
10 to 11 years complete	[88.5]	59.7	67.3	67.6	64.8	29.1	33.6	3.5
12 or more years complete	87.8	74.8	72.5	73.3	70.2	44.5	36.7	3.2
<i>Caste</i>								
Scheduled caste	83.5	60.3	66.9	66	62.3	25.4	29.4	5.4
Scheduled tribe	[85.1]	61.2	61.2	56.7	55.2	22.1	17	4.9
Other backward class	83.2	61.8	66.5	63.7	61.4	26.3	29.3	5
Other	81.8	65.7	64.4	64.8	60.1	28.6	26.8	3.6

Note: Percentages given in [] were estimated without proper weights owing to a low number of observation under that category in the sample.

Source: National Family Health Survey – 2015–16

Table 2.6: Empowerment Indicators – 2 – Attitude Towards Gender Roles [2005–06 and 2015–16]

Selected Groups	2005–06		2015–16	
	Percentage who agree that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for at least one specified reason (1)	Percentage who agree that a wife is justified in refusing to have sex with her husband for at least one specified reasons (2)	Percentage who agree that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for at least one specified reason (1)	Percentage who agree that a wife is justified in refusing to have sex with her husband for all specified reasons (2)
<i>Residence</i>				
Urban	44.6	74.8	37.1	69.9
Rural	59.2	66.2	56.3	72
<i>Schooling</i>				
No Schooling	65	64.9	59.8	68.4
< 5 years complete	55.2	69.2	58.8	67.8
5 to 9 years complete	48.9	69.7	53	74.2
10 to 11 years complete	31	76.6	45.2	76.8
12 or more years complete			35.7	76.4
<i>Employment (past 12 months)</i>				
Employed	62.9	59.2	59.3	68.5
Employed, for cash	64.1	58.8	55.5	67.9
Employed, not for cash	61.7	66.4	65.6	69.4
Not Employed	53.8	70.1	52	72.5

(contd...)

(Table 2.6 continued)

Selected Groups	2005–06		2015–16	
	Percentage who agree that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for at least one specified reason (1)	Percentage who agree that a wife is justified in refusing to have sex with her husband for at least one specified reasons (2)	Percentage who agree that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for at least one specified reason (1)	Percentage who agree that a wife is justified in refusing to have sex with her husband for all specified reasons (2)
<i>Caste / Tribe</i>				
Scheduled Caste	65	60.5	59.8	70
Scheduled Tribe			51.7	58.3
Other Backward Classes	59.2	68.5	53.8	72
Other	45.3	70.3	46	74.6

Source: National Family Health Survey – 2005–06 and 2015–16.

Note: (1) Specified reasons are: she goes out without telling him, she neglects the house or children, she argues with him, she refuses to have sexual intercourse with him, she doesn't cook properly, he suspects she is unfaithful, she shows disrespect for in-laws; and (2) Specified reasons are: knows husband has a sexually transmitted disease, knows husband has sex with other women, and is tired or not in the mood.

of schooling or social group, have almost no significant role in decision-making. In rural Bihar, about 60 per cent of women (either alone or jointly with their husband) can make decisions on how to spend their husband's earning, major household expenditures and visiting families and relatives but only 25 per cent of women with a bank account respond that they themselves use it. This obviously indicates the constraints in actual freedom/control in determining how the money is accessed or used. Similarly, only 5 per cent of women access loans from micro-finance programmes even though about 28 per cent are aware of the programmes in rural Bihar. In sum, it reveals that majority of the women do not have the autonomy to undertake their own decisions or actions. Limited employment opportunities and high level of domestic responsibilities also limit their opportunities for and control over their own actions or decisions.

The entrenchment of the patriarchal norms and practices becomes evident when one examines the attitude of women towards gender roles given in Table 2.6. In rural Bihar, about 59.2 per cent of women responded that the husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for reasons that are to do with not fulfilling expected gender roles.⁶ However, about 66.2 per cent of women responded that the wife is justified in refusing to have sex with her husband for specific reasons.⁷ There exist variations which reveal that women with more years of schooling and access to employment are more capable of opposing physical or emotional violence. It also reveals that women belonging to marginalised sections, both social and economic, have higher probability of experiencing physical or emotional violence from their partners; where the worrying factor may be that they believe that such treatment is justified and that the husband/lover has a right to do so. In sum, rural Bihar, where our study was conducted, is a space with high level of gender inequality and low levels of women empowerment. It is also a space

⁶ For reasons including she goes out without telling him, she neglects the house or children, she argues with him, she refuses to have sexual intercourse with him, she doesn't cook properly, he suspects she is unfaithful, she shows disrespect for in-laws.

⁷ Specified reasons are: Knows husband has a sexually transmitted disease, knows husband has sex with other women, and is tired or not in the mood.

where women's attitudes to their own lives also need a change for changing social norms.

2.3. Education in Bihar

Given this background to political, social, and economic and empowerment, we move to examine particular socio-cultural aspects of Bihar that influenced MS implementation and impact. As observed in the earlier section, educational outcomes, especially for women, have been historically low. While they have improved in the last decade, the structural barriers to female literacy and education are still quite strong. There have been specific ways in which the state has tried to intervene and it is useful to examine the larger historical and structural barriers that any policy or empowerment programme faces while engaging with women's education in the state. Here, we confine our analysis to a brief historical overview of education in Bihar both during the pre and postcolonial periods. Later in the last chapter, we take a closer look at both political and policy developments of the last three decades in detail to be able to explain our findings of the impact of MS on women's economic empowerment in the state.

2.3.1. *Pre-colonial and colonial contexts of education*

Bihar, in education too, presents a case where it has regressed over a period of time, especially as compared to the ancient and medieval periods of history. Historically, the academic educational systems of India have strictly followed the Brahminical form of education, which excluded (by design) the majority of the population. In fact, the very idea of creating accessible academic education for the masses was considered a radical notion in much of the pre-colonial period. Alternate institutions such as Buddhist *sangharams* and *biharas* did try to engage in breaking this stranglehold over knowledge concentrated in the hands of the few, but the influence was not widespread. However, Bihar was the apex of Buddhist thought and there existed an ecosystem of knowledge and learning that allowed it to develop into an apex of education and host the world's oldest university, Nalanda. During the Mughal period, the educational

system made popular through the Mughal Empire was incorporated into the existing educational systems already prevalent in Bihar. For example, girls from both Muslim and Hindu households would begin their education with a ceremony on the fourth day after four months in their fourth year known as the *Bismillahkhani* (Kadir 2005).

From what is known of that period, primary education for girls was fairly common among the upper castes. In 1835, the Education Report recorded roughly 100,000 schools in Bengal (of which Bihar was then a part) and Bihar accounted for 40,000,000 students in these schools (Kadir 2005). However, higher education was still highly restricted because of the prevalence of the *purdah* system in both Hindu and Muslim communities. Moreover, child marriage was highly prevalent and girls were often considered to be the 'property' of their marital homes. Therefore, no efforts were made to ensure female education. Of course, a few elite households from both these communities began promoting the concept of private tutoring for their daughters inside their houses, leading to some level of growth in secondary education for women, but these were often the exceptions that proved the rule (Kadir 2005).

Prior to the expansion of the British colonial empire, most of the educational systems appeared to be fairly segregated with specific communities catering to their own with their own specific curricula (Karan and Pushpendra 2006). After the East India Company's initial years in the country, the British were very cautious on the provision for 'modern' education to the Indians, due to previous historical retaliations post the introduction of education in different colonies (specifically in the United States of America at the time). However, due to various petitions by individual officers, philanthropists and political pressures, the government began establishing schools in Bihar in 1845, further cemented by the resolution in 1859 eventually leading to establishment of *zilla* or district schools in Patna, Arrah, Chhapra and the Hill School at Bhagalpur (Jha 2006).

By 1866, there were vernacular schools at most district-level areas and an English school in each principal town. However, these did not always improve access to education for girls. Part of the reason was the prevalence of certain social practices and beliefs. For example, it was widely believed that the education of a girl

child induces widowhood (Bagchi 1993). Even though schools had begun mushrooming since 1845, the first girls' schools started only in 1853 and these were often Christian missionary-run schools catering to the Anglo Indian or British population in the state (Jha 2006). For the British, education was fairly instrumental. It was primarily to ensure that cultural practices such as child marriage or sati were not practiced and they felt that education was one of the ways to restrict these practices (Bagchi 1993). The government at the time highlighted the only two routes available to a woman in India: becoming an educator or a life of marriage (*ibid.*), reflecting the lackadaisical attitude to women's education in the state.

Despite this cavalier attitude, in 1867, the first girls-only school opened in Patna, promoted heavily by Bengali communities with the support of the Principal of the Patna College, McCrindle (Jha 2006). By 1868, there were two girls' schools in the state, one of them run by a rich Muslim who had begun the school as a means to ensure that his daughter's education followed the traditions from the Mughal period (*ibid.*). In 1917, Patna University was set up, prior to which there were two colleges in Bihar, which had been affiliated to Calcutta University (Pathak 2012). The university began giving postgraduate Arts degrees by 1919 and began science degrees by 1921. It originally covered not just Bihar but also Orissa and Nepal.

Despite the slow and gradual improvement of the state administration with the education system, there was little improvement in female enrolment due to a variety of issues: fear of sexual violence, cultural norms such as maintaining purdah, cultural and physical restrictions on women's physical mobility and use of public space and these restrictions continued to impede women's education even in the post-independence period.

2.3.2. Post-independence context of education

Post-independence Bihar has often been referred to as part of the BIMARU (indicating sickness) states due to high level of poverty and the large level of disparity. This negative image of Bihar was not prevalent right after Independence (in the 1950s) when the administration was lauded for its consistent performance and clear, focused goals (Kumar, Alam and Joshi 2008). As mentioned

earlier, in the early days it was mostly a Congress-run state and therefore, derived much of its mandate in terms of its educational policy from the central government. By the late 1970s and the 1980s, this started to shift. With the new regional parties gaining prominence and political strategies targeting hitherto untapped voting banks (such as the Dalit and minority populations), a more state-centric approach was taken towards many social issues, one of them being education.

By 1976, Bihar had a variety of private institutions in primary and secondary education in the state as a response to this state-centric approach. During the same time, the large disparities in the state prompted the Bihar government to pass the Non-Government Education (Take Over Control) Act 1976 (Karan and Pushpendra 2006), ensuring a larger level of state government control over educational institutions running at different levels and by private bodies. By doing so, the state hoped to create a uniform education system at the elementary school level. This was also done through setting up of an Elementary Education Committee. It is important to add that this was the phase of nationalisation or provincialisation, as it was called in some states, throughout the country. Though there was large government spending on the improvement and the upkeep of education in the state, due to legacies from previous years such as the poor infrastructure of schools and the lack of qualified teachers, there eventually began a new phase of private education from the 1980s once again in the state (Karan and Pushpendra 2006).

During the same period, the central government began including the promotion of women's empowerment as a priority in the five year plans from the Sixth Plan of 1980–85, which comprised a multi-faceted approach to the development of women in the country with plans focusing on employment, family planning, access to health and education facilities for women (Bano 2015). Through these expenditures, there was a further investment by state and central governments on policies and programmes on the development of women in their respective states. But these still remained limited in terms of coverage and reach. Although Bihar spends a much higher percentage of its total annual expenditure on education, the

amounts remain low because of the fact that the size of the economy itself has remained small.

This is compounded by the fact that Bihar has an extensive rural population that has historically lacked infrastructural facilities, formal means of livelihoods and has high rates of gender and caste discrimination in homes, schools and in the workforce (A. Kumar 2009). As a consequence, in agricultural households, the likelihood of children focusing on education remains rather low (Stearns 2005) and more so for girls, who are often doing care work for their families (Bano 2015). Girls are withdrawn from school at the first instance of any distress in the family: illness, indebtedness, elderly or child care, substituting for their mothers if the latter are active participants in the work force. Moreover, social norms for schooling also work against girls from marginalised communities (Jha and Jhingran 2005). These consistent patterns in Bihar have led to it often having the lowest female literacy rates in the country.

While the rates of literacy have definitely improved post-independence (as indicated in the previous section), the socio-political cultural and institutional space in which MS entered Bihar was much more resistant to girls' education in general. So, the need for this programme was felt very strongly, and it was one of the reasons why the programme was introduced in Bihar.

2.4. Mahila Samakhya in Bihar

As mentioned earlier, when MS gained some prominence as a pilot project and was extended to Bihar, the BEP was considered a natural place to house it as UNICEF had agreed to fund the programme in the state. Considering that BEP faced a major challenge of girls' education and women's mobilisation, housing MS was viewed as an opportunity and mutually beneficial for both sides.

Starting with four districts in 1992, the MS Bihar expanded to 21 districts by 2012. As is the case with MS in all states, it did not cover the entire district but only certain chosen blocks, the sub-district administrative level. The focus was on Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs): a block with lower than state average female literacy is an EBB. MS continued to function as part of the BEP Council

Table 2.7: Year of Entry of MS in Districts in Bihar

Starting Year	Districts covered by MS
1992	Rohtas, Sheohar, Sitamarhi, West Champaran
1993	Muzaffarpur
1998	Bhojpur, Darbhanga, Gaya.
2001	Kaimur
2005	Vaishali
2006	Banka, Jamui, Kishanganj, Supaul
2011	East Champaran, Katihar, Purnea
2012	Araria, Khagaria, Madhepura, Madhubani

Source: Authors compilation from various sources

till 2005 and formally separated from it when it registered its own society. However, given its long-standing relationship with the Department of Education (DoE), it continued to function closely with the Education Department in Bihar.

Additionally, MS was also engaged heavily with the DPEP project, briefly mentioned earlier. DPEP was designed to promote a challenging, holistic planning and management approach to Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). It was introduced in 42 districts in selected states in 1994 and then extended to more than 100 districts in 1995. Multiple donors, including the European Union, DFID and the World Bank funded the DPEP. In its third phase, it entered Bihar with the support of the World Bank. DPEP was intended to address the problems of access, retention and, above all, quality in primary education with a gender responsive approach. The DPEP was characterised by an area-specific approach, contextual and sensitive to local conditions. It was committed to reducing gender and social disparities with regard to enrolment, retention and achievement of all children at the primary school level. MS Bihar, which was an integral part of the DPEP in Bihar from 1996 till about 2000, worked on elementary education issues with both adult women and adolescent girls.

Two features distinguished MS in Bihar slightly from other states. One was the emphasis on education right from the very beginning and the second was the mode of operationalisation of economic empowerment. Although education had always been the

foundational principle upon which the methodology of MS was functional, being part of BEP and DPEP created specific ways in which the focus on education was mapped out. One of the ways in which this influenced the programme was that engaging with adult women tended to take a backseat (World Bank Report 2005). As a result, MS in Bihar also witnessed the tussles between MS, SSA and DPEP, leading to MS often being used as trainers without critical effect (Ramachandran 2012). We explore this more deeply in the last chapter where we try to explain the results of our study through an analysis of policy and political influences.

In Bihar, economic empowerment agenda in the MS emerged as a planned process early on. Based on an analysis of various forms of exploitation prevalent in the state, MS Bihar made the conscious choice of encouraging women of the *samoooh* to form micro-credit groups in 1994–95 but with a caution:

The majority of our samoooh women come from the poorest and the lowest strata of society. Realizing that these women are facing severe economic pressure, indebtedness and unemployment, the idea of 'savings' was introduced in 1994–95 in those samooohs which were rather well established. However, the MS teams are always aware of the possible negative impact of money and money transactions on the solidarity of the samooohs. As a result the activity is being taken up with much caution. (Mahila Samakhya Bihar: A Journey in Women's Empowerment, Bihar Education Project)

As the state started engaging more and more with SHGs, linkages with banks and resources available through the state for collectives also started influencing the nature of the *sanghas* (Ramchandran and Jhandyala 2012), with older larger *sanghas* breaking up to form small *sanghas* (*bachaat samooohs*), but retaining the same functioning and form of the older *sanghas*. In 1998, following a NABARD training that provided them information on better and smooth functioning of the *sangha* that also provided them specific techniques to access financial resources and mutual lending, these *samooohs* started to reduce their dependence on the high interest rates in the banks. This practice still continues where most *sanghas* tend to lend their

savings out for loans instead of placing this money in the bank or take loans from the bank.

In conclusion, what emerges is that MS started functioning in Bihar in a context where women, especially those from the most marginalised communities, were living in poverty, had a long history of oppression, were largely illiterate and had very limited opportunities to break systemic barriers. At the same time, MS was also working in a context which saw a large number of women participating in rights-based social movements as well civil society initiatives. In order to create impact on the field, MS Bihar was able to leverage institutional support to emphasise empowerment through education. Because of the flexibility of the programme, they were also able to create specific forms of impact over a wide range of socio-economic factors. The political and policy climate changed dramatically over the course of three decades, which is also evident from the social indicators that sometimes reflect these changes. The rise of Other Backward Castes (OBC) in politics and the global focus on universalisation of basic education as an international goal together had their reflections in the MS functioning and choices. The final chapter goes into details of the political changes that Bihar experienced in the last three decades to contextualise the impact of MS on women empowerment in the state. As mentioned earlier, to explore the different dimensions of this impact, we engage with the impact of MS on indicators of economic empowerment in three districts in Bihar: Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar. While we try to understand the aspect of time through an analysis of policies and politics of the last three decades, we present a brief profile of these three districts here to understand how the 'space' looks.

2.5. Socio-geographical profile of study districts

2.5.1. *Muzaffarpur*

Muzaffarpur is located in the north-west region of Bihar. It shares its boundaries with the districts of North Champaran, Sheohar and Sitamarhi in the north, Darbhanga in the east, Samastipur and Vaishali in the south and Saran in the west, with an area of 3,172 sq.

km (Government of Bihar n.d.). However, it is located very close to the state capital, Patna, without sharing the boundaries as the two districts are divided by the river Ganga and connected by one of the longest road bridges of the world, known as Rajendra Setu.

As Bihar is situated in the Gangetic plain, its soil is usually fertile and well-irrigated. The Agriculture Department has divided the region into four agro-climatic zones: north alluvial plain, north east alluvial plain, south east alluvial plain and south west alluvial plain (Department of Agriculture Bihar n.d.). Muzaffarpur is found in the north alluvial plain with sandy loam soil. The crops often grown are paddy, maize, wheat and lentils. The district is also famous for the growing litchis and mangoes, which are exported in huge quantities (Government of Bihar n.d.). Two prominent rivers run through the district – Bagmati and Budhi Gandak. The district, like the rest of North Bihar, often witnesses flood, which regularly disrupts lives as well as livelihoods.

Of the three sample districts, Muzaffarpur has the largest number of industries, ranging from sugar factories, thermal power stations, railway wagon factory and pharmaceuticals industries (Government of Bihar n.d.). Because of close proximity to the capital city of Patna, it also enjoys greater infrastructural facilities as opposed to the other two districts, and is much more urbanised than the other districts. However, many of the sugar factories and thermal power stations are in dire need of modernisation and often fall in the category of sick industries.

Male and female literacy rates have also improved in the district since 2001 with female literacy growing by 19 percentage points (Census 2011). The population has been increasing and the sex ratio in the district has continued to diminish since 2001 with moving from 920 women (per 1000 men) to 900 women (per 1000 men). The SC population in the district is about 15.9 per cent with 0.1 per cent belonging to tribal populations in the district (Government of Bihar 2001). High level of male out-migration prevalent in the district makes it difficult to easily establish the cause of the declining sex-ratio: whether it is migration alone or is it reflective of higher incidence of female feticide is not clear.

2.5.2. Kaimur

Kaimur rests on the western tip of the state surrounded by Jharkhand on the south, Uttar Pradesh on the north-west and the districts of Rohtas and Buxar on the east (Government of Bihar n.d.) with an area of 3,332 sq. km. (Census 2011). Kaimur is one of the newly formed districts in the state and split from Rohtas in 1991. It consists of two main types of geographical areas: hilly regions and plains (Government of Bihar 2009). It sits on the Agro-Climatic Zone III-B (Southern West), which has soil ranging from sandy loam, clay loam to clay and loam (Department of Agriculture, Bihar n.d.). There are two rivers running through this district Karmnasha and Durgawati (Government of Bihar n.d.). The main crops grown in this region are paddy, maize, wheat and sugarcane (Government of Bihar n.d.).

Unlike both Muzaffarpur and Katihar, Kaimur does not have any particular industry. It also has a long history of being a Naxalite area, the term used for the far-Left Maoist movement. The Naxalite areas are often viewed as unsafe for industrial or any other form of investment, and considered insecure because of the fear of violence from both sides: police and Naxalite. Its main source of income remains agriculture (Department of Agriculture Bihar n.d.). Due to the large forest areas, it also produces timber, bamboo, firewood, *chiraunji* and *kendu* leaf. It is also famous for its textiles including silk and carpentry (Government of Bihar 2009). Although it is fairly well connected to the rest of Bihar through the National Highway 30 that runs right through the district, many parts are remote and inaccessible due to its hilly and rocky terrain.

As compared with the other districts, the population density of Kaimur is low though the population has been increasing over the years. Unlike the other two districts, the sex ratio has actually increased overall for Kaimur rising from 902 women (per 1000 men) in 2001 to 920 women (per 1000 men) in 2011. The child sex ratio has also increased slightly from 940 female (1000 male) to 942 female (1000 male) in the same time period (Census 2011). Literacy levels have also gone up in the last 10 years from 69.64 per cent to 79.37 per cent for men and 38.79 per cent to 58.40 per

cent for women (Census 2011). The overall SC population in the district was 22.2 per cent and ST population was 2.8 per cent as of 2001 (Government of Bihar 2001).

2.5.3. *Katihar*

Katihar is situated to the south-east of Bihar surrounded by the states of West Bengal and Jharkhand in the south east area, the district Bhagalpur in the west and the district of Purnia in the north, with an area of 3,057 sq. kms (Government of Bihar n.d.). Katihar rests on the Agro-Climatic Zone II (North East), which has soil ranging from sandy loam to clay loam (Department of Agriculture Bihar n.d.). The main crop grown in the region is paddy (Government of Bihar n.d.). The Mahananda and the Ganga river flow through this region.

Though not as extensive as Muzaffarpur in terms of industry, the district is famous for the jute and paper mills in the region (Government of Bihar n.d.). The district also boasts a very high level of connectivity through railways. The town of Katihar is a major junction under the North East Frontier Railways with a seven-line junction. Additionally, both NH 31 and NH 81 run through it (District of Katihar n.d.). This district also connects the rest of the country to the north-eastern states through the railways and therefore is of strategic importance.

With an increasing population, the overall sex ratio has remained the same from 919 women (per 1000 men) in 2001 to 919 women (per 1000 men) in 2011. However, child sex ratio for the ages below six years has fallen from 966 girls (per 1000 boys) in 2001 to 961 girls (per 1000 boys) in 2011 (Census 2011). Literacy rates continued to grow for Katihar with male literacy going from 45.31 per cent in 2001 to 59.36 per cent in 2011 and female literacy jumping from 23.80 to 44.39 in the same time period (Census 2011). The overall population of Scheduled Castes in the district was 8.7 per cent and 5.9 per cent for Scheduled Tribes (Government of Bihar 2001). Declining child sex ratio hints at the growing prevalence of female foeticide and other practices that prevent birth and survival of girls in early years.

After providing a picture of the state of Bihar in detail and the study districts in brief, we move to presenting our results and analysis in the next three chapters. While Chapter 3 details our estimations as well as analysis of the economic empowerment effect of MS in these three districts while Chapter 4 focuses on inter-generational impact. Both these chapters extensively use data collected through surveys and ethnographic methods and attempt to integrate the quantitative and qualitative analyses. Chapter 5 goes deeper into the results analysed earlier mainly through the use of qualitative data from the field itself for a better understanding of the patterns observed and analysed earlier while the last chapter analyses the wider political policy trends observed in the last three decades as well as the shifts and changes in MS' directions over the same period and their relationship with the patterns and effects observed earlier.

3 Women's Economic Empowerment

Indivisible part of a synergetic process

3.1. *Background*

Shivani stands out in the crowd, both because of her colourful sari and colourful personality. She talks passionately to us about her life, experiences and the changes that she has experienced. Shivani cannot read or write and is struggling to make ends meet. When her daughter was born, her husband took very ill. There was no one else to provide for her family. So, out of sheer necessity and desperation, she decided to go to work. Leaving her infant daughter behind with her sick husband, she started selling vegetables in the district market. She would sell various things – rice crisps, mangoes, papaya – anything to get by. While she was doing this, a *sahayogini* from MS informed her about this new programme that will help women in her position. So, in 1993, Shivani joined a small group of women and started her journey with MS.

Rani is much younger than Shivani; she is in her early 20s. But she doesn't seem as youthful as Shivani. Rani's family hails from a very remote village where basic necessities such as water and food are a constant source of struggle. Based on the customs of her community, she was married at the age of 12 but continued to live with her parents. She never went to school and her young life was mostly marked by childcare (of her siblings) and housework. An MS

sahayogini noticed Rani cutting grass or taking care of her family members, despite being formally enrolled in school. The *sahayogini* convinced her parents to send Rani to the Mahila Shikshan Kendra (MSK) in their district. Coming out of her village and staying in a building was intimidating for Rani. But soon her journey with the philosophy and method of MS began.

Economic empowerment cannot be seen in isolation. Rather, it has to be viewed as an indivisible part of a whole, where all aspects of empowerment are essential to create a shift in gender relations, social norms, and personal growth. In this chapter, we examine the way in which MS was able to influence social norms and customs entrenched with the rural workforce, address issues of information asymmetry, provide space for independent decision-making processes and enable political participation so that women could become independent, strong, and politically-conscious citizens. Precisely because this process of empowerment is non-linear and multidimensional, we analyse the impact of MS in two ways. The first is through examining the effects of the MS empowerment on particular outcomes of individuals over a period of time in the larger context of a highly stratified society. The second is through examining the unfolding stories of Shivani and Rani (and many more like them) and the complicated journeys that the women take in their interaction with MS.

In order to examine the overall effects of the MS programme, we look at seven measures of empowerment as well as a composite empowerment measure to understand the nature of influence over a period of time, specifically, 23 years, 15 and five years. What we found was that while there are variations in the magnitude and nature of effect at the level of indicators and period of exposure to the MS programme, there is documented impact of the programme on women. For instance, impact on economic activity (as a measure) is stronger for the sample with the shortest exposure (five years) to the programme but the difference between MS members and non-participants is insignificant and marginal for the sample with longest exposure (23 years). MS members are better informed and are more likely to participate in political processes at both the

state and local levels; this effect is observed to be highest for MS members with the longest exposure to the programme. There are indications (elaborated later in this chapter) that the time duration of the programme had differential influences on the measures of empowerment.

However, the quantitative analysis has its limits: it fails to tell us what the processes of change were, what the initial responses were, where push-backs and regressions happened, why did certain achievements sustained whereas others failed and what does all this mean for an individual or for numerous individuals engaged with the programme. In order to understand and unpack the mechanisms and pathways through which these effects have been attained by MS, we used ethnographic methods. This data was able to provide us insight into the spaces and outcomes sustainable on their own as well as the spaces and outcomes that encounter greater barriers that require higher level of continuous engagement. Studying the contribution of informal institutions such as Apna Bank, Nari Adalat, Jagjagi centres along with individual narratives helps us discuss the impact of MS on several indicators like self-efficacy, decision-making, political participation, attitudes towards violence and economic activities that contribute to empowerment. The chapter, in essence, captures the trajectory of empowerment that MS fostered and iterates the complex process of empowerment as non-linear, dynamic and continuous.

3.2. *Construction of individual and overall economic empowerment measures*

Empowerment is not the result of a pill that you take one night and next morning you are cured...

In order to examine the different facets of empowerment, we engaged with particular measures of empowerment useful to capture its multidimensional nature. In this sub-section, we explain the methodology adopted to transform these measures or survey questions with varying responses into dichotomous variables of cardinal scale, the construction of individual measures or

dimensions as well as the construction of the composite economic empowerment index. We borrow heavily from the framework adopted by Alkire et al. (2015) to construct the multidimensional poverty index and the research on development of the human development index by United Nations Development Programme to construct our individual measure and composite economic empowerment index.

We assume that the economic empowerment of women is to be assessed using S number of measures, or dimensions, such that $S \in N$ – where N is a set of positive integers.¹ Each measure is to be assessed by the response, or value, $K \in N$ reported by a respondent i in dimension j by $x_{ij} \in R$, where R is a set of non-negative real numbers, for all $i = 1, \dots, n$ and $j = 1, \dots, S$. We denote an overall matrix ES_j which contains all the responses reported by all respondents across all constituents considered to construct the individual measure. Further, we denote another matrix M which contains all the individual measures for all our respondents.

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 ES_j = \begin{pmatrix} x_{11} & \dots & x_{1k} \\ \vdots & & \vdots \\ x_{n1} & \dots & x_{nk} \end{pmatrix} & \begin{array}{c} \text{Respondent} \\ \text{Constituents} \end{array} &
 \begin{array}{ccc}
 M = \begin{pmatrix} x_{11} & \dots & x_{1S} \\ \vdots & & \vdots \\ x_{n1} & \dots & x_{nS} \end{pmatrix} & \begin{array}{c} \text{Respondent} \\ \text{Measures} \end{array}
 \end{array}$$

These matrices aid in identifying those who are empowered by examining the marginal and joint distributions of ES_j and M .²

This enables us to analyse the impact of MS by (i) varying level of movement in the constituents, (ii) individual measures and (iii) composite economic empowerment index. In order to do this, we undertake transformation of the constituents to arrive at variables

¹ We use the terms measures and dimensions of economic empowerment interchangeably in this paper.

² A marginal distribution is a distribution of a particular measure j , say economic activity, across all respondents. Thus, it can be used to obtain the proportion of respondents by different degrees of empowerment without any references to other measures. On the other hand, joint distribution will help in understanding the proportion of respondents by different degrees of empowerment across all measures for all our respondents.

with a single scale of measurement.³ This is to ensure that the aggregation of the constituents and individual measures to construct the indices is undertaken in a meaningful manner (Alkire et al. 2015).

To explain, the constituents of the seven individual measures were recorded in different scales of measurement. For instance, current or recent employment under the economic activity measure is of a binary scale where a value of one is assigned if the respondent reported Yes to being employed in the last 12 months and zero otherwise. On the other hand, constituents under the self-efficacy measure are of the Likert scale. While the aggregation to construct the individual measure is not affected, it does not remain the same. The individual measures are aggregated to construct the composite economic empowerment index.⁴ The variation in the composite economic empowerment index constitutes the variation in responses across the constituents; thereby making it difficult to assess the actual level of economic empowerment for all respondents across all dimensions. In order to circumvent this problem, we transformed the variables in different scales to a binary scale of zero and one which represents negative and positive responses, respectively, by the respondents. The matrix of transformations for the constituents is given in Annexure Table A2.

After the transformations, we aggregated the constituents by taking the arithmetic mean with equal weights to construct our individual measure. The basic assumption here is the linearity of the

³ Alkire et al. (2015) define scale of measurement as a 'a particular way of assigning numbers or symbols to assess certain aspects of the empirical world, such that the relationships of these numbers or symbols replicate or represent certain observed relations between the aspects being measures'.

⁴ For instance, in the given example, a positive movement towards economic empowerment under a binary variable, such as economic activity, will change the response for an individual from a value of zero to one. On the other hand, a positive movement in the self-efficacy measure (four-item scale) – say a movement from a value two ('hardly true') to three ('moderately true') – will change the value of the individual measure from 0.5 [2/4] to 0.75 [3/4]. In general, a single positive movement in the ladder of five-level Likert item changes the value of the individual measure by 0.25 points. Thereby, the binary variable will vary by a degree of 1 and the Likert scale variable will vary by a degree of 0.25. The combination of these two variables in another overall variable will not be meaningful.

constituents and linearity in relationship between the constituents itself. Given that the scale of the constituents is either zero or one, the individual measure will not be impacted by the problem of perfect substitution between the constituents and will be sensitive to changes in the values of the constituents. Thus, each individual measure is given by

$$S_i = \frac{1}{K} \sum_{i=1}^k x_{ik} \text{ ----- [Equation 3.1]}$$

Each measure contains the natural zero which can be associated with no empowerment at all. Further, the individual measure is of ratio scale such that the value ranges between 0 and 1.

The composite economic empowerment index is derived by taking the equal-weighted geometric mean of the individual measures. The rationale behind the geometric mean for the aggregation is motivated by the inter-connected and multidimensional nature of our definition of economic empowerment of women. The geometric mean, with equal weight, also ensures that a one per cent reduction in one individual measure, say economic activity, has the same level of impact on the composite economic empowerment index as a one per cent reduction in another individual measure, say political participation (Jahan et al. 2015). Despite these advantages over the arithmetic mean, Alkire and Foster (2010) observe rightly that the geometric mean is highly sensitive to the lowest values in the distribution. It should be noted that all our individual measures have a well-defined lowest value which is the natural zero.

A zero value in one individual measure for a respondent can lead to the composite economic empowerment index being zero hindering the computation of any joint distributions or making it impossible to measure the economic empowerment across dimensions for all respondents. We avoid this problem by adopting a zero replacement strategy, where a value of 'one' is added to the individual measures to move the range from [0,1] to [1,2].⁵ After this, we derive the

⁵ It should be noted that the transformed individual measure is used for the computation of composite economic empowerment index; and the originally derived individual measure will be used for the analysis.

composite economic empowerment index by taking the geometric mean of the individual measures which range between [1,2]. The last transformation here is to deduct the composite economic empowerment index by a value of 'one', thereby bringing the range back to [0,1] without altering the distribution at all.⁶ This ensures that there is consistency in the lowest value, which is zero, across individual measures and composite economic empowerment index. Further, a normative cut-off can be applied to identify those who are least and most empowered, say values falling in the range of [0,0.20] and [0.80,1] respectively. Also, the identification strategy will be consistent across individual measures and the overall index. The mathematical notation of the transformation and computation of the geometric mean is given below:

Step 1: Changing the range of individual measures from [0,1] to [1,2]

$$TS_i = S_i + 1 \text{ ----- [Equation 3.2]}$$

Step 2: Computation of Composite Economic Empowerment Index

$$ICEEI_i = \sqrt[s]{x_{i1} * x_{i2} * ... * x_{is}} \text{ ----- [Equation 3.3]}$$

where s is the number of individual measures and i represents the respondent.

Step 3: Final Composite Economic Empowerment Index

$$CEEI_i = [ICEEI_i - 1] \text{ ----- [Equation 3.4]}$$

3.3. Estimation strategy

To reiterate, the study was conducted in three districts in the Indian state of Bihar – Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar – where MS was working for 23 years, 15 years and five years respectively at the time of our survey (2016). Our primary survey constitutes of randomly selected MS members (treatment or intervention sample, as we would have preferred to refer to it) and non-MS respondents (control

⁶ Refer to Figure A2, A3 and A4 in the Annexure for the graphical representation of the original and final derivation of the composite economic empowerment index of Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar respectively.

or non-intervention sample) from these three districts. Using the primary survey, we estimate the average treatment effects of the treated (ATT *hereon*) on the outcome by duration of exposure to MS. The ATT is defined as the effect of MS of only those who have had the exposure to MS.

The ATT is derived from two components – potential outcome for the treated and potential outcome for the control. Following the potential outcome framework, we define potential outcome for the treated (denoted as Y_{1i}) as the outcome observed when a person receives the MS programme and potential outcome for the control (denoted as Y_{0i}) as the outcome observed when a person did not receive the MS programme (Rosenbaum and Rubin, 1983; Holland, 1986; Rubin, 2005; Imai and Stuart, 2011; and Stata, 2013). We denote treatment status as T where $T = 1$ when the individual i receives the MS programme; and $T = 0$ is when the individual i did not receive the MS programme.

In an ideal experimental setup, the ATT of MS would be estimated by taking the difference between the potential outcome of an individual i when she receive and did not receive the MS programme [$E(Y_{1i}) - E(Y_{0i})$]; assuming random allocation of treatment-assignment and that an identical environment exists.⁷ However, in the real world, we observe only one potential outcome either when the individual had received MS programme – (Y_{1i}) or not (Y_{0i}), which results in the missing data problem in estimating the causal effects (Rosenbaum and Rubin 1983; Holland 1986). Therefore, we have to speculate about the missing potential outcome data to be able to estimate the causal effects and make any causal inference of the MS programme.

The central assumption here is the stable unit treatment unit value assumption (SUTVA) which states that there should be no interference or interaction between the treated and control units, such that the individuals in treatment and control did not have any effect on the potential outcome of the control and treatment respectively. Second, there is no hidden variation of how the treatment was given or delivered to the individuals i such that the

⁷ Here, $E(.)$ denotes the expectation of the population.

observed outcome will be equal to the potential outcome for each level of treatment assignment (Rosenbaum and Rubin 1983; Angrist et al. 1996; Rubin 2005; and Imbens and Rubin 2015).

The first part of SUTVA is satisfied through our sampling strategy, where we had selected non-MS villages from blocks (sub-district level) where MS did not have any presence at all. Next, we took measures to account for the non-randomised allocation of villages to treatment status (T_i). Since we had no control over the treatment assignment of villages – which can result in probability of treatment assignment, also referred to as ‘propensities’, for the MS and non-MS respondents being dissimilar.⁸ If not accounted for, it causes difficulty in making any casual inferences from the estimation results (Rubin 1973; Rosenbaum and Rubin 1983; Angrist et al. 1996; Rubin. 2005; and Imbens and Rubin 2015). We circumvent this problem and estimate the ATT of MS by making use of the theoretical foundation laid down by Rosenbaum and Rubin (1983). The first assumption here is that a set of observed co-variables, Z_i , exists such that the treatment-assignment is strongly ignorable conditional upon these observed covariates.⁹ We formalise the treatment-assignment with a probit model

$$T_i = \delta_i + \beta_{zi}Z_i + v_i \text{ --- [Equation 3.5]}$$

where T_i is a dummy variable assigned as value of 1 for villages with MS and 0 otherwise. Z_i includes the observed pre-treatment covariates such as SC and ST population (%) and female literacy (%). These co-variables were sourced from Census 1991 for Muzaffarpur, Census 2001 for Kaimur and Census 2011 for Katihar.¹⁰

⁸ The dissimilar probability of treatment assignment implies that the MS and non-MS villages are drastically different, or even worse that the non-MS may represent the sample population to whom the MS programme may not have been offered. The observed difference in adjusted means between MS and non-MS can be due to the non-equivalence between the groups; thereby invalidating any statement about the causal effect of MS.

⁹ This is referred to as the strongly ignorable treatment assignment assumption (Rosenbaum and Rubin 1983).

¹⁰ It should be noted that MS started working in Muzaffarpur from 1993, Kaimur from 2001 and Katihar from 2011. Therefore, we selected the relevant pre-treatment time period at which the village-level data was available from respective Census surveys.

Further, the probability of treatment assignment¹¹ given the co-variables, $[\pi(Z) = \Pr(T = 1 \mid Z)]$ is strictly greater than zero and less than one over the support of Z_i (Rubin 1973; Rosenbaum and Rubin 1983; Rubin 2005; and Glynn and Quinn 2010). It is represented mathematically as:

$$\{Y_{1i}, Y_{0i}\} \text{ is independent of } T_i \mid Z_i \text{ and } 0 < \pi(Z) < 1$$

We make use of the observed covariates – SC and ST population (%) and Female Literacy Rate (%) – used by MS officials to identify and target villages to estimate the propensities of treatment assignment.¹² These propensities were then used to identify and match the non-MS villages to MS villages. This ensured that there are systemic differences in propensity of treatment assignment between MS and non-MS villages.¹³

Given this, in addition to the fact that the MS programme is implemented at the village level, it can be said that the potential outcomes (Y_{1i} and Y_{0i}) are independent of the treatment-assignment mechanism. The second part of SUTVA – of no hidden variation in treatment – is guaranteed by the fact that nature of MS programme is similar to all MS members in a particular study site (or district). In sum, the potential outcome framework, SUTVA, strongly ignorable treatment-assignment and common support over Z_i will allow us to estimate the effect of MS – mathematically expressed as:

$$\tau_i = [E(Y_i(1) - Y_i(0) \mid T_i = 1)] - [E(Y_i(1) - Y_i(0) \mid T_i = 0)] \text{ ----- [Equation 3.6]}$$

¹¹ Note that we use probability of treatment assignment and propensity scores interchangeably in this chapter.

¹² We limited ourselves to using these two variables and did not add any additional observed co-variables as that would then lead to introducing the problem of researchers' discretion in constructing the treatment-assignment function. King (2016) documented that such researchers' discretion and arbitrary inclusion of any available observed co-variables leads to biased estimates of the effect. Therefore, we use only the variables used by the MS officials themselves to estimate the propensity of treatment-assignment and use it to identify and match with non-MS villages.

¹³ In the Annexure, we provide extensive details on the approach to the matching process, distribution of propensities and reduction in bias to ensure that the MS and non-MS villages are similar in treatment-assignment.

Now there are several estimators that allow one to estimate the treatment effects of MS such as propensity score-matching, inverse probability weights (IPW), inverse probability weights with regression adjustment (IPWRA) and augmented inverse probability weighted estimators (AIPW). Of all this, AIPW has theoretical properties where the unbiased and consistent ATT is estimated when only either the regression model for the outcome variable or the logit model for the propensity score is correctly specified (Glynn and Quinn 2010; Słoczyński and Wooldridge 2014; and Stata 2013). Further, Glynn and Quinn (2009) ran Monte Carlo simulations and observed that the AIPW estimator is more robust and performs better under a fully correct specification and drastically better when either the outcome or the treatment-assignment model is partially mis-specified. Given this, we make use of AIPW estimator to estimate the treatment effect of MS.¹⁴The general outcome model is specified below:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_{1i} T_i + \beta_{ri} C_i + \varepsilon_i \text{-----} [Equation 3.7]$$

In the outcome regression model, the dependent variable, Y_i , includes the constituents, individual measures and the composite economic empowerment index. We estimate a logit model for the constituents of the individual measures as the dependent variable is a binary variable (0,1); whereas a fractional logit model is employed for the individual measures and composite economic empowerment as the dependent variable ranges between 0 and 1. The treatment status, denoted as T_i , is a binary variable which is 1 if the individual i receives the MS programme and 0 otherwise. The control variables, denoted as C_i , includes socio-economic demographic profiles of individual i namely age, caste, type of house, current per-capita household income and number of household members. We included

¹⁴ It should be noted that the STATA programme for AIPW allows for the estimation of average treatment effect (ATE). We use this estimator for our purposes as the average treatment effect (ATE) will be equal to the average treatment effect on the treated (ATT) in our case. This is because of the fact that our treated sample constitutes only of those who had been given and continued with the MS programme. The theory on estimating treatment effects indicates that the ATE will be equal to ATT in such circumstances (Stata 2013; and Trochim and Donnelly 2001).

a binary variable which is 1 if there are any SHGs functioning in the village and 0 otherwise, to capture the effect of any SHG other than MS on the outcome variables. Further, it includes the distance to the nearest town from a village (measured in kilometres), percentage of area utilised for non-agricultural activities, percentage of SC and ST population, female labour force participation rate and female literacy rate to account for the village-level factors that explain variations observed in the outcome variables.

With respect to the treatment-assignment model, we have already discussed the independent variables to estimate the propensity scores in earlier paragraph. As a robustness check, we estimated a variant of the treatment-assignment model where we included additionally variables at the level of individual (women) such as age, caste, education status of husband¹⁵. This variant was to examine the question of 'non-random treatment-assignment of women within a MS village, thereby its implication on the estimation of treatment effects'.^{16,17} The estimated magnitude of the effect or the significance level does not change, relative to the treatment-assignment model used to estimate propensity scores at the village level. Thus, we make use of estimates from the treatment-assignment and outcome model given in equation 3.5 and 3.7 respectively for our discussion.

Another important point to highlight is the examination of treatment effects of MS by variation in duration of exposure represented here by three districts. The duration of exposure to MS represents level of intensity, maturity, capacity, network, and knowledge of the *samooths* in MS villages. An examination of the effect through this lens will help us understand the sustainability of

¹⁵ For those women who were separated, divorced or widowed, we made use of the education status of a person who was assumed to have significant (if any) on the participation of these women in collective groups. This would either be the father, or mother, or father-in-law, or mother-in-law. The choice among these individuals was purely dependent on the self-reported response of the respondent herself.

¹⁶ We explore this possibility through our regression estimation, even though it must be stated that was not the case with MS, as the treatment assignment was purely at the village level.

¹⁷ The estimates from this set of regression are not presented here but available on request.

the effect of MS on overall economic empowerment of marginalised women and can be extended to individual constituents and measures.

However, the estimation is undertaken for each district separately to ensure that the propensity scores are estimated for MS and non-MS villages within each district, thereby ensuring that a MS village from Muzaffarpur is not matched with a non-MS village from either Kaimur or Katihar.¹⁸ This introduces difficulty in examining the effect of MS by duration of programme exposure as we do not econometrically control for district-level differences in equation 3.7. It could well be argued and assumed that differences in district-level variables such as female literacy (%), SC and ST population (%), or even per capita income would not lead to drastic changes in the magnitude and significance levels of the effect, especially since a variant of these set of observed co-variates is controlled for at the individual, household and village levels. Second, it must be noted that our sample respondents – both MS and non-MS – across these three districts belong to marginalised sections of society, facing similar levels of deprivation and opportunities. We will be cautious and claim that estimation results represent a potential curve of treatment effect by duration of exposure, and not the actual estimated curve itself. Our interpretation of the results presented in this chapter will be conservative and will refrain from the argument of short, medium and long-term effects of the MS programme. We will treat the result as it is and denote the five years (Katihar sample) as shortest exposure, 15 years (Kaimur sample) as medium exposure and 23 years (Muzaffarpur sample) as longest exposure to the programme from now onwards.

3.4. Profile of our sample respondents

We had targeted about 500 MS and 500 non-MS respondents in each of the districts. In Muzaffarpur, the survey was completed for 419 MS and 488 non-MS respondents from 48 MS and 50 non-MS

¹⁸ Not controlling for this will lead to complication in interpretation of the results thereafter as then one will not be sure of the estimated potential outcome of the control.

villages¹⁹. In Kaimur, the survey was conducted in 43 MS and 43 non-MS villages and about 463 MS and 509 non-MS respondents were surveyed from these villages. In Katihar, the survey was conducted in all the targeted 100 villages covering a total of 490 MS and 490 non-MS respondents.

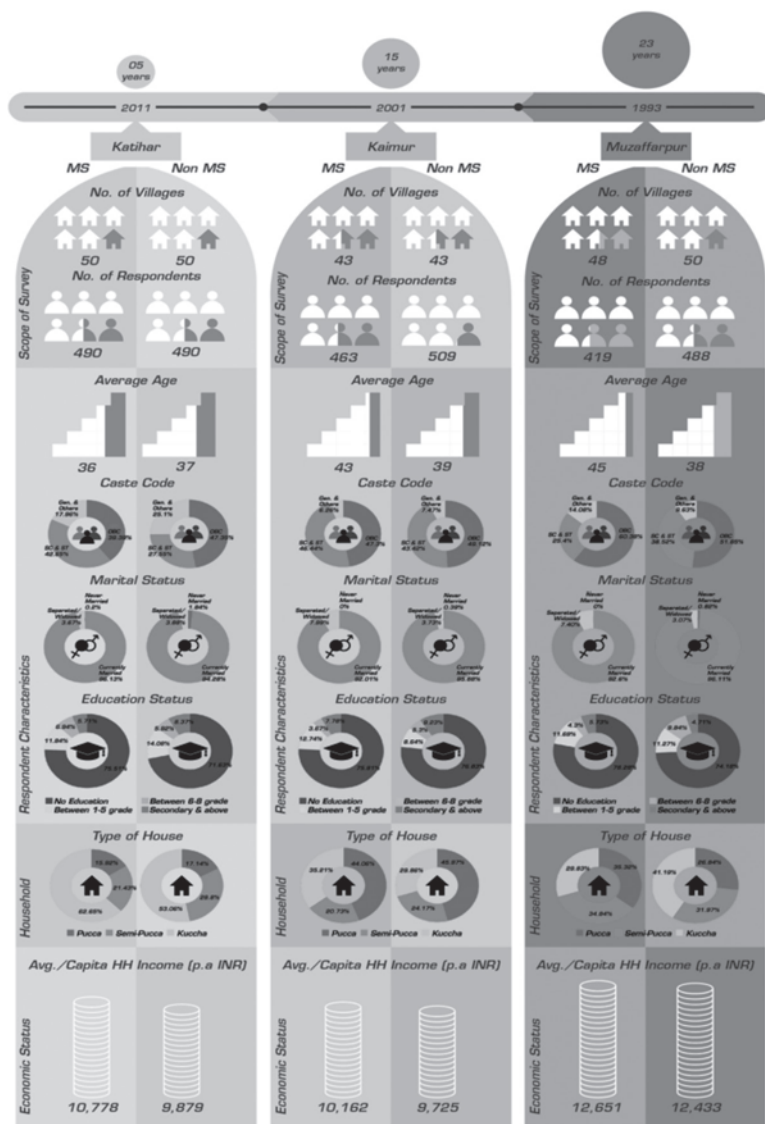
On an average, MS members are older by about seven and four years as compared to non-MS respondents in Muzaffarpur and Kaimur respectively; this difference in average age between MS and non-MS respondents is about one year in Katihar. Therefore, though there is significant difference in age between our MS and non-MS sample in Muzaffarpur, the median age of MS and non-MS respondents reveals a much narrower gap, about two years, in Kaimur.²⁰ It must be noted here that the MS programme is available to all the households in a particular village and is not restricted to any particular age group. On other characteristics, our sample is made up of majority of socially-disadvantaged group such as OBC, SC and ST, approximately 90 per cent, 93 per cent and 80 per cent in Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar respectively. More than 90 per cent of the women in our sample across the three districts are currently married and about 75 per cent of the women have had no formal education at all.

At the household level, we find that respondents in Muzaffarpur, irrespective of MS or non-MS, earn about Rs 1,700 to Rs 2,000 (US\$ 25–30) per annum more than the respondents in Kaimur and Katihar. It should be noted that per capita income per annum of all the respondents is close to the Rs 12,000 (US\$ 175) per capita consumption expenditure per annum which was denoted as the below poverty line for rural Bihar as per the proposed Tendulkar Methodology (Planning Commission 2014). Further, we find no statistical difference between MS and non-MS respondents in terms of per capita income per annum (USD) across the three districts.

¹⁹ Survey collection efforts for the MS respondents in the remaining two MS villages did not take place as we faced difficulty in ascertaining whether MS had begun its operations during the time period 1991 and 2001. Hence, it was decided not to undertake the survey in the two villages and thereby maintain our sampling strategy.

²⁰ The median age between MS and non-MS respondents is 45 and 35 years in Muzaffarpur.

Figure 3.1: Descriptive Statistics of Our Sample for the Three Study Districts



Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

We find significant difference between MS and non-MS sample at the village level, especially in Muzaffarpur. This can be observed in terms of the distance to the nearest town from the MS/non-MS village, percentage of presence of any SHGs), and percentage of area utilised for non-agricultural activities within the village. The differences in these village-level characteristics do not matter for the treatment-assignment function and has been controlled in the outcome regression to estimate the ATT of MS on the overall economic empowerment of rural women.

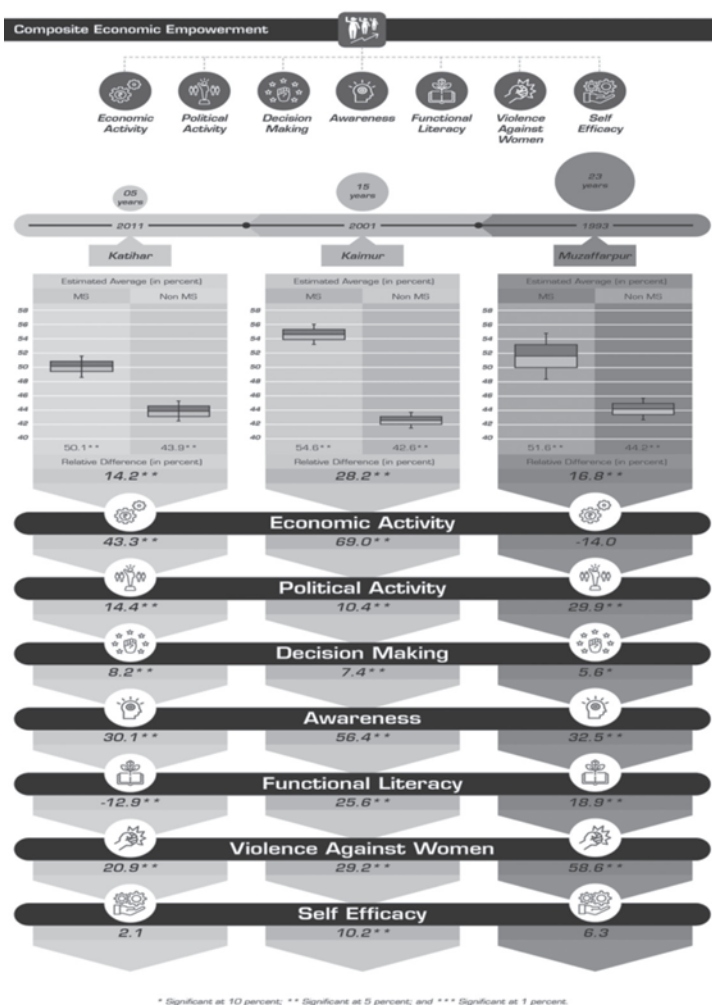
3.5. Composite economic empowerment index

The ATT of MS on the composite economic empowerment index is positive and significant for all the three districts. The ATT of MS was observed to be highest for Kaimur, where the MS programme has been present for the past 15 years, followed by Muzaffarpur (23 years) and Katihar (five years) with similar levels of relative difference from non-MS villages. Participation in the MS programme leads to a 28 per cent difference in the composite economic empowerment index relative to non-MS respondents in Kaimur, followed by a 17 per cent difference and 14 per cent difference in Muzaffarpur and Katihar respectively.²¹ The estimated ATT of MS in the longest exposure to MS with 17 per cent indicates that the effect of MS programme is sustained and does not dissipate to zero effect in the long run.

If we consider the observed variation in ATT across the three durations of exposure, although the quantitative analysis does not control district-level differences, we are taking into consideration the rural economy, female employment largely restricted to agriculture and the lower levels of women's empowerment observed in Bihar (as compared to other states in India). In essence, the factors that would have created economic opportunities, spaces and led to a change in

²¹ We estimate percentage difference by taking the difference between estimated average score of MS and non-MS and dividing it by estimated average score of non-MS. The ratio is then multiplied by hundred to arrive at the value of percentage difference.

Figure 3.2: Estimation Results of Composite Economic Empowerment Index and its Constituents



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

the outcome variables have been stagnant or have changed at slower rates. Given this social and economic scenario, one can postulate that the effect of MS on women's economic empowerment depicts a concave curve. It could be highly probable that the introduction

of the MS programme to rural women, especially belonging to the marginalised sections in Bihar, results in a significant and positive increase in their levels of economic empowerment, reaching its highest level in about 15 years and declines afterwards to a level, yet remaining significant and positive compared to the levels observed in the initial years of the programme.

Unpacking the composite economic empowerment index, we observe that MS has had a significant effect, on an average, on participation in economic activity, political participation, awareness about laws and entitlements and attitude towards VAW in the shortest exposure period. The non-significant percentage difference for the intra-household decision-making and self-efficacy measures in the shortest exposure district suggests that it takes more time to undo the impact of gender socialisations to which they had been subjected. The process of this change often starts with addressing deeply internalised gender roles that allow women to start feeling self-confident about their coping abilities and resilience. This attitudinal shift also allows them to negotiate the social and cultural barriers within the family (at the household level) so that they can function as independent entities.

In the medium exposure period, in Kaimur, we observe that MS has had a substantial effect on developing an average MS member's knowledge base about laws and entitlements, intra-household decision-making, functional literacy, political participation and self-efficacy to become economic citizens. This is evidenced by significant and positive ATT of MS on all the individual measures, where the economic activity index has had the highest percentage difference of 69 per cent among all the other individual measures. Along with this, the estimated percentage difference for awareness about laws and entitlements and functional literacy of 56 per cent and 26 per cent respectively is highest even among average MS members belonging to the short and long-term exposure to the programme. It should be remembered that there exists a positive and significant effect of considerable magnitude of the MS programme on the other measures such as political participation (especially at the gram panchayat level), attitude towards VAW and self-efficacy as well. Thus, it can be concluded that the MS has

led to economic empowerment of women in a convincing manner in this case.

In the longest exposure period, in Muzaffarpur, we observe that MS has been able to strengthen an average MS member's attitude towards VAW and higher level of participation in the political space, especially at the state level. The women have also a higher probability of awareness about law and entitlements, functional literacy, self-efficacy, and being part of the intra-household decision-making process. The effect of MS on economic empowerment of women in Muzaffarpur, with more than two decades of exposure, is not as unequivocal and spread over various measures as it is in Kaimur, which has had a little more than one decade of exposure.

The tapering of effect size or absence of clear effect in certain aspects of empowerment in Muzaffarpur could perhaps be explained by a number of factors: personal, programmatic and policy-related and also wider, macro socio-economic environment related. For instance, the fact that an average MS member in Muzaffarpur is older relative to those in Kaimur and Katihar as also to the non-MS women in Muzaffarpur could have played a role in a number of ways. One is the availability of economic opportunities for older women tend to diminish in an agrarian economy in addition to the changes in the labour economy at the time MS was started in the area. While age, as a variable, has been controlled in estimating the effect size, the role of the external environment is difficult to account for in such estimates.

External policy environment and programme focus also matter. For instance, MGNREGA was introduced in 2005. This was the period when MS had already completed more than a decade in Muzaffarpur whereas the programme was still young and expanding in Kaimur. Similarly, microfinance entered as an important aspect of programming for MS only at the beginning of this century. Till then, the focus was much more on identity, gender relations and VAW. This, at least to an extent, could explain the high effect size for economic activity in Kaimur as compared to Muzaffarpur. Also, given their ages, MS members in Muzaffarpur could be at different stages in their respective lives, where the focus could have been more towards children and community. The analysis of the inter-

generational impact of MS, discussed in the next chapter, tends to support this conjecture. Also, since women themselves determine the priorities in MS to a great extent, it is also possible that the collectives at different moments made varying choices.

In the end, what clearly emerges from this analysis is that the MS has indeed had a positive effect on economic empowerment of rural women coming from the most marginalised sections of the society irrespective of the period of exposure – the effect is positive for the samples with the shortest, medium and longest exposures. In order to understand the differences in effect sizes as well as to go deeper into the processes and choices different districts made in response to different times and issues, it is important to understand the MS process or model of economic empowerment as derived through the analysis of ethnographic information and pertinent literature.

3.6. Non-negotiable principles of MS philosophy

I was convinced that society will change when women are in power. I believed that all my life. Power that comes from within, empowerment that comes from within in comparison to empowerment that comes from being someone else is very different.

(Personal interview, 16 December 2015)

This quote from Sister Sujitha, the first SPD of Bihar's MS programme provides an overall understanding of philosophy and practice of MS. MS followed a feminist approach to empowerment where economic empowerment was not de-linked with other forms of empowerment. The central idea of the programme was that women cannot be economically empowered if they are unable to think for themselves and make their own decisions. The process does not also have a singular aim. For example, it did not seek to just economically empower women; it wanted to create an overall environment in which women are able to articulate their own needs and find ways to fulfil them. The method used was very simple. True to its feminist roots, MS believed that the creating a collective of women was a method by which an alternative to patriarchal power could be created. It rested its philosophy on the idea that by building

the collective consciousness of women; it could create resistance and change to the traditional structures of patriarchal power. With this philosophy and method, MS entered the field with a defined set of non-negotiables, some of which are listed below (Government of India 2017):

1. Empowerment is more than just economic activity; it is about building collective consciousness
2. Women have to take control over activities; it is a fundamentally bottom up approach
3. Information is key, and
4. Effective use of local resources.

The non-negotiables were complementary and worked in synergy with each other to implement the philosophy of MS in the field. Let us first understand these non-negotiables through examples before discussing the model itself.

3.6.1. *More than just economic activity*

In MS, information and awareness on savings, loans and employment or any other form of economic activity was almost always associated with information and awareness about gendered norms and identity, patriarchal practices, health, education, rights, political processes and gender-based violence. Opportunities for participation in economic activities were simultaneously used as opportunities for engaging in other kinds of action and self-introspection. For example, many women associated with the MS joined local schools as cooks making hot midday meals for children made mandatory by the Supreme Court of India in response to a Public Interest Litigation²². While MS used the mid-day meal (MDM) scheme to employ women as cooks, it also ensured that women of the *sanghas* participate more fully in the running of the schemes for nutrition and hygiene. It also allowed women to increase their participation

²² In a landmark judgment by the Supreme Court of India on 28 November 2001, the court directed all state governments to provide hot, cooked meals free of cost to all school-going children at the primary level. This was applicable to all government schools and government-aided schools. The content of the meal was defined by the court and had to include at least 300 calories with 8–12 grams of protein for each meal. This meal had to be provided for at least 200 days a year.

in the functioning of the school. Similarly, by providing catering services for various teacher training workshops and other public functions, women were able to be more active in their communities.

Through this service, the traditional feminine job of cooking was turned into a mechanism for sowing seeds for social change, the biggest impact of which was on caste relations. As these collectives of women hailed from mostly lower caste communities who were discriminated against through pollution and purity caste-norms, cooking for upper caste communities was fairly revolutionary. Cooking allowed these women not only to break social taboos but also helped them to build a viable livelihood for themselves in this process (Personal interview, 16 December 2015).

3.6.2. *Women to take control*

As mentioned earlier, MS used six broad areas – education, health and hygiene, employment, savings, political participation and violence against women – that the *sanghas* would work on. The choice of what specific problem within these areas was decided only by the *sangha*. This meant that the local context and needs of the *sangha* determined the choice and the MS mechanism did not decide the sequence or targets and sometimes not even the strategy. Under each of these six themes, sub-committees comprising of two members each were formed. The membership of these committees was rotational. This was done to make sure that all women of the *sangha* were exposed to all six domains. Trainings were often conducted at the block or at the district level on each of these focus areas. Participants from each of the committees would often participate in these meetings and would bring their knowledge back to the entire group. In addition, each committee would also report on their own activities to the *sangha*, so that work on each of these domain areas was constantly being conceptualised as well as addressed.

In addition, one person from the collective, the *sangha*, was trained to maintain their accounts and registers. *Sanghas* played an important role in deciding evolution of institutions such as *jagjagi* centres – village-based adult learning centres, Nari Adalats – women's courts run and managed by the local women themselves, and Apna Banks – women's banks. Interestingly, Muzaffarpur, where

the MS effect on economic empowerment seemed to have faded over the years, shows the presence of sustained women-managed institutions, the details of which will be discussed later in the chapter.

3.6.3. *Information is key*

All *sangha* activities started with the provision of basic information. This was not the 'feeding' of information; instead, women were given the space to respond, discuss, critique and offered strategies to seek more information. As a result, women became more aware not only of the respective information but also about their right to information. One of the tools used to further information and awareness was training programmes. As mentioned earlier, MS organised multiple trainings using various methodologies with a focus on sharing and reflection on experience, both old and new. For instance, making or touching pickles while menstruating is considered a taboo in some Indian communities as it is believed that a menstruating woman is impure and would end up spoiling the pickle. So, while pickle-making was done as part of the training activities, menstruating women were also asked to participate to help dispel notions of purity. Over the course of the few days, when women saw that the pickles weren't spoilt, this allowed MS to explore notions of culture and tradition as a way of binding women's activities. This helped women to understand the various patriarchal prescriptions behind such taboos and allowed women the space to start questioning such beliefs themselves (Personal interview, 16 December 2015).

3.6.4. *Effective use of local resources*

MS made all efforts to use the local resources in an efficient manner. *Sahayoginis*, the cluster-level workers, were central to the intervention and was always selected from among local women. The criteria for the selection of *sahayoginis* were simple. She had to have an open attitude to learn and be willing and ready to travel around villages. The choosing of the local resource person was very critical as women from the local areas could relate to and connect with the programme more easily if it was being anchored also by someone who they knew. Local resources also became important in choice

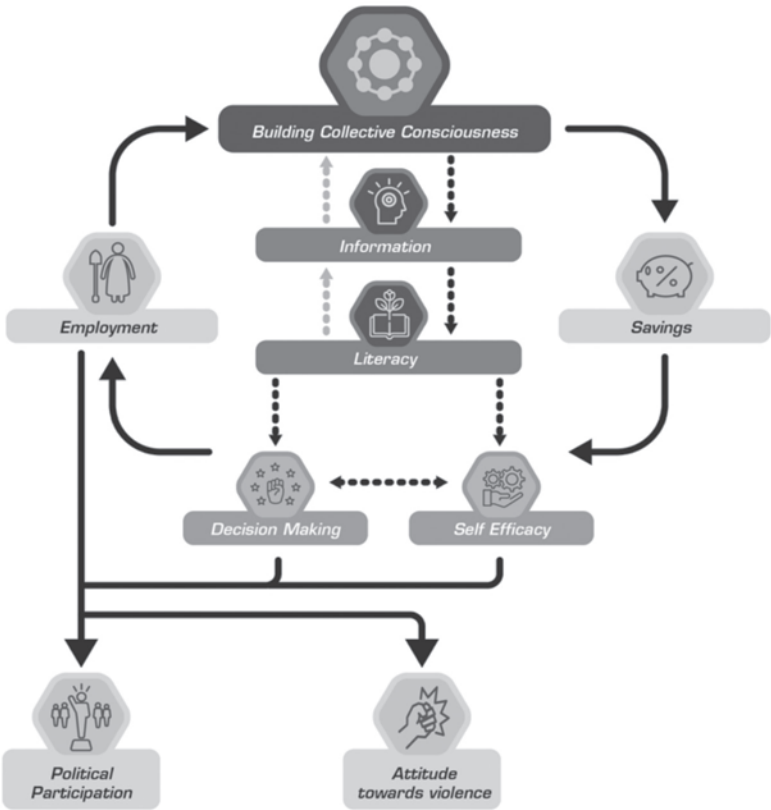
of activities. For example, in Kaimur, women started cultivating mint after realising that the land was conducive to farming of that crop. Mint cultivation gave those women good returns: they could run their families and also save some money in the *sangha* (Personal interview, 26 April 2016). Another means by which they connected to each other was through the creation of songs which were often locally-based. Songs were used very actively as a medium to express the feelings and ideas of the collective. They were also used to spread the ideology of the collective and further build collective consciousness. Every domain had its own song. These songs were always in the local language, which made it easy to communicate and relatable for the women.

3.6.5. *MS model of economic empowerment*

While MS did not have a fixed model in place for their method of empowerment, we conceptualised one on the basis of our observations in the field (Figure 3.3). The model should not be construed as the steps of empowerment as it does not depict any kind of progression in the MS intervention. Most of the dimensions or activities depicted here were taking place simultaneously and are not discrete in nature or in time.

The building of the collective consciousness among the members of the *sangha* was a prominent process. Collective consciousness can be defined as a set of shared beliefs, ideas and attitudes cultivated through shared and created experiences of the women's lives. The *sangha* primarily served as a space for conversation and dialogue that created this collective consciousness. MS provided women with information on a variety of subjects related to law, rights, entitlements, position of women in society and in the process gave these dialogues a particular direction. As *sanghas* matured, various needs emerged, literacy and education being important ones. MS has been designed to respond to these needs using diverse means: providing more information on government schemes that could be accessed and by starting specific institutions for women and adolescent girls who had either never been to school or had dropped out long ago: Mahila Shikshana Kendra (MSK) – an eight-month residential course was a major education strategy that MS

Figure 3.3: MS Model for Empowerment



Source: Qualitative data collected from Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar

experimented with first in Banda in Uttar Pradesh and was later adopted in all MS implementing states. MS in Bihar also opened Jagjagi Kendras (JK) – village-based learning centres for women and girls in addition to MSKs. Education was conceptualised as a wider and deeper process focusing on rights, functional skills, self-defence, aimed at questioning existing gendered roles and relations and transforming society. Getting out of domestic space, mobility, participation in public spaces were especially encouraged and supported through various means.

The process was challenging for MS functionaries. Poverty, gendered practices, caste norms posed a challenge in getting women from the poorest and disadvantaged sections to come out and find time for themselves. Suspicion and ridicule which they faced from the male members added to this challenge. The MS functionaries, who themselves received extensive training on gender as well as on community issues, had to be completely embedded in the field and find ways such as extensive and daily contact with the women, engaging with local elders, organising meetings in the evenings and so on. For example, both Shivani and Rani became part of the larger MS process because of this intense engagement of the *sahayoginis* in this process. Shivani's family situation was known to a few in the village, and the *sahayogini* felt that she would immensely benefit from the information on economic empowerment from the *sangha*. All of this was possible primarily because of the deep knowledge that *sahayoginis* had about the people in their local context as well as their commitment to women's empowerment beyond the call of duty: '*Hum raat ko meeting karte the, shuru mein bahut muskhi hua, lekin ek junoon tha kaam karne ka*' (We used to have meetings at night, it was difficult for us at the beginning, but we were passionate towards our work), (FGD, 29 August 2016).

The process of collectivising women and ensuring that they participate regularly as a *sangha* was even more challenging for the communities that live on the margins, not just in terms of social indicators but also geographically. Significant distances clubbed with inadequate transportation facilities made it even more difficult for MS functionaries to reach out to many communities. For instance, in Bihar, Musahars are a Dalit community considered lowest in the caste/*varna* system of hierarchy, often living on the edge of the villages, separate from other caste groups. Given that MS starts with the most marginalised communities, forming a collective of Musahars was a priority for MS but it was also a difficult and time-consuming process. The *sahayogini* had to travel far and regularly in order to meet the women and other members of the village. Only then were the women convinced about the idea of forming a collective (Personal interview, 16 July 2017).

The building of trust was crucial. For example, Rani was able to go and attend MSK for her education primarily on the basis of

the relationships of trust that the *sahayogini* in her village was able to build in her community. Therefore, the MS design allowed the processes to take their time in building their relationships. Once the process gained roots and *sanghas* were formed, it became easier to take build alternative ways of understanding and knowledge through dialogue and action, following MS non-negotiables and philosophy (Personal interview, 16 July 2017).

3.7. Unpacking the composite empowerment index

Each dimension of the economic empowerment signifies a facet of MS work and an important part of the process of collective consciousness-building. We now discuss the seven dimensions separately to gain a deeper understanding of the MS effect on women's empowerment. We examine both the way in which MS was able to influence the wider trends as well as the individual influence it exerted over the lives of women such as Rani and Shivani.

3.7.1. Information/Awareness about laws and entitlements

... people with knowledge and intelligence could avail the benefits of these schemes and grow, but we didn't have knowledge or strength to fight for our rights. MS gave us courage to stand for our rights.

(Interview, 11 May 2017)

When MS started mobilising women into collectives, women started realising that information and awareness was an important tool for social change. They realised that there was a lot of information asymmetry due to their position and identity in society. MS provided the women with information on laws and entitlements, rights, remedial mechanisms and opportunities. One of the main elements of information sharing was information on government schemes: MDM, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA), vaccinations and public health care facilities. Apart from schemes, MS also provided information on the rights of a woman in terms of laws related to the workplace, maternity, prevention of sexual harassment, age of marriage, and the emphasis was also on fighting for making laws stronger: they often

sang, '*Kaahe bahan bane kamzor, kanoon mazboot kar lo*' (Sister, why are you being weak? Let us make the laws stronger).

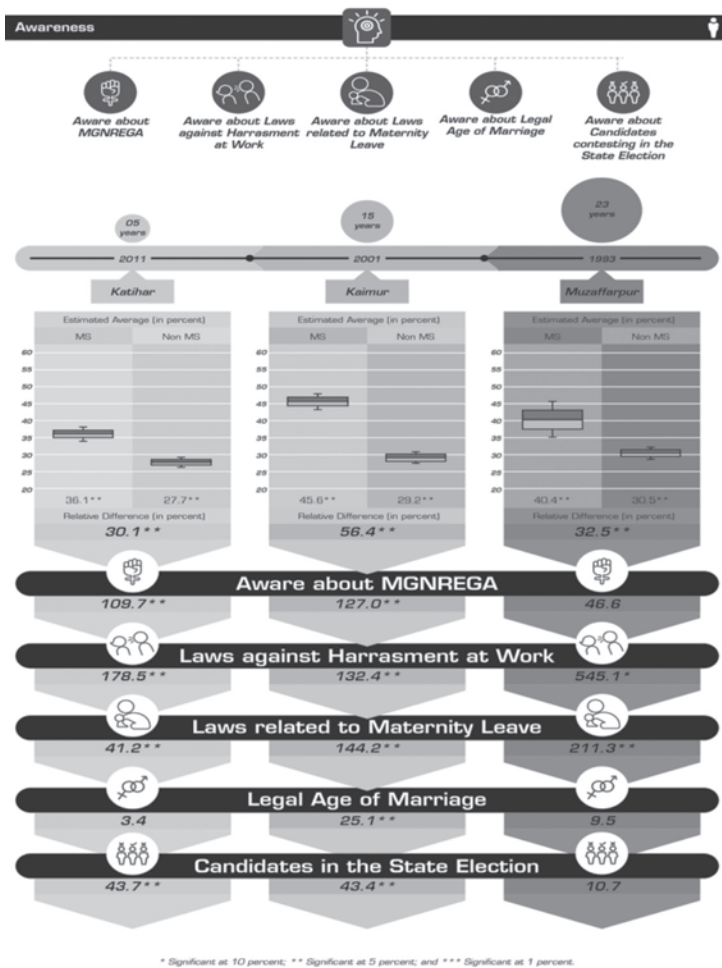
This observation in the field is also reflected in the quantitative analysis where we see that the average MS member is more likely to be more aware of her rights and entitlements than her counterparts in all three districts. An average MS member in Kaimur has the highest ATT of MS in information/awareness index (about 56.4 percentage difference), followed by Katihar and Muzaffarpur (about 32.5 and 30.1 percentage difference respectively).

In Kaimur, an MS member in MS villages, on average, is 25 per cent more likely to be aware of the MGNREGA scheme than non-MS respondents in non-MS villages.²³ Moreover, an MS member is about 7 per cent and 15 per cent, on average, more likely to be aware about the laws regarding maternity leave and protection against sexual harassment at work. We know from the decision-making measures that MS members enjoy a higher likelihood to take decisions regarding participation in the labour force. If we examine all of these trends together, we see that an average MS member is better equipped with information about laws to protect her rights in the workplace and to take advantage of available employment opportunities as compared to non-MS respondents. Further, she is 18 per cent more likely to be aware of the legal age for marriage.

Similar results are observed for MS members in Katihar, where the only difference is that the magnitude of ATT of MS is lower for all constituents and the awareness index relative to an average MS member in Kaimur. In Muzaffarpur, we find a statistically non-significant difference between MS and non-MS with respect to awareness of the MGNREGA scheme; even though the probability of MS members in MS village is about 17 per cent, on average, relative to the probability of 12 per cent observed for non-MS respondents in non-MS villages. But an average MS member is better informed regarding her rights at the workplace as the results show that she is 15 per cent (at 10 per cent level) and 19 per cent more likely to be

²³ Here, the per cent of likelihood is derived from taking the difference between estimated average probability of MS and non-MS and then multiplying it by 100.

Figure 3.4: Estimation Results of Awareness Index and its Constituents



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

aware of the laws against sexual harassment at work and maternity leave respectively.

In sum, the results show that an average MS member in Kaimur has the highest ATT of MS in information/awareness index (about 56 per cent difference), followed by Katihar and Muzaffarpur (about 33 and 30 per cent difference respectively).

3.7.2. Functional literacy and education

... previously shopkeepers were giving us credit of Re 1 and writing in their books Rs 10 and were making fools of us due to our illiteracy and children were left illiterate due to poverty.

(Interview, 24 October 2016)

It was commonly observed in the field that women cited literacy as one of the biggest contributions of MS towards their lives. Women, including Rani and Shivani, told us that they would have remained non-literate and understood very little about the alphabet or numerals if MS had not been in their lives. In fact, for both of them, as well as for many women we met, literacy was invoked as a symbol of pride, as the women did not remain '*angootha chaap* (using thumb print for signature) any more, and used their literacy as a skill to overcome a number of problems. Women cited cases of earlier being cheated by the money lenders and shopkeepers because they were unable to read and write. Further, being literate also ensured that they could avail benefits of multiple government schemes, especially for their children (FGD, 30 August 2016). As mentioned earlier, two institutions: JKs and MSKs played an important role in providing education and functional literacy to women associated with MS (for more details, please refer to Box 3.1 and 3.2).

While the MSK was more of a programme-level intervention present in all states that implemented MS, the idea of village-based JKs was indigenous to MS in Bihar. MS functionaries from different levels came together to develop a curriculum for basic literacy skills – including language, numeracy, reading and writing – using the common vocabulary of the women. All three study districts ran these centres. The *sanghas* that focused more on education were usually the first to get the centres. In most cases, the women of the *sangha* selected a teacher for themselves: someone who was literate and was well aware of the local context and was part of the community. A number of women and girls also participated and managed JKs after graduating from the MSKs. Rani was one of them.

Once Rani returned from the MSK, local women demanded that she run the centre because she had learned a lot in the MSK and had impressed the women. She ran the MSK successfully till the time

came for her to be sent to her marital home. Given that she was still underage, she resisted the move taking the support of the women in her community as well as the *sahayogini* from MS. When she turned 18, however, she could no longer resist the intense family and social pressure and had to go to her husband's home (Interview, 22 March 2017). So, the pathway to empowerment was not always smooth for everyone who was associated with MS. The MS was working with strong structural social barriers and the movement towards independence and agentic action was often slow and, in some cases, regressive. Nevertheless, as will be explained in later chapters, this first exposure to information and agency allowed women trapped within constraining social circumstances to negotiate and create small spaces in their lives from which to create their own journeys.

Box 3.1: Mahila Shikshana Kendra (MSK)

MSKs were conceptualised as non-formal residential bridge course centres set up across all 11 MS states in India. The inception of MSK predates MS but the MSK was redefined by MS in the year 1994–95. The target population for MSK were adolescent girls who had either dropped out of schools or were never enrolled in school due to various pressures at home and outside. The objectives of MSK were:

- Providing women and girls opportunities for learning in the shortest time;
- Creating a pool of trained women who can work both within the project and with other education and development programmes;
- Providing a facility where women who have been marginalised by society (single women, widows, deserted women, divorcees) can pursue education in a secure and stimulating environment.

A lot of thought and hard work was involved in developing the curriculum for MSK. The MS functionaries along with other academics, feminists and educationalists contemplated the difficult question – *what is worth knowing?* – to come up with the curriculum for MSK. The focus was on two things. First was the relevant certification for the girls and women so that they are able to study further or create employment opportunities for themselves. The second was to bridge unequal practices in society for the girls to access a larger body of knowledge. In addition to academic lessons, vocational skills and life skills were also provided.

The girls were trained in sewing, gardening, planting, cycling, music, games and so on. They were also given information on hygienic practices, gender issues, caste issues, laws and rights of women and citizens of India. The girls helped with the maintenance of the centres which also formed a part of their training in terms of community living and collective ownership (Jain et al. 2012). MSK has been life-changing for many girls who have attended the centre in

- acquiring self-confidence and esteem
- being able to deal with authority at home, in the community and the government
- knowing about one's body, about health problems and remedies and being able to apply this
- knowledge to daily life
- learning of vocational skills
- learning about law and being able to engage with the legal system to redress wrongs
- acquiring reading and writing skills – literacy as part of education
- preparing for mainstream certification

After finishing the course work at MSK, many girls in Muzaffarpur and Kaimur were mainstreamed into KGBVs with an increased sense of self-worth and confidence (Interview, 29 and 30 August 2016)

Box 3.2: Jagjagi centres

The name *Jagjagi* comes from the root words *Jagat* meaning world and *Jagi* meaning awakening, literally translating to awakening towards the world. The programme originated in Bihar in the 1990s and aimed at providing a space of leaning to adolescent girls and women in MS districts. The idea of *Jagjagi* was borrowed from the Angana Vidyalaya scheme under the DPEP (Ramachandran 2012). The demand for *Jagjagi* centres arose directly from the well-articulated need for literacy by the MS women after the *sanghas* started functioning. Women increasingly realised the importance and need for literacy and became aware of the barriers to literacy that arose from patriarchal practices at home and outside and other structural barriers such as the non-availability of neighbourhood schools and lack of transport and resources to attend regular schools. The *sanghas* that articulated this need were the first to set up *Jagjagi* centres.

A group of women, especially the members of the education committee within the sangha, were responsible for the functioning of these centres. The first step towards this was appointment of a teacher who had basic literacy skills and was a local person. She would receive training from MS and would be hired at a salary of approximately Rs 2,500 per month (Interview, 29 August 2016). The women of the *sangha* were also responsible for monitoring the centres. The curriculum for the centre was internally developed by MS, and Sister Sujitha, the first SPD of MS, played a significant role in developing it. She says that the idea behind the curriculum was to use the everyday, colloquial language of the women, the most commonly used terms, in order to educate them in numeracy, reading and writing (Interview, 10 December 2015). Apart from that, women were also taught self-defence techniques like karate. Young girls were mainstreamed into KGBVs and linkages with other interventions within MS were facilitated by the centre. For example, adolescent girls were encouraged to participate in *Kishori Manch*s, spaces to debate and discuss socio-political issues. At a later point, *Jagjagis* further branched out into *Bal Jagjagis* solely focussed on children below nine years of age. These centres became inactive in Bihar in 2016–17 after closing of the MS programme due to paucity of support and funding.

*Kishori Manch*s, *Jagjagi Kendras* and *MSKs* were also used to mainstream or re-enrol a number of adolescent girls in the residential schools known as Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs), started as an intervention by the Government of India for girls who dropped out of upper primary education, drawing inspiration from the success of the *MSKs*. All these institutions provided health and hygiene-related information as part of education. In fact, years after the training, women remembered the simple solutions that they learnt as part of health education as being very critical in maintaining good health and saving lives. This was especially true in places where the incidences of water-borne diseases are still very high.

Sakhis used to take care of their drinking water and make sure that women are buying timsi (a steel bowl with handle to take water out from

the pitcher). If a woman didn't buy a timsi then the sakhi would buy one for her by collecting money (Re 1 from each person). Now you will find timsi in each and every house. (FGD, 19 February 2017)

MS made women aware of the public health centres present at their villages and the facilities such as free ambulances that the government provided at nominal fee or free of cost:

Previously we were not aware of this facility but a didi told us during a workshop that government provides free ambulance services for pregnant women to transport them to hospital for delivery and she also gave us the contact number for calling ambulance. Soon, we found an opportunity to avail this facility when a pregnant woman of our group needed help due to her labour pains. An ambulance was sent and that woman delivered the baby in the hospital. This service was fully free. From that day, an ambulance is always called in times of need. (FGD, 18 May 2017)

Local schools have also been important sites for action. For instance, MS women in Kaimur carried out *prabhat pheri* (morning rounds) during which they walked around the premises of the school to inspect the level of cleanliness in classrooms, toilets, drinking water facilities and kitchen for MDM before the school started in the morning. Any lapse was immediately reported to the head teacher who would take corrective actions. More importantly, it also gave women an opportunity to participate in public space, and contribute to something that was valued by the local community (FGD, 25 January 2017).

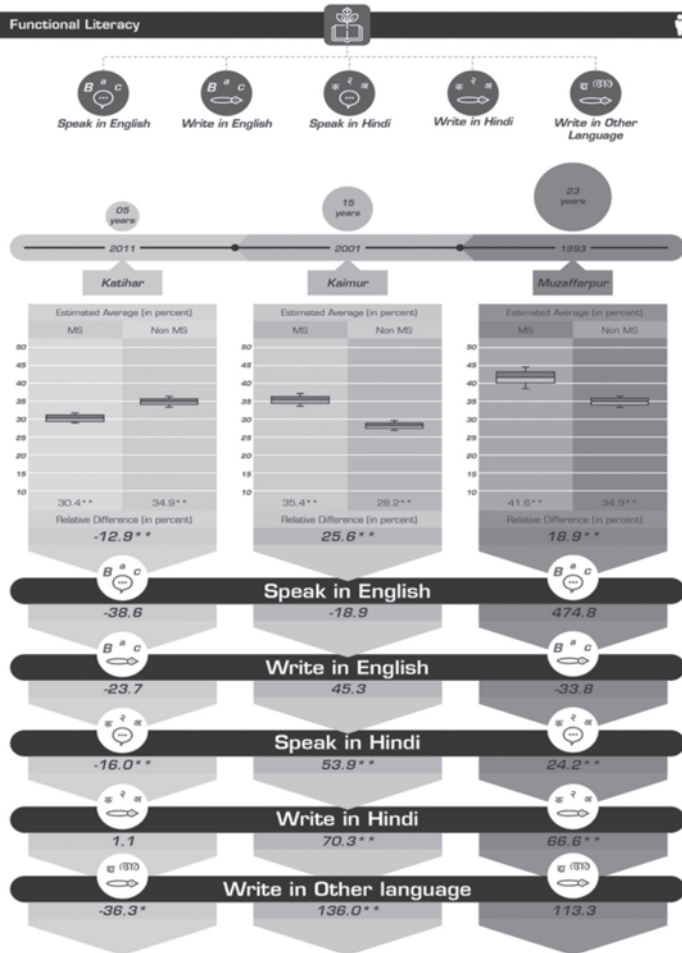
Women's elementary education also allowed them to explore new opportunities for labour. For example, Shivani learnt how to read and write and was also exposed to basic numeracy skills at a *Jagjagi* centre in Muzaffarpur. This allowed her to forge a new identity and a new livelihood by being the first woman mason in Bihar: 'While studying in the Jagjagi centre, I learnt counting from 1–100 and in the same way, it is for an inch tape too... which helped me later in being a mason.' (Interview, 30 August 2016).

These measures in improving the literacy of women by MS (and thereby, creating pathways to new identities) were also assessed quantitatively through very simple measures. When we assessed the speaking and writing abilities of MS and non-MS women in English, Hindi, and other languages, it was clear that with more exposure to the programme (such as in Muzaffarpur and in Kaimur), women were more likely to have literacy skills. For example, more number of MS women in Muzaffarpur and Kaimur could speak and write in Hindi whereas negative and significant effect of MS is observed for an average MS member in Katihar. The functional literacy index is higher by 7 per cent in Kaimur and Muzaffarpur when one compares MS women and non-MS women. These results are primarily driven by the average MS member's ability to speak and write in Hindi. In Kaimur, an average MS member is about 18 per cent more likely to be able to speak and write in Hindi relative to an average non-MS respondent. Further, we observe that an average MS member is seven per cent more likely to write in other languages relative to five per cent probability observed for an average non-MS respondents.

In Muzaffarpur, the results indicate that an average MS member's ability to speak and write in English and other languages is statistically equal to an average non-MS respondent. So, it appears that the major difference appears to be in speaking and writing Hindi, where an average MS member in MS villages is 16 per cent and 23 per cent more likely to speak and write in Hindi respectively. This may be because Muzaffarpur is closer to Patna, the capital of Bihar state, than the other two study sites. This would have motivated the MS members to improve their ability to speak and write in Hindi, the official language, to facilitate their participation in various activities such as employment, political collectives/SHGs and others.

In Katihar, we observe the lowest effect of MS where the score of an average MS member is five percentage points lower than the average score of a non-MS respondent (0.349). This amounts to a negative relative difference of 13 per cent from the average score estimated for non-MS respondents. We observe similar patterns with the average MS member's ability to speak in Hindi (lower by 10 percentage points) and about two percentage points lower, though

Figure 3.5: Estimation Results of Functional Literacy and its Constituents



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

non-significant, difference in an average MS members' ability to speak and write in English relative to an average non-MS woman. One possible and perhaps partial explanation for this could be the fact that Katihar is a border district and a substantial portion of

the population speak different on-Hindi languages such as Maithili, Bangla and Nepali (Government of India n.d.).

3.7.3. Decision-making

MS women have their own identity now. Previously, they were known by the names of their husbands, fathers-in-law or sons. Now, they send their daughters to school and even for coaching. Previously they didn't have any say in their family decision-making but now they participate in making discussions on the issues of education of their children, marriage and on other household matters.

(FGD, 25 January 2017)

Participating in MS meetings was not easy for women. Given that MS was not providing any service per se and attending meetings required some adjustments of women's family and care work responsibilities, families often resisted women's participation in these meetings. It was a common experience of many women, both *sahayoginis* and *sakhis*, to face neighbours' questioning eyes and they were often talked about, either behind their backs or openly in front of their families (FGD 30 August 2016; Interview 7 September 2016; Interview 12 April 2017). With greater awareness about laws and their rights, the politics of gender and entitlements and a sense of strength women started asserting their decision to participate in the MS processes with the active support of the collective (FGD, 30 August 2016). Going to meetings, especially residential trainings, was a significant marker for many women in terms of independent decision-making. The reason these decisions were especially crucial for women was because mobility of women, prior to MS, was highly restricted.

So, ensuring mobility was an important dimension of the MS work. Focusing on this dimension allowed women to realise that the world was not limited to their homes and allowed them to participate more publicly in many ways. This included incidences of travelling to New Delhi to protest against the closure of the MS programme.

... we were travelling by train and some of us got left behind in Gorakhpur, and then we boarded a wrong train. Once we realised that, we again got off

and finally managed to reach and participate by catching the right train.

(Interview, 14 April 2017)

Once women became assertive and active outside the household, they also started participating in important decisions in the household, especially related to education and the marriages of their children, especially girls. This was an important topic of discussion at the *sanghas* and the women carried these lessons and the internal reflections to their homes. Many of the family members we spoke with also acknowledged this change (FGD, 17 January 2017).

Shivani, in fact, is one of the most iconic symbols of both internalising and externalising the methods of MS. Despite her difficult family circumstances, Shivani was determined to educate her three sons and daughter. Her eldest son has finished his intermediate education and runs a shop. The second son graduated with a first division and runs a cosmetics shop. The youngest son has done his matriculation and wants to study further. Her daughter has finished her senior secondary level schooling and is now enrolled for a Bachelors of Arts degree (Interview, 30 August 2016). Women used the strength of the collective to resist and negotiate both within and outside the household. These manifested differently in different time periods and spaces. As mentioned earlier, Rani was able to negotiate delaying going to her marital home by a few years because of the support that she received from other *sangha* women as well as from MS.

Another important example comes from Katihar, the youngest MS district in our study, where women took on powerful political forces to resist the widely prevalent alcoholism among the men in the villages. Tired of the abuse that often resulted from men's use of alcohol and buoyed not only by the information and knowledge that they received but also by the support of MS, women took out protest marches against liquor shops with hard-hitting slogans in the local language. Once they realised that the local brews were being sold mainly in the weekly market, they approached the sellers, and when sellers did not cooperate, they went to police to file a complaint:

Around 45 women gathered there. A man suggested to the police station in-charge to rape all the women and show them their right place. But

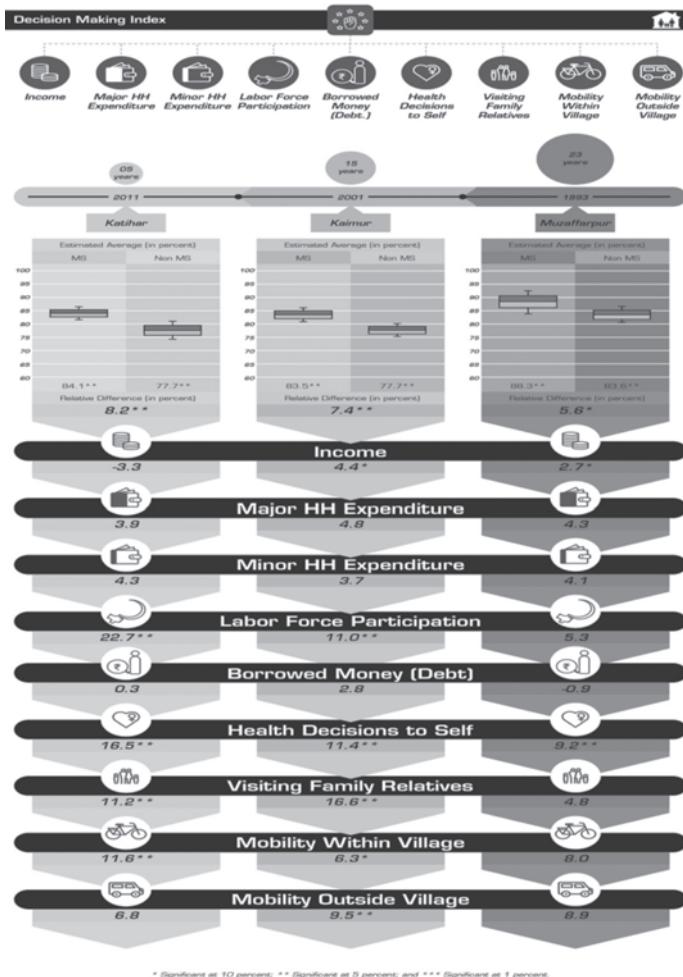
women didn't lose their courage and continued. We said that you just try to touch these 45 women, and you would find 45,000 women in reaction. We told them that we are ready to die in order to change things for the better.

(FGD, 15 April 2017)

Similar cases of protests against alcohol were reported from all three study districts. In fact, protest marches with songs and slogans was a common means of resistance in MS. Women from Muzaffarpur and Kaimur shared several instances where *sangha* women had decided to protest child marriage and helped in stopping many child marriages. On several occasions, the women took strong action on rape cases. They would not restrict themselves to protest marches. They would also help the survivor get due compensation and justice by supporting the survivor through the police and court processes. Primarily because of this engagement with the justice mechanisms systems, MS started to devise an alternate form that would provide the space for women to articulate the violence and violations that they have experienced. This resulted in an informal institution – Nari Adalat – which will be covered later in this chapter. We were able to observe the shifts in women's understanding of their potential and this created shifts in the power dynamics within the household, leading to a more significant contribution by women in the household. These changes, internal and dynamic, emerged much more strongly in our conversations with women, as compared to the ones we received through our quantitative survey, although there were clear trends that MS did impact decision-making for women.

Our estimation results show that there is significant effect of about seven-eight per cent difference relative to non-MS in Kaimur and Katihar; whereas the estimated effect is about six percentages different from non-MS in Muzaffarpur, which is significant only at the 10 per cent level. In Muzaffarpur, it appears that an average MS member is only seven per cent more likely to take decisions independently or participate in the process than non-MS respondents with regard to healthcare for the self. The results are not statistically significant for any of the other constituents in Muzaffarpur.

Figure 3.6: Estimation Results of Decision-making Index and its Constituents



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

In Kaimur, about seven per cent difference is observed for an average MS member relative to a value of 0.77 for an average non-MS respondent in the decision-making index. In terms of labour force participation, we observe that an average MS member is

eight per cent more likely to take a decision either independently or jointly with other household members than non-MS respondents. A similar result of ATT of MS can be observed for decisions regarding healthcare for self. With regard to mobility, we find that an average MS respondent is about 5 per cent more likely to take her own or join decision to move within and outside the village; further, she is 7 per cent more likely to take decisions to visit her family/relatives in comparison to an average non-MS respondent. We therefore observe significant differences between MS and non-MS women for all the constituents in Kaimur, except decisions regarding major and minor household expenditure and expenditure of borrowed money. Here too the differences exist but they are not statistically significant. In short, an average MS member is only four per cent more likely to decide, either independently or jointly, on how her income will be spent.

In Katihar, with five years of exposure to MS, we observe a significant effect of MS on variables related to labour force participation, health decisions to self and mobility within the village. The magnitude of effect is observed to be highest relative to Kaimur and Muzaffarpur. For instance, the percentage difference between MS and non-MS is about 23 per cent in Katihar, compared to 11 per cent in Kaimur and a non-significant 5 per cent in Muzaffarpur with respect to decision regarding labour force participation.

What emerges here is that an MS member, irrespective of the length of exposure to the programme, is more likely to take or participate in decision-making processes on matters related to her own participation in economic activity, such as labour force and mobility, which can add to the income pool of the household. But the story behind the decisions regarding use of her own money appears to be much more complicated. As indicated in the qualitative data, this might also have to do with the particular economic circumstances under which the family is making these decisions.

3.7.4. Self-efficacy

Self-confidence does not come only from money. Money does not give freedom. MS had inculcated so much self confidence in women that there was a case where a man's wife testified against her husband and sent him

to prison. He had raped his dumb and deaf sister-in-law. The woman said that her husband had wronged a woman and he must be punished for it.

(Interview, 27 November 2016)

Strong linkages between decision-making and self-efficacy emerged from the narratives of the women. Women from all three districts, Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar, viewed self-efficacy as part of a continuum of decisions and actions that they took independently. Being part of the *sangha* provided an identity to the women, and they became more aware of the role and influence of patriarchal discourses in determining their lives, their gendered social roles, their positions, and their experience. To combat these larger discourses of male dominance, traditional symbolism borrowed from the Hindu pantheon of goddesses, especially Kali and Durga, worshipped for their strength and ferocity, were commonly used:

MS enlightened us as regarding our bodies and this society and helped us in making our sphere bigger and better. Previously, women were confined to their houses and had nothing of their own. Now, they have their own bank accounts. They used to think that the outside world belongs to men only but now they compare themselves with goddesses Durga, Laxmi and Kali and are ready to fight like Kali.

(FGD, 17 January 2017)

Inside the home, this confidence was reflected in small but significant negotiations around social norms associated with their bodies and expressions:

Earlier I was afraid of my father-in-law and older brother-in-law, and used to cover my face in front of them; even wanted to avoid them all the time; but now I talk to them and don't cover my face – now I cover just my head.

(Interview, 18 May 2017)

The women mostly viewed their decisions to participate in economic activities like savings, small enterprises and seeking employment as major signs of enhanced self-efficacy and they

pushed back against some social norms. For instance, although the inheritance law provides for an equal share of land both in parental and husband's family property to women and men, it is rare for women to claim this right because of the social stigma associated with claiming this right. Another social taboo is associated with tilling the land as it is not considered a 'woman's job'. Women's labour on the farm is often restricted to back-breaking work such as sowing or weeding but this is often seen as 'light work' as it believed to not require 'physical strength'. After joining MS, a number of women started small ventures at home like cottage industries, shops and started tilling their own land. They also started to stake a claim on their own land and their inheritance. A good example of this is the story of Nisha.

Nisha had lost her husband and had no livelihood when she became a member of the *sangha*. With support of the *sangha* women, she demanded and got her legitimate share of land from her mother-in-law and started cultivating wheat, potatoes and other vegetables. Nisha said that she feels a lot of pride in being able to fend for herself. Another story is that of Neelu's who decided to open her own grocery shop in her village. She decided to take a loan for the shop without consulting her husband, as she did not want to face opposition till she actually got the loan. Once she got the loan, she negotiated and convinced her husband to support her. Neelu also started saving money from her own earnings as well as from the money that her husband gave her for domestic expenses. With that money, she got a life insurance for herself without informing her husband:

Now I go alone to buy goods for my shop. Previously I was not allowed to go to my maternal home alone and even I myself was not confident enough to go out. It is the inspiration and courage I got from MS that I could open a shop today. It gave me confidence to be independent.

(Interview, 18 May 2017)

Awareness of rights, laws and entitlements also contributed to enhanced self-efficacy and confidence. Extreme left parties, commonly referred to as Naxalites, are active in Kaimur which

implies that the incidences of violence are common from both police and the Naxalites. Police searches without warrants are commonly experienced and rarely questioned. Women started questioning these unauthorised police visits after learning through MS meetings and trainings that these were unlawful:

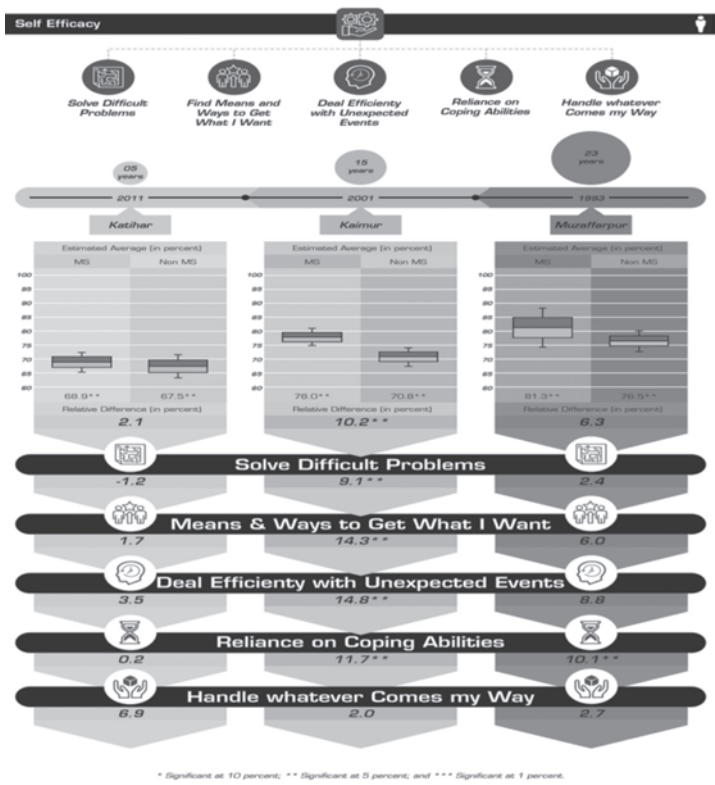
Women are now aware and are not afraid of the police. If police come for search, women tell them that they can't enter the house when a woman is alone at home; women are also aware about warrant papers and other laws. Now women are not afraid of travelling alone to Bhabhua (the district headquarter) to report an unlawful incident.

(FGD, 17 January 2017)

This kind of attitude and strength in the field is clearly reflected in the quantitative analysis as well. The data shows that there is statistical difference in unadjusted means of the self-efficacy index for Muzaffarpur and Kaimur, both of which had the longest and medium exposure to MS in Bihar. The ATT of MS is significant, at the five per cent level for the Kaimur sample, and we observe a 10 per cent difference in the self-efficacy index as one goes from no MS programme to MS programme. This means that the probability of an average MS member being confident about solving difficult problems, resilience and coping abilities are about 9 to 10 per cent more than non-MS respondents in Kaimur. The average estimated score for MS members is about 0.813 in Muzaffarpur, which is higher than those observed in Kaimur and Katihar, though the relative difference between MS and non-MS is not significant.²⁴ This is most noticeable in average MS members' confidence in dealing with unexpected events, handling anything that comes their way and resilience through coping abilities. Thus, it can be argued that an average MS member in Muzaffarpur embodies higher levels of self-confidence, self-reliance and resilience compared to an average MS member in Kaimur and Katihar where the programme has been

²⁴ Here, we are not commenting about the statistical difference between MS members in Muzaffarpur vis-a-vis Kaimur and Katihar; rather, it is based on the observable difference in percentage points for MS members alone across these three districts.

Figure 3.7: Estimation Results of Self-efficacy Index and its Constituents



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

functional for about 15 and five years respectively. So, it can be surmised that the distilling of all the dialogue, action, and increase in self-confidence as a resultant of MS process is clearly visible in areas where they have worked the longest. From both the qualitative and the quantitative data, it is clear that internal shifts in attitudes and behaviour are possible with long-term interventions and will not, in all likelihood, show up within a period of five years.

3.7.5. Economic activity

As we have been discussing, MS focused on participation in economic activities by not just emphasizing on savings and employment alone

but also on skills and knowledge that enables well-informed and sustained participation in various economic activity. This included addressing information asymmetry, enhancing self-efficacy, enabling autonomous decision-making in various spheres of life. Savings was not part of the MS process in the beginning but entered as an important activity later when SHGs and microfinance schemes started becoming a major policy priority. This shift in policy priority coincided with MS entry into Kaimur. Unlike SHGs, MS did not provide any seed money for savings but stressed the importance of financial security, especially for unforeseen circumstances and old age. Initially, efforts were made to ensure that women and their families were able to escape the clutches of local money lenders. Women told us that the various reasons that the *sahayogini* used to ensure that they start creating *Bachhat Samoohs* (savings groups):

If you don't have money, nobody will care for you. Without financial independence, empowerment cannot happen. Lack of money brings more misfortune in the time of crisis to a poor person. If we organize ourselves and save, then at the times of crises the savings will save us.

(FGD, 18 January 2017)

MS also emphasised developing an awareness about the reasons for savings and the areas in which spending is better than saving. They sang songs that talked about saving for their daughters rather than for their daughter's dowry. This meant that they were saving to ensure that their daughters would get educated. Given that all the women were from marginalised groups, they did not have enough financial resources to save. As a way to combat this very central problem, MS provided women with information about various government institutions and schemes that were available for this purpose. They were informed about the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and the schemes for loans and savings available for women. MS even reorganised its own spaces to enable women to access schemes: women were divided into groups of 10 to form the *Bachhat Samoohs* (referenced earlier in the quotation) in Muzaffarpur to avail loans provided by NABARD (Interview, 15 May 2016).

Apart from this, women were also informed about loans available to buy seeds, irrigation technologies like motor pump and crop insurance. In Muzaffarpur, one of the most significant impacts of MS on empowering women economically was the creation of an informal institution called *Apna Bank* (Our Bank) [see Box 3.3]. Meera, one of the *sangha* women, narrated a case as an example to illustrate the norms of borrowing from *Apna Bank*:

A woman had taken a loan of Rs 15,000 and only one instalment had been paid, at this juncture her husband passed away. The amount of one instalment was lesser than the amount of interest. So, the amount of interest was also payable. I told the other members of the group that if she cannot pay back the amount, then the Bank will deduct that amount from her security money and the remaining amount will be returned to her. But they requested that the security money not be touched. Her husband was no more and she would need the money for her survival. The group members were ready to deposit Rs 700 on her behalf.

Because *Apna Bank* was created for the MS members, these acts of negotiation, flexibility and understanding were possible, even within an institution. This characteristic of MS's engagement with saving groups also allowed women the confidence to borrow loans against their savings. Women reported taking loans for a variety of reasons. The most commonly cited reason was for business purposes. Women across the three districts of Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar stated that they took loans for dairy farming, buying seeds, buying cattle, starting a shop or for their children's education – for daughters and sons. When taking loans, women as a group would decide their own processes and rules for the eligibility criteria for loans, loan wavers, interest rates, mortgages and recovery strategies. Because the rules were made within the *sangha*, they were extremely sensitive to the needs of the women. As evidenced in the previous example, they were responsive to the context and would waive loans in times of crises. However, they were equally strict when it came to recovery:

A person had borrowed money and did not return it for three years. We went to that person's house and picked up the motorbike from there and

said 'The motorbike will be returned only when the money is paid back'. We had to do this in solidarity with each other, as there was a need to get the money back.

(FGD, 25 January 2017)

Income generation was another important aspect of the work MS did with respect to economic activity. MS focused on providing information about various state-supported social security and employment schemes such as widow pension, old age pension, *Indira Awas Yojna* (low cost housing scheme for the poor), MGNREGA and other employment opportunities. One such example is the participation of MS women as cooks under the MDM scheme, mentioned earlier. The state government had officially decided to give the responsibility of MDM management to MS women in villages/blocks where MS had a presence. Although low-paid, this was considered better than the drudgery of 'working in the agricultural fields which involved standing in knee deep water and mud' (Interview 28 January 2017).

MS also encouraged women to start their own small businesses through skill development in a number of areas such as handicrafts, tailoring, sanitary napkin-making, and noodle-making, mint farming, masonry, and catering. A number of these professions were also chosen so as to break established gender barriers to these jobs and professions. A prominent example is the case of training women masons (*Mahila Mistri*) and for catering services. While the catering service broke caste-based norms around food, as mentioned earlier, women masons broke gender-based norms very effectively. Shivani is a prominent example of this.

After gaining basic literacy and numeracy skills in the village-based JK, Shivani was offered an opportunity to go to a training camp to become a mason in Gandhi Ashram, Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The focus of the training was to build toilets for low-income families. With the financial support from Ahmedabad as well as the training that she received, she became the first woman mason in the state of Bihar. Once Shivani constructed the first toilet in her own house, all the women of the household found it very convenient. Earlier, women were constantly under the risk of being bitten by snakes

Box 3.3: Apna Bank

The term *Apna Bank*, comes literally translates to Our Bank and is perhaps the most suitable title to signify the purpose and functioning of the bank. The idea of *Apna Bank* emerged after long-term discussion on savings and loans by the federation members of Muzaffarpur. *Apna Bank* was formed in 2014 and is currently operative in two blocks of Muzaffarpur, namely, Mushari and Bandra. The bank started with contributions from the *sangha* members and MS functionaries who collected a sum of Rs 89,000 to establish the bank. *Apna Bank* established rules and a set of norms that were developed by the members of the federation. The norms are mainly borrowed from Ajeevika but modified to suit the MS ideology. For example, one of the norms that *Apna Bank* follows is that a woman needs to be employed or involved in a business to be able to get a loan in her name. This is mainly to ensure the financial capability of the woman to pay back the loans. The maximum loan given to a woman is Rs 10,000 which needs to be returned in 12 instalments. Women avail the facility of personal loans and group loans. A group consists of two or three women. A designated date is fixed every month for collection of the loan amount.

The charges to be part of the bank were also fixed. For example, a registration charge is Rs 112; insurance charge was Rs 50. Security money needs to be submitted to avail the savings and loan facility at *Apna Bank*. The norms of the bank are simple –

- In case of the death of the husband, a death certificate needs to be submitted and if the death certificate is not submitted, a letter needs to be procured from the *mukhiya* (village headman).
- In case of the death of the husband, the interest on the loan is waived.
- The idea is for the group to serve as a guarantor to the loan rather than the family.
- All members of the *Samooch* are entitled to take loan.
- The age limit for availing the facilities of the bank is 18–60 years (although this is under consideration as extension of age to 65 years was proposed recently).
- The maximum loan that is given to a woman is Rs 30,000 but the loan amount for first loan is a maximum of Rs 10,000.
- Collection dates are fixed keeping in mind the local needs like festivals and so on.
- Passbooks and cards are given to all beneficiaries who need to be signed.

Currently, *Apna Bank* has approximately a sum of Rs 18,00,000. This money has increased substantially over the years and only under special circumstances is this amount used. For example, in the recent Nari Adalat trainings held in New Delhi for MS functionaries, money from the *Apna Bank* was used for transportation and logistical purposes.

or insects, especially at night and during the rainy season. Women had to face a lot of difficulties in going out of their homes for defecation, including the lurking danger of rape and molestation. Once word got around, Shivani wearing her mason's uniform, constructed a large number of toilets for other households in her village. Later, she also became a trainer and trained many batches of women in masonry.

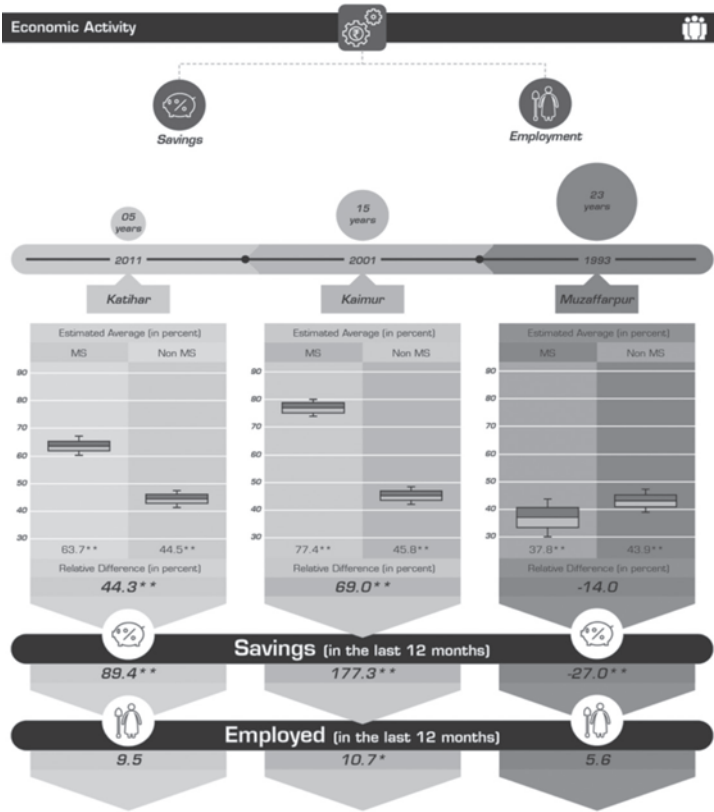
Shivani's photograph in her mason's uniform is recognised by most visitors to the Mushari block office in Muzaffarpur and they often exclaim, 'Oh she is from Dariyah (Shivani's natal home). She has become a heroine.

(FGD, 29 August 2016)

This experience of improved financial outcomes, either through training, creation of new institutional forms, savings, or loans is also reflected in the larger landscape. In Katihar and Kaimur, where MS had been present for the past five and 15 years respectively, there has been significant effect of MS in increasing the probability of participation in savings and employment activity and thereby on the economic activity index. In Katihar, the percentage difference between an average MS member and non-MS respondent is about 89 per cent and 10 per cent with respect to savings and employment activity respectively. We also observe that participating in MS programme increases the economic activity index by 43 per cent of an average rural woman relative to no MS programme.

Similarly, in Kaimur, the estimated percentage difference is about 178 and 11 per cent in terms of savings and employment activity respectively. Here, participating in MS programme increases the economic activity index by 69 per cent of an average rural woman relative to no MS programme. The probability of participation in savings and employment activity, in addition to the relative

Figure 3.8: Estimation Results of Economic Activity and its Constituents



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

movement in the economic activity index, is higher in Kaimur, where MS has been present for the last 15 years, relative to Katihar, where MS has been present for the last five years.

On the other hand, the results from the Muzaffarpur sample, where MS has been present for the 23 years, show that MS and non-MS respondents have statistically equal probability of participation in employment activity. In the sub-sample regression of Muzaffarpur, we observe that the probability of labour force participation is lessened as the women grow older – indicating that women may

choose to leave the labour market. The fact that MS women in this district were significantly older than those from non-MS areas perhaps partially explains the absence of a significant difference between the two. For example, while Shivani was working very actively as a mason earlier, she is currently not working and is much more involved in MS activities through the federation. Additionally, the care responsibilities especially those associated with motherhood become important. An example of this is Rani who after marriage and giving birth to three children had to withdraw from the labour markets as she was unable to care for her three children and hold a job. Further, an average MS member is less likely to save relative to non-MS respondent in Muzaffarpur, which could be explained by their lower levels of labour force participation. This could also be because MS did not put much emphasis on savings when they entered this district – this came only later – and that influenced only those who were associated with *Apna Bank*. Hence, the ATT of MS for the economic activity index is not statistically significant in this district, suggesting that there has either been no effect or the effect on economic activity has dissipated over time. So, despite higher levels of self-efficacy of the women, the economic activities performed by women were still dependent on higher-order factors primarily related to social structures of age, employment, and gender.

3.7.6. *Political participation*

Right from the beginning, MS emphasised lessons of citizenship to ensure that women were able to participate fully in their communities. Through MS meetings and training India, the functions of all the tiers, especially the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) present as the third tier of government. The women were also told about the affirmative action taken by state in the form of reservations of seats for women in third-tier local governments. Bihar was the first state to enhance the reservations of seats for women in local government structures from 33 per cent to 50 per cent in the year 2006. Many women remained unaware till they were told about this by MS. MS also encouraged women to actively participate in their *gram sabhas* (the general body meetings of the local panchayats) to voice their opinions.

This focus on active citizenship and political participation was especially visible in Kaimur where many women participated in the Panchayati Raj elections. As is well documented in the literature, reservations give women seats, but do not ensure voice in a patriarchal society with asymmetrical power divisions (Agnihotri and Mazumdar 1996). But it was clear from the conversations with MS women as well as field observations that they were unhesitant in voicing their opinions and demands in these contentious political spaces. A prominent example of this is Veena Devi (name changed) who was elected as a member from a ward in Shantipur (name changed) panchayat in Kaimur district in the year 2015. We discuss her narrative in detail later in Chapter 5.

Kali was another example of a person who was elected as a ward member and told us that despite the fact there are several barriers to participating honestly and fully in the political space, she continues to do so. For example, she told us that the prominent barriers that she faces are the use of money, the power of caste identity and relations and patronage in local elections. She spoke of the nepotism currently on display in her village.

No matter what happens, the same family remains in power as Mukhia, the head of panchayat – first father, then son, then daughter in law as the seat got reserved, but represented by her husband.

(Interview, 28 March 2017)

Women from MS are often the only women actively participating in these spaces, despite the 50 per cent reservation provided to women. This active participation by MS women is reflected in some ways in the quantitative analysis. We observe that for the state elections, an average MS member is more likely to discuss the candidate contesting in their constituency (about 26 per cent) than non-MS respondents in Muzaffarpur. The same is not observed for Kaimur and Katihar, where the ATT of MS is not statistically significant. We do not find any significant difference between MS and non-MS respondents in their response to voting in the state elections. This is because of equal to or greater than 90 per cent probability of an average respondent, irrespective of MS or non-MS,

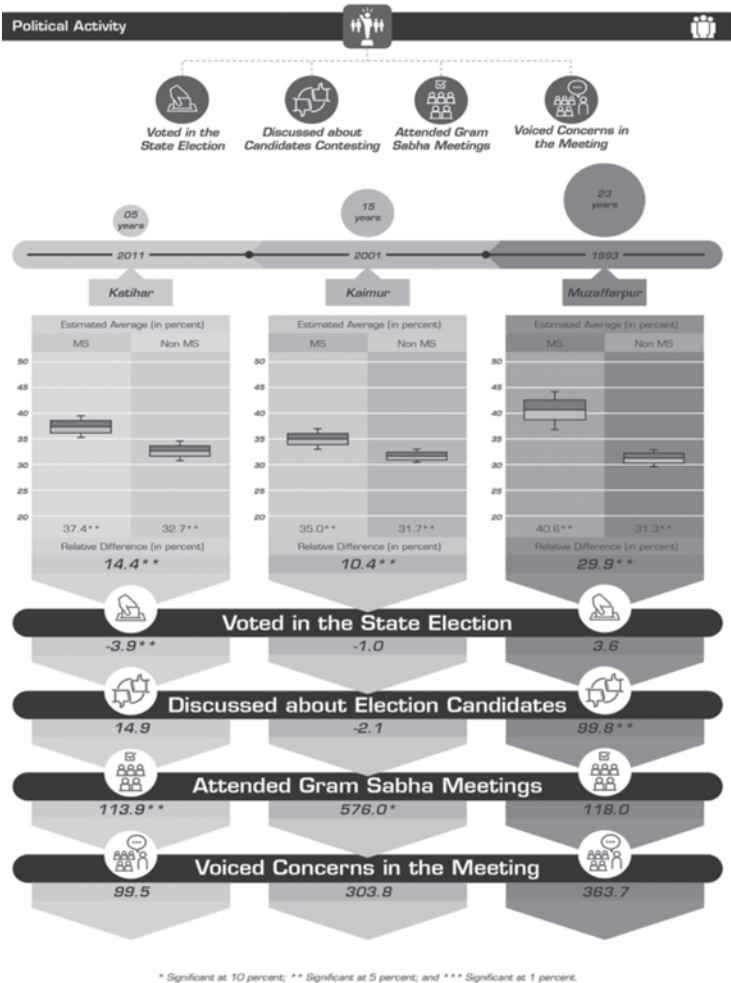
to vote in the state elections. This could be reflective of the trends recently observed in Bihar and other economically backward states where women from marginalised communities are coming out in large numbers to vote (Kapoor and Ravi 2014).

Next, the level of participation at the *gram panchayat* level is significantly low relative to the participation rate observed in the state-level activities. Two findings arise from an examination of the descriptive statistics. One, in general, women's participation is higher where the number matters – in voting and attending *gram sabha* meetings but low where it goes beyond the number and involves 'voice' – expressing their opinions and concerns. Two, women who are part of the MS across the three study sites participate more as compared to others, especially at the *gram panchayat* level. The estimation results only add credibility to these aforementioned findings.

In general, the average probability of non-MS respondents attending *gram sabhas* in non-MS villages is lower relative to MS members. The average probability of attending *gram sabhas* is about three per cent, two per cent and 10 per cent for non-MS respondents in Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar respectively. On the other hand, the average probability for MS members in MS villages is about 6 per cent, 10 per cent and 21 per cent in Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar respectively. Given the lower probability of non-MS respondents, one does observe a significant difference of 114 per cent in Katihar, 576 per cent in Kaimur (significant at 10 per cent) and a non-significant difference of 118 per cent in Muzaffarpur. A similar pattern of higher probability of participation yet lower in magnitude during *gram sabhas* can be observed across the three districts. However, these differences are not statistically different from non-MS respondents.

With regard to the political participation index, the highest ATT of 30 per cent was observed in Muzaffarpur, primarily driven by the fact that an average MS member is 26 per cent more likely to discuss about the candidates than an average non-MS respondent. This is followed by Katihar and Kaimur with an ATT of 14 per cent and 10 per cent respectively, where it is influenced by the higher level of participation for an average MS member at the *gram panchayat* level.

Figure 3.9: Estimation Results of Political Activity Index and its Constituents



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Nevertheless, as described earlier, there is no statistical difference between MS and non-MS in terms of voicing their concerns during *gram sabhas*. In addition, our field observations indicate that the nature of MS members with political space is qualitatively different

where they make use of every available resource at hand to enhance their bargaining power. So why doesn't it translate to significant levels of expression of opinion and concerns of MS members during these meetings? The possible reasons are, as Kali mentioned earlier, that these political spaces are still heavily male-dominated and contested. For instance, during one of field visits, we observed that a group of MS members attending the *gram sabha* were sitting on the ground while the men were sitting on chairs. This in itself showcases the patriarchal power that prevails in such spaces where such treatment acts a barrier for a woman to even enter this space.

Another reason could be that the issues that are usually discussed at *gram sabha* meetings remain very different from the challenges faced by women in their day-to-day lives. Their issues are raised and resolved in other institutions such as *Nari Adalats*, alternative fora of social justice started and instituted by MS (explained in the next section). Women access these forums and other informal structures to resolve their problems rather than coming to the male-dominated space of the *gram sabha*. Given that the quantitative survey did not focus on this important aspect of political participation, it is recommended that future studies incorporate political participation relating to both informal and formal structures.

3.7.7. Attitude towards violence

Previously, they used to blame themselves for their male family members' abusive behaviour but now they understand the role and attitude of men towards them. (Interview, 24 October 2016)

Earlier, we used to talk with each other that husband is husband and we are not supposed to talk to him or confront him. He earns for us and we should give him food and live peacefully in our homes. When we interacted with MS and didi told us about violence, it was really a new and relieving experience for us (FGD, 25 October 2016).

One of the issues that MS started to address very early in its programme is that of gender violence. This was partly because women started talking about their experiences of violence in the sangha. The process of disclosure was organic, partly because

women were facing resistance (in the form of physical assault) when they formed the *sanghas* and took the time out for themselves. In certain cases, women were physically assaulted in the presence of MS members, and therefore, conversations around violence started to be incorporated into trainings as well as meetings. Additionally, one of the prominent areas around which committees were formed was gender violence.

The information sessions around gender violence centred around four main topics: (1) types of violence, (2) the common perpetrators of violence (3) laws and protection and (4) the notions of the body, honour and shame. Women were encouraged to discuss the different kinds of gender-based violence, including sexual violence that they had experienced. The idea of violence was unpacked in these sessions to include other forms which need not necessarily account to physical abuse. In these sessions, MS was trying to destabilise the commonly held notion that the family is a safe and sacred space for women, when the violence that they themselves had experienced was often from someone whom they knew. Women were also encouraged to see and get in touch with their bodies not just in terms of the physicality, but also the social value attached to it, especially around the ideas of shame and honour.

While the initial conversations were hard, women slowly started questioning the concept of victim-blaming and the belief that it is always the fault of the woman who faces the violence. The women would earlier blame themselves when faced with violence and considered the authority of men as sacrosanct. Once they discussed these issues threadbare, they realised that they were not the only ones facing such violence at home and outside. Once the common experiences were shared, women started placing the cause of violence outside themselves and slowly they even started questioning it. They rallied around rape victims and raised their voices collectively and openly.

In one case in Muzaffarpur, where a Dalit girl was raped, MS women decided to gather around the police station physically in order to put forward their demands and show the strength of the collective. They demanded compensation for the girl and also made sure that due procedures of investigation were followed by the police.

They also spoke to the family members to support them in their time of distress. They took the girl to a government hospital and got her medical examination done. In another similar case in Katihar, a 17-year-old boy had raped a minor Adivasi girl of eight and was absconding after the crime. The MS group convinced the mother of the victim to allow the girl to be taken for a medical check-up and for the case to be reported to the police. The police acted upon the complaint, searched for the accused and caught him. The *sangha* women organised a rally to support the victim and were able to garner public support to bring the matter to the *gram panchayat*. After a long struggle, they ensured that the victim got monetary compensation and the boy was charged.

In addition to domestic abuse and rape, women in MS also participated strongly against sex selective abortions, witch hunt, child marriage. This often involved counselling and physical assistance. For instance, in one case, when a woman got pregnant and was under pressure from the family to abort the child after knowing that it was a girl, MS women ensured that she did not do that:

She was not even attending meetings as she was afraid that women would find out about her pregnancy. She already had one son and six daughters. We tried to convince her that it was wrong to abort after knowing that it is a girl. She ignored us and reached the health centre for the abortion but her sister-in-law informed us and we reached there and brought her back. Later, she gave birth to a girl and decided to get sterilised.

(Interview, 18 May 2017)

MS also evolved an institutional mechanism for redressal and space to discuss cases of gender-based violence through *Nari Adalats*, the women's courts [see Box 3.4]. These redressal mechanisms were conceptualised primarily to ensure that women were provided the opportunity and space to provide testimony related to the violence that they experienced. These fora were also used to provide opportunities for mediation on issues related to marital life and created a public space through which women could address abuse happening behind closed doors. These courts were not extra-judicial and did not function outside of the law. Instead, these institutions followed the

law closely and worked to ensure that the implementation of the law and the provisions for relief against domestic violence were actually functional locally. When we asked the *sangha* members whether the judgements in these courts were taken seriously, many of them responded that institutions could be built only after a certain level of trust could be built within the community.

Only after the women emerged as knowledgeable and trusted members of their communities, did the formation of the *Nari Adalat* happen within the community. Moreover, a lot of these meetings were held within the panchayat premises and many of the members were invited to serve as witnesses to the activities. Their presence helped bring legitimacy to the process. It also helped that many *Nari Adalats* worked closely with the judicial system as well as the police in order to ensure better co-operation and administration of the decisions made in the *Nari Adalats*. In this way, there was a concerted effort by MS to involve all aspects of the community to ensure that women were not only aware of their rights but were able to access these rights through the justice mechanism systems.

Box 3.4: Nari Adalat

Nari Adalat in Hindi means Women's Courts. These courts serve as women-friendly spaces of justice for the most marginalised sections of society, especially women. Rooted in the *sanghas*, the *Nari Adalat* strives to make justice accessible to the most marginalised, given the lengthy, expensive, patriarchal and as a result, intimidating judicial system in the country. It also provides a safe space for women where they can freely voice their opinions on issues, especially violence against women. The idea of the *Nari Adalat* emerged in Gujarat in the year 1995 (Best Practice Foundation 2010) when women of the *sangha* increasingly became aware of the violence that they all experienced. The women demanded to know more about violence and the spaces they could seek redressal from. Women of the *sangha* slowly started holding village-level meetings and started conversations about violence against women. An unpleasant incident where a *sahayogini* was murdered by her husband in Vadodara, Gujarat triggered the institutional setup of the *Nari Adalat*. Women had decided that they had had enough of domestic violence and needed an alternative space for justice and for such conversations to take

place (Best Practice Foundation 2010). After 1995, other states followed suit, and as per recent evaluation reports, there are 481 *Nari Adalats* in the 11 states that MS was operative in (IIMA 2014).

In 2014, there were 72 fully functional *Nari Adalats* in Bihar which had dealt with a magnum of 8,472 cases (IIMA 2014). The processes and roles of the *Nari Adalat* was discussed in detail with MS functionaries and the *sangha* women in all three districts, especially in Muzaffarpur and Kaimur, more so in Muzaffarpur, since the federation fully supports the activities of the *Nari Adalat* and they have received funding from Sisters of Charity, New Delhi, to continue their work with the *Nari Adalat*. The *hinsa* (violence) committees of all *sanghas* were active participants in the *Nari Adalats*. The women's court comprise of a core committee of 10 to 11 women aware of issues related to violence, laws and mechanisms for redressal, sensitive to the subjectivity of women, known locally by the panchayats and other members of the village. Three well-trained members from the core committee act as a jury and preside over the cases. Every *Nari Adalat* meeting convenes on a pre-determined date of the month. The members of the jury rotate to ensure that unnecessary bias or power does not creep into the process. The legal/violence committees within the *sanghas* serve as active members of the *Nari Adalat*. The court sessions are held at the block level.

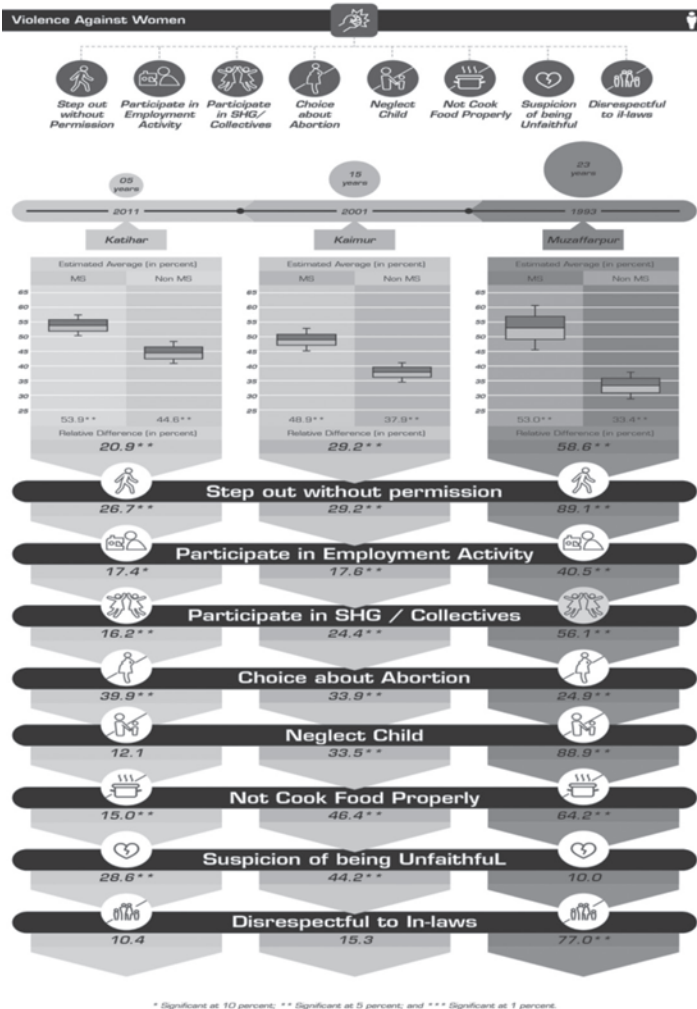
The *Nari Adalat* is seen as a last means for remedy because issues that do not get resolved at the village level are brought to this court. The members of the *Nari Adalat* in Bihar are extensively trained on laws related to women like property rights, sexual harassment, dowry, marriage laws and so on. The women are also told about special laws like protection of SC/ST laws, Right to Information and the Indian Penal Code. The women are made aware of the processes related to the judicial system in India. For example, they are provided information on the difference between cognisable offences and non-cognisable offence, in addition to the process of filing/filling a First Information Report (FIR). Apart from this, women are also made aware of patriarchal practices and other barriers that prevent them from seeking justice. Members are encouraged to build their local networks with panchayat officials, village elders, government officials, police officials, the sole purpose of this is to spread awareness on *Nari Adalats* and provide legitimacy in terms of local acceptance from the people of the villages (Observation of *Nari Adalat* training, Muzaffarpur, August 2016). The members of

Nari Adalat stated that it is not easy for them to work in a patriarchal setup and they have to constantly keep themselves informed and updated with new provisions in acts and laws. The women gave several examples of cases that they had presided over, ranging from domestic disputes related to land and property, rape to witch hunts. The women said that the community support has slowly grown over time as the member's jurisprudence is sensitive to the needs of women and the community. (FDG, September 2016)

When we examine whether these extensive efforts on ground to address gender violence are reflected on a larger scale, we primarily used a measure that assessed the respondent's attitude towards violence against women (VAW) in circumstances that defy typical 'feminine' expectations in a patriarchal society. For example, our measure includes refusal to carry on care responsibilities pertaining to the family such as taking care of children, obedience towards in-laws, and domestic chores like cooking. It also includes independent decision-making regarding participating in labour force employment, joining a collective/self-help group, making reproductive choices on their own and stepping out of the house without the husband's permission. We also included a question which asked women whether violence was acceptable if the husband suspected them of infidelity.

What we found was that with respect to care responsibilities, a higher percentage of MS, members relative to non-MS, think that it is not justified for the husband to hit their wives under such circumstances. The general pattern is that the treatment effect is highest in Muzaffarpur, followed by Kaimur and Katihar (with non-significant differences in all variables except for food not being cooked properly at the 6 per cent level). To elucidate, the effect is about eight per cent in Katihar, 17 per cent in Kaimur and 23 per cent in Muzaffarpur. Second, it should be kept in mind that MS members who think it is justified for the husband to beat his wife for not taking care of children, not cooking food properly and especially for being disrespectful to in-laws constitute nearly half of our sample in all the three districts. This indicates that not all MS members, irrespective of the duration of exposure to MS, hold the

Figure 3.10: Estimation Results of Vaw Index and its Constituents



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

same perceptions of violence and unjust treatment meted by their husbands for not practicing established patriarchal social norms.

With respect to independent decision-making, about 60–65 per cent of MS members in Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar think that

it is not justified for a woman to participate in employment activity or join collectives without her husband's permission. In contrast to this, majority of women think it is justified for a husband to beat his wife if she chooses to have an abortion without her husband's permission.

Essentially, we found a higher percentage of MS women not justifying spousal abuse under any circumstances.²⁵ However, we observe that the attitudes of respondents towards VAW varies drastically in terms of care responsibilities, independent decisions regarding participation in economic activities and decisions as to what happens to their own bodies (choice regarding abortion).

While the respondents think the VAW is justified in domains of care responsibilities and abortion choice, they do not think it is justified when pursuing economic activities. This raises serious questions of the idea that improvement in economic activity (or opportunities) alleviates social problems faced by women by improving their bargaining power within the household as propounded by many economists, governments and micro-finance groups.

The argument that is often raised is that an increase in economic status will reduce social problems. Here we find that there are certain core attitudinal beliefs that even MS who were dealing with the issue directly and more thoroughly were unable to fully address in the last 23 years. Thus, our result exhibits that women's attitudes towards VAW are still influenced by the gender socialisation and gender roles in a patriarchal society although the exposure to MS does bring about some change through institutional mechanisms as well as solidarity networks, in women's lives.

3.8. Conclusions

The above analysis helps us draw four main conclusions. These are:

3.8.1. *The effect of MS on economic empowerment*

The effect of MS on economic empowerment, defined as a holistic process, is unambiguously positive and significant though the

²⁵ To be specific, the difference was observed to be highest in Kaimur (about 0.12 points), followed by Muzaffarpur and Katihar where the difference is observed to be almost similar (about 0.08 points).

drivers of the effects vary from one place to the other. The highest effect size (28 per cent difference) is seen in Kaimur, the district with 15 years of MS exposure and in the middle time-period in our sample, with Muzaffarpur (17 per cent difference) with 23 years of MS exposure and Katihar (14 per cent difference) with five years of exposure. Broadly, this implies that though certain processes and outcomes, such as changing attitudes towards VAW or impacting intra-household decision-making patterns, take longer to take root and are not as strongly visible in districts other than Muzaffarpur, certain other processes such as participation in economic activities become routinised and therefore, do not invoke similar responses as elsewhere in the long run. On the other hand, the results are faster and outcomes can be seen even in the short term when it comes to economic activities such as savings and labour force participation.

3.8.2. Multiple factors matter

What also emerges clearly is that multiple factors matter: programme focus in a particular period heavily influences outcomes but so does the external policy environment. MS entered Kaimur in 2001 and that was the decade of a number of significant public policy initiatives. For example, the Right to Information was made a law, Right to Food came into force through a Supreme Court judgement, MGNREGA came both as an act ensuring right to livelihood and a scheme to actualise that law and the micro finance movement became stronger and more common.

Since the programme was new in Kaimur at that time, perhaps all these found reflection leading to a very high effect size there. When MS entered Muzaffarpur, the focus was much more on breaking gender barriers in the first phase and, therefore, these aspects were given much more focused attention and these effects have sustained over a long period of time. In Katihar also, despite slowing down of the MS activities in the last two years due to a fund crunch, the effect on savings, employment and awareness remain high.

3.8.3. Influence on different dimensions

The MS model focused on collective consciousness and holistic empowerment and the effect can be seen on different dimensions.

The MS collectives focused on collective identity leading to collective action on various aspects of subordination, as reflected in their participation for diverse set of rights and entitlements, unlike other collectives who primarily focused on either microfinance loans or livelihood schemes. Mobility, resisting violence, asserting women's voices in private and in public – these were important and inseparable parts of MS action and women we interacted with were emphatic in saying that 'sanghas are not like Jeevika²⁶ or other SHG groups'. Unlike MS, Jeevika follows a fixed set of protocols and, therefore, does not allow flexibility for women to decide the activities they want to pursue, even within the preview of activities related to savings. Women who have been members of both kinds found the MS processes far more enriching:

Jeevika is providing us with just savings. There is nothing new for us. No employment, no training. Now we just go, give our money for saving and come back.

(FGD, 17 January 2017)

MS was doing more than savings as we were getting aware of various issues. We were inspired by the knowledge and the thought of taking care of our families. Now women have understood their well-being and are going ahead to make their lives better. We are aware of our rights. Before

²⁶ The Government of Bihar (GoB), through the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society (BRLPS), an autonomous body under the Department of Rural Development, is spearheading the World Bank-aided Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project (BRLP), locally known as JEEVIKA with the objective of social and economic empowerment of the rural poor. The objectives of JEEVIKA are: improving rural livelihoods and enhancing social and economic empowerment of the rural poor, developing organisations of the rural poor and producers to enable them to access and better negotiate services, credit and assets from public and private sector agencies and financial institutions, investing in capacity-building of public and private service providers, playing a catalytic role in promoting development of microfinance and agribusiness sectors (JEEVIKA website <http://brlp.in/web/brlp/> overview accessed on 3 April 2018) Implemented mainly through micro finance groups and microcredit, JEEVIKA comes under the umbrella scheme of National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM).

2001, nobody knew these things. Participation in the sangha provided us with this new world of knowledge.

(FGD, 17 January 2017)

One could argue that MS has led to sustainable effect in women's lives where the results are not going to be confined to present but also for the future, some of those visible in the inter-generational effects that we are exploring in greater detail in the next chapter.

3.8.4. Importance of examining structural barriers

When viewed from the lens of economic citizenship, MS with its focus on empowering education through collective consciousness as a means of change seems to have generated high impact for a good number of women in rural India. Shivani went from a woman who was selling vegetables to eke out a meagre livelihood for herself and her family to the first woman mason in the state of Bihar who educated all of her children and has greater ambitions for her grandchildren.

However, we also saw, both through the qualitative study as well as the quantitative results, that the structural barriers to empowerment have been overcome. The process of empowerment for women coming from the poorest sections in a patriarchal society is a process of negotiations and continuous struggle (details of which will be covered in Chapter 5). The intersectionality of caste, class, religion, poverty and gender make women's lives far more complex and studying the effects of any programme that tries to address all these aspects is equally complex. For example, while Rani's story started out to be very hopeful with her journey to MSK and her employment as the JK, she couldn't ultimately withstand family pressure to get married. After going to her marital home, the gains that she had made by her education quickly unravelled within the new patriarchal family into which she was married.

I could not resist. If I was educated enough, I would not be leading this life. My parents did not allow me to study further.

(FGD, 27 February 2017)

So, while it is clear that MS was able to shift major social forces in terms of information and awareness of rights, decision-making, political participation and violence against women, it must also not be forgotten that the women that MS typically address are marginalised women who face multiple sources of deprivation and have very minimal social and financial resources. So, the story of MS is not about only Shivani, the woman who defied the odds and emerged stronger, or Rani, the girl with the greatest potential who was trapped into one of the oldest and most stable patriarchal institutions. The story of MS, as the next two chapters reveal, is about both of them. It is about the institutional barriers, negotiations and the constant struggle that both Rani and Shivani experience in their journey towards empowerment.

4

Breaking the Cycle Understanding the inter- generational impact of MS

4.1. Introduction

Why do you feel helpless?

The law is very strong

Child labour is illegal

Do not do anything that will get you punished

Why do you feel helpless?

If anything happens, come together and think

Then lodge an FIR

The law is very strong

Stop child marriage

Uproot the practice of dowry

Giving and taking is a crime

The law is very strong

Rape is a crime

Punishment is in the hands of the law

7 years in jail

The law is very strong

Song sung in Mahila Samakhya

Women's empowerment programmes and development policies implicitly assume that empowering women will translate into improving their children's outcome in terms of education, health, marriage, labour market and well-being (World Bank 2012; Coffey et al. 2015; Duflo 2012). This becomes relevant in a context such as Bihar where high levels of poverty exist intertwined with low human capital and strong patriarchal practices. It is not surprising then to observe higher incidence of child marriage and gender disparity in education. There is no doubt that there has been a significant decrease in the gender gap at elementary and secondary levels¹. For instance, in 2006–07, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) at elementary and secondary levels of education for girls was 0.76 and 0.61 where the gross enrolment ratio of girls was about 86.60 per cent and 41.00 per cent respectively (Refer to Annexure Table A3). By 2011–2012, the GPI at elementary and secondary levels were at 0.97 and 0.93 respectively. However, the reduction in gender gap at secondary levels only conceals the poor levels of gross enrolment rates for both boys and girls at 44.30 per cent and 41.00 per cent respectively. This is in contrast with the gross enrolment rate of 88.90 and 86.60 for boys and girls respectively observed at elementary level. It clearly suggests that both boys and girls discontinue their education at the secondary level.

The reasons for discontinuation, however, are many and vary by gender.² Duflo (2012) observe that parents do not value girls' education as they are expected to marry and take care of their

¹ Elementary level includes both primary (Class 1 to 5) and upper primary (Class 6 to 8) levels; Secondary levels includes classes from 9 to 12. The age-appropriate enrolment for Class 1 to 5 includes 6 to 10 years; 11 to 13 years for Class 6 to 8; 14 to 15 years for Class 9 to 10 and 16 to 17 years of Class 11 and 12. In sum, the age-appropriate group for enrolment in elementary and secondary level ranges between 6 to 17 years.

² According to National Sample Survey on Education Round in 2014, the factors for discontinuation include financial constraints, engaged in domestic duties and care work (especially for girls), engaged in economic activities (especially for boys), not interested in duties, unable to cope with studies, completed desired level, school is far, marriage and other reasons. For girls, additional factors such as non-availability of female teachers and girls' toilets also influence their decisions to discontinue education (MOSPI 2016).

households whereas boys are expected to continue their education for as long as they want. According to the recent survey of NFHS, 2015–16, about 42.50 per cent of girls aged between 20–24 years were married before 18 years. Further, Warner et al. (2014) find that prevalence of child marriage is about 60 per cent in Bihar relative to 47 per cent observed at the national level. While the relationship between poverty, low levels of educational attainment and child marriage is complex, often laced with causality flowing both ways, strong patriarchal norms with specific gender roles assigned to men and women can accentuate gender inequality and the incidence of child marriage (Wodon et al. 2017).

Recognising this, MS engaged with the younger generation through the institutional structures of Bal Jagjaggi Kendras (BJKs), Jagajagi Kendras (JKs) and Mahila Shiskhan Kendras (MSKs) in addition to participating and trying to influence mainstream educational institutions in the communities. Further, women through their journeys of empowerment have also created pathways enabling their children to attain better educational levels and better health and to delay early marriage. In this chapter, we will examine the effect of MS on children's outcomes and illustrate the different ways in which MS was able to influence women's choices and decisions for the next generation, especially pertaining to their daughter's education and marriage. In particular, we will illustrate the complex social mechanisms and structures that women have to negotiate with and navigate in their everyday lives in order to create the same spaces and opportunities for their children that MS was able to create for them.

We present quantitative analysis in combination with ethnographic evidence to examine the movements in the educational and marital outcomes for daughters. While the quantitative evidence provides us perspective on the larger landscape of influence that MS was able to exert (as compared to villages where there was no MS programme), ethnography helps us to understand the nuances and complexities of these movements. This provides us a greater understanding of the whole process of 'breaking the cycle' of inter-generational gender discrimination.

The chapter is divided into four primary sections. The first briefly examines the rationale behind examining two indicators –

education and marriage – as the lenses to examine intergenerational impact. This includes examining the current literature on the topic, the ways in which the study measured these two dimensions, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The second examines the process by which MS engaged with the next generation of women with respect to education. This section also examines the engagement that MS had with educational institutions, both in terms of creating alternate non-traditional institutions as well as trying to influence existing institutions to cater to the aspirations of the next generation. The third examines the institution of marriage as an important indicator of intergenerational impact. The fourth and final section examines the difficulties encountered by MS and *sangha* women during this journey.

4.2. Importance of inter-generational impact

It is a well-documented fact that improvements in women's status have drastically altered the landscape of their choices and opportunities (Malhotra et al. 2002; McNay 2005). This is particularly true of decisions related to choice and time of marriage, as well as the timing, spacing and number of children. In case of women's empowerment programmes, it was expected that the intergenerational aspect would lead to better internalisation of the *meaning* of empowerment (with all its messiness and conflict) and long-term impact spilling over to the entire community. This internalisation of empowerment, in turn, is assumed to contribute to the sustainability of women's empowerment programmes.

The MS policy document explicitly states that it seeks to mobilise and organise women and enable them to take charge of their lives and *those of their daughters/children* (MHRD, undated, emphasis added). A few rigorous quantitative studies have mapped the intergenerational impact of the MS programme (for example, Janssen 2010; Janssen et al. 2004; Bhuwania et al. 2016) and found that MS has had far-reaching consequences not only for the women themselves but also for their children and for the wider community in which they live. These studies have clearly shown that MS's positive outcomes have spilled over to the next generation, especially in the

form of immunisation rates of children and educational outcomes for girls in the community. Studies (e.g., Janssen et al. 2004) have indicated increased parental awareness about school education and participation and contribution to school activities.

Similarly, a recent study by Bhuwania et al. (2016) covering all the districts nation-wide under the MS programme found that not only were educational levels higher among women in such districts but women also married later in these districts. The districts under the programme that started with a disadvantage compared to those not under MS showed marked improvement in a span of just one generation. What is even more important, as pointed out by this study, is that the effect of MS on girls' education and postponement of marriage, is bigger for the most disadvantaged groups – the poorest quintile or the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe communities.

These findings are especially important to consider against the backdrop of debates in the development discourse on empowerment. For example, there is concern that the instrumentalist perspective of various government programmes has taken precedence over understanding and implementing women-defined and women-identified empowerment outcomes (Ramdas 1990; Patel 2003; Bhog 2005). Adult education programmes were seen to invariably tie women's learning to their reproductive roles alone – maternal and child health, fertility, nutrition and other 'feminine' domains which also form part of the desirable 'national goals' (Ramdas 1990; Patel 2009; Bhog 2005; Dighe and Patel 1997). The regressive notions behind 'educate a woman and you educate a family' constrained and diluted the vision of adult women's education as being defined by women's own needs for learning and instead became more about the instrumental role they played in the education of their families (Bhog and Ghose 2012). As literacy of mothers ensured enrolment and retention of girls in school, the role of women's education was increasingly linked to improving participation of children in school, especially for girls from the weaker sections of the society, without any value placed on the intrinsic importance of mothers' education.

These debates in the development discourse also influenced MS. As a programme operating in the period where these debates were raging, MS had to grapple and negotiate with this shift in focus

in the policy arena, as seen in the discussions within the MS and its National Resource Group (Jandhyala 2003). However, it was comparatively easier for MS to adapt, as the operational strategy of the programme had always been to focus on education as a means to empower women so that they may better negotiate the power relationships within and outside their households (Bhog and Ghose 2012). These negotiations were done in the arena of their own personal autonomy and independence but also in securing these same things for their children. We examine two primary indicators – education and marriage – to explore this relationship.

4.2.1. Education

Even though women's education has made great strides in India, there still remain persistent failures in achieving universal enrolment and preventing drop-out rates (CSO 1991; Sen 2007, 2008; Bhuwania et al. 2016). There also exists a significant rural-urban divide in rates of female literacy. On approximation, rural female literacy was half of that of the urban areas (Sen 2007, 2008). So, right from the beginning, an important goal in India since the formulation of national plans for education in 1968 has been to invest in women's education (Bhuwania et al, 2016). As discussed in the first chapter, this finds explicit mention in the 1986 National Policy on Education (NPE) where there was special emphasis on the removal of disparities and to equalise educational opportunity, especially for Indian women, ST and the SC communities. The section on women (Part IV, Education for Equality, National Policy on Education, 1986, pp. 9) explicitly states that:

Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women.

Education as such results in positive externalities. Not only does it have an intrinsic value in the sense of the joy of learning and reading but it also has instrumental, social and process roles. When one individual sends her child to school, her neighbour

is likely to do so as well. Women's education too, often spreads this way, more specifically, through same gender effect, i.e., an educated woman is far more likely to send her daughter to school than an uneducated woman (Drèze and Kingdon 2001). It is a well-established fact that lack of education acts as a barrier towards unlocking women's potential in the economy through employment, gains in health for the population and, finally, the improved ability to take important decisions such as when and who to marry or when to have children. In this sense, education is a fundamental tool for women's empowerment and addressing the educational needs of women in India remains an important goal even today (Sen 1997; Sen 2007–08; Bhuwania et al. 2016). The emphasis on education by MS, therefore, was naturally on changing the social norms of women's lives, both for themselves and for their daughters.

4.2.2. *Marriage*

Women's age at marriage has been the focus of global development policy concerns across the developing world and is considered crucial for realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Nour, 2006; Jha et al. 2016). Age at marriage is an indicator of a woman's ability to better negotiate decisions at home and has often been used as a proxy for empowerment. Early marriage is widely recognised as a human rights violation as girls are denied access to education and economic opportunities, perpetuating the gendered nature of poverty (UNICEF 2005; Raj 2010; Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi 2003). At the macro-level, it also contributes to maintaining the inter-generational cycle of poverty and further marginalising women in society. It is also a complex issue with inter-generational implications, from both the gender and child rights perspectives (Jha et al. 2016). Evidence suggests that adolescent marriage and pregnancy may negatively impact both women's reproductive health outcomes and child health outcomes (Finlay et al. 2011; Raj et al. 2010; Santhya et al. 2010). Statistics also suggest that the prevalence of domestic violence is higher for those who have been married at an early age (Jha et al. 2016).

Associated with marriage in India is the system of dowry, a commonplace practice in India. In the context of early and child

marriage, dowry is one of the most commonly cited reason for parents to marry their daughters at a young age because lower dowries are expected for younger brides (Nirantar Trust n.d.). This relationship between marriage and dowry is especially relevant in India, as there are significantly high incidences of dowry deaths in the Indian subcontinent (Parmar 2014; Banerjee 2013). Studies have cited structural inequalities within Indian society, along with social norms and practices which reinforce, reproduce and perpetuate these inequalities as the root causes of early and child marriage (Chakravarti 2013; Chandra 1998; Nirantar Trust n.d.; Jha et al. 2016). Therefore, child marriage need not only be seen as a developmental outcome that indicates the nature of future potential for girls but also an indicator of the larger social system in which these marriages are taking place. The prevalence of these practices indicates the rigidity and stability of social structures within the social context of the women, as they have been outlawed by the state and yet continues to persist.

4.2.3. Measuring education and marriage

We focus on two parameters, namely education and child marriage, in our qualitative and quantitative framework to examine the effect of MS on the next generation, especially given its criticality in the lives of women, their empowerment and perpetuation of gender inequality.

4.2.3.1. Data and estimation strategy for the quantitative analysis

In our quantitative analysis, the outcomes that we measured are related to the children of our respondents – relying upon the identification of MS and non-MS villages through the propensity score-matching method (detailed in Chapter 3). We consider the data on children (referred to as children dataset hereafter) as observational in nature since the sampling strategy for the survey was devised with the villages (MS/non-MS) as the primary sampling unit and women/households as the secondary sampling unit. The selection of respondents was not conditional on their marital status or motherhood. The children dataset, therefore, does not constitute

all the 980, 972 and 907 women/households in Katihar, Kaimur and Muzaffarpur respectively.³ Next, the sample for the three districts was not pooled together for the analysis. The estimations are run separately to ensure that MS villages are matched with non-MS villages located in the same district, similar to the respondent-related regression in Chapter 3.⁴ In sum, the children dataset for each of the three study districts may not have enough observations too be able to detect five percentage points with 0.80 power and 0.05 significance level. Second, the responses recorded are self-reported by the respondents (the mothers) and not validated through any checks. Thus, the findings here should be considered indicative in nature to understand any significant and positive effect of MS on children through its various strategies.

In the quantitative analysis for education, we consider two types of variables – current enrolment in school and functional literacy. We define current enrolment in school as those children in the age group between 6 to 18 years of age currently enrolled in any type of school, formal or non-formal, expressed as a percentage of sample children population in the same age group. This is closely relatable to the age-specific enrolment rate covering both elementary and secondary levels for the age group between six and 18 years defined and produced by MHRD as part of its official statistics.

Next, we define functional literacy as the ability of the children to speak and write in Hindi or English, six years and above, expressed as a percentage of the sample child population of the same age group. Literacy constitutes of the ability of the child to read and write those languages in school, household, communities and any other place as required. For the quantitative analysis of marriage,

³ The questions related to children outcomes were asked to the respondents only if they had children either living in the household or elsewhere. There were provisions to skip these set of questions if the respondent was single, ever married but with no children currently or not willing to respond.

⁴ We reiterate that the sample used for analysis is based on primary survey, where the selection of MS and non-MS villages was determined by the probability of selection. Therefore, our estimation strategy is conceptualised in cognizant of the principles behind the sampling strategy as well. Any deviation from this, such as combining all three district datasets, would introduce problems in both estimation and interpretation.

we defined child marriage as any child married before the legal age of marriage which is below 18 and 21 years for girls and boys respectively in India. These three types of outcome variables require different sub-samples of the children dataset and their respective estimation strategies. We discuss below our approach towards data generation, weighting and estimation strategies in that order adopted for estimating the effect of MS on inter-generational outcomes.

We begin with the sub-sample constructed for estimating the effect of MS on the functional literacy of children. We consider here only children belonging to the age group six years and above to be included. This is because children below six would be too young to be exposed to Hindi or English which is not the mother tongue especially in Katihar district. Inclusion of children below six would result in downward bias of our estimates. Given this, our sub-sample for functional literacy constitutes of 2,809, 3,326 and 2,941 children in Katihar, Kaimur and Muzaffarpur respectively.

Similarly, we construct a sub-sample with children belonging to the age group between six and 18 years to estimate the effect of MS on current enrolment in school. The age group six to 18 years is officially considered as the appropriate age for a child to be pursuing primary to secondary education (class 1 to 12) in India. Given this, our sub-sample for current enrolment constitutes of 1914, 2,069 and 1744 children in Katihar, Kaimur and Muzaffarpur respectively.

The sub-sample for child marriage includes only those children who were married after the MS programme was implemented in a particular district. We excluded children married before 1993 in Muzaffarpur, 2001 in Kaimur and 2011 in Katihar in both MS and non-MS villages. The argument here is that MS would not have had any opportunity to work with the women or create any institutional structures to influence the age of marriage before its implementation; thus, inclusion of these observations would only result in a biased estimate. Given this, our sub-sample for marriage constitutes of 3,049, 3,671 and 3,259 children in Katihar, Kaimur and Muzaffarpur respectively.⁵

⁵ Table A4 provides details on the number of women/households that constitute the sample for functional literacy, current enrolment and marriage analysis.

The three different datasets comprising children belonging to different age-groups in combination with no stratification by gender adopted at the sampling stage imply that the distribution of male and female may not be equivalent in number. This may in turn result in biased estimates and not facilitate understanding the MS effect on the gender gap. Besides this, we also have to ensure that there is balance between MS and non-MS villages to ensure unbiased estimates. We adopted a weighting strategy to ensure balance among treatment status and gender (male/female).

First, we estimated the probability of selection into treatment using a probit model with the dependent variable being dummy of treatment status and the independent variable being the percentage of SC/ST population and percentage of female literacy at the village level for each of the three study districts (namely Katihar, Kaimur and Muzaffarpur). This is similar to the strategy adopted for the respondent-related estimation detailed in Chapter 3. Once the probability of treatment selection was estimated, we adjusted the weights to ensure that there is balance between male and female children so that the results are not biased due to non-stratification by gender at the sampling stage. The inverse of the probability of selection and frequency weights are multiplied to derive the final weights to be used in our analysis. This weighting strategy enables us to compare the estimates between male and female within (and between) a treatment status: in this case functioning of the MS in the village. Table A5, A6 and A7 in the Annexure provide both un-weighted and weighted gender-wise distribution of the functional literacy, current enrolment and marriage respectively.

Moving on to the estimation strategy, the primary objective is to estimate the effect of MS on the three outcome variables. From our discussion of the findings in Chapter 3, we know that MS has had significant and positive effect on the economic empowerment of women. We assumed then that this empowered self in addition to improved social status in the household and community would have resulted in better awareness, intra-household allocation of resources, decision-making and aspirations towards the next generation. We made use of quasi-experimental method, propensity score-matching

in particular, to match MS and non-MS villages (discussed in detail in Chapter 3).

In our estimation equation, we introduced a dummy variable to denote treatment status (1=MS villages and 0=non-MS villages) in order to estimate the effect of MS on the three inter-generational outcome variables. Our outcome-related regression had dummy variables of current enrolment (1 – currently enrolled; 0 – not enrolled), speak and write in Hindi/English (1 – able to speak and write in Hindi/English; 0 – cannot speak and write in Hindi/English), and marital status (1 – ever married; 0 – never married). The independent variables are at three levels – individual, household and village. At the children level, we control for gender, age and square of age (to understand if there is any non-linearity in probability of current enrolment or functional literacy). At the household level, we control for the mother's age, her education and marital status, type of house, caste, per capita household income and number of household members. At the village level, we control for the distance from town (in kms), percentage of SC/ST population, percentage of female literacy and whether or not there was any functional self-help group there. We employed the probit model to estimate the probability for current enrolment and functional literacy with the equation specified below

$$Y_{c,i,v,d} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Dummy for MS}_{v,d} + \beta_2 CH_{c,i,v,d} + \beta_3 HH_{i,v,d} + \beta_3 V_{v,d} + e_{c,i,v,d} \quad \text{----- Equation 4.1}$$

Where $Y_{c,i,v,d}$ denotes the outcome variables varying at the level of children and the coefficient of interest is β_1 which provides the magnitude and directionality of MS effect. $CH_{c,i,v,d}$, $HH_{i,v,d}$ and $V_{v,d}$ denote the children, household and village-level characteristics controlled for in the regression estimation.

While we employed the probit model for the marriage sub-sample as well, the estimation equation differs slightly to enable derivation of probability varying by age and treatment status. To do this, we interacted the dummy variable for treatment status with the age at which the child was married. This facilitated not only estimating the probability of child marriage in MS and non-MS villages but we were able to examine whether the probability of marriage varies

at different age groups say (a) under 15 years; (b) 16 to 17 years; (c) 18 and 20 years and (d) 21 years and above by gender and treatment status. Therefore, the estimation equation for marriage is specified as given below:

$$Y_{c,i,v,d} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Dummy for MS}_{v,d} * \text{Age of Marriage}_{c,i,v,d} + \beta_2 CH_{c,i,v,d} + \beta_3 HH_{i,v,d} + \beta_3 V_{v,d} + e_{c,i,v,d} \quad \text{--- Equation 4.2}$$

Both Equation 4.1 and Equation 4.2 were estimated by applying weights as discussed earlier and standard errors clustered at the treatment-assignment level (village). As a robustness check, we also estimated the regression by applying only the weight derived from probability of selection into treatment to balance among MS and non-MS. Additionally, we also estimated the regressions with standard errors clustered at the household level.⁶ The results are similar where only notable observation was improved significance level of coefficients from estimations with standard errors clustered at the household level. For the purpose of our discussion here, we make use of estimates where weights were applied to balance among both gender and treatment status in addition to standard errors clustered at the village level.

4.2.3.2. Qualitative analysis and document review

In terms of qualitative data, we make use of interviews with men, women, and the children (mostly, adolescents) themselves. From women and children, we elicited information either through focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews. With men, the information regarding children and adolescents came through focus groups. The focus of most of these discussions can be categorised into the following topics: educational aspirations, marital hopes, aspirations for work, and quality of life (including care work). We coded all of our interviews and focus group discussions across various themes such as livelihoods, MS processes, and impact.

⁶ Tables A8–A25 in the Annexure provides the estimation results of the econometric regressions as described in Equation 4.1 and 4.2, in addition to the estimations to check for robustness for all the three outcome variables and three study sites.

The analysis in this chapter pertains to the two themes that also emerged in relation to children that were quite prominent: marriage and education. While dynamics of work participation, care work and quality of life were also critical to many of the conversations that we recorded, we found that focal points of conversation in regard to children revolved around aspects of education and marriage⁷. We also used information regarding the nature of participation in SDMCs by *sangha* women through the document review of the minutes of the SDMCs as well as panchayat documents (details in the Annexure). The document review process also involved two field-level interactions, one each in the district of Kaimur and Muzaffarpur. The interaction with the *sangha* also provided additional documents of the sangha, namely, the *sangha* registers, and used in our discussion here.

4.3. MS and education

The beginning of all empowerment efforts in the field for MS starts with the *sahayogini*, who meets rural women, organises meetings with them, initiates conversations among women regarding their problems and makes them aware of their rights. As explained in Chapter 3, one of the major priority areas for rural women was education. *Samooths* (groups) were made, *sakhis* (female friends) were appointed and both *sakhis* and *samooths* were given extensive training. *Sahayoginis*, especially, were trained to ensure that *sanghas* were given time for knowledge and to learn new things (FGD, 15th April 2017). Trainings to *sangha* women centred around sharing of information, knowledge creation and awareness of various issues, including on education, violence, and health. The trainings were integral to the programme given the information asymmetry due to women's marginalised position in society:

One has to face difficulties in getting knowledge. As we have already lost a lot, now, we need to get aware of new things Routine life is fine,

⁷ The dynamics of work participation and care work will be examined in much more detail in the context of institutional and social structures in the next chapter.

but one must leave domestic chores to get knowledge of the new world to share with the group (FGD, 25 October 2016).

Acquiring new information is considered necessary for a *sangha* to function. Many women indicated that their lives improved because they had information and knowledge. Women in the village were of the opinion that a woman can do a lot if she has intelligence, and they remain oppressed without [this intelligence] (FGD, 15 April 2017). This knowledge was not restricted to books but also about life. The widening of their social world through various kinds of information affected women's choices and decisions regarding their children. More specifically, they felt that they were given the wisdom to educate [their] children and could guide them properly (Personal Interview, 26 November 2016). For a number of women, this meant that they realised that their daughters could study beyond the matriculation examination [class 10]. One of them told us that she would '*like [her] daughters to become like [her]. They should go out and do something.*' (Interview, 20 January 2018).

To examine whether these micro mechanisms of MS resulted in improved educational outcomes for their children, we analyse the quantitative data on enrolment in school and functional literacy.

4.3.1. Current enrolment

Table 4.1 provides the estimated probability of current enrolment for children in the age group of six to 18 years old and relative difference between MS and non-MS to assess the effect of MS. Among the three districts, female child in Muzaffarpur is 28 per cent more likely, on average, than a male child to be currently enrolled, irrespective of the grade and treatment status. But, in general, the average probability of being currently enrolled is lower in Muzaffarpur relative to the estimated probabilities in the other two districts.⁸ There is very small difference in probability between Kaimur and Katihar.

Despite the lower chance of being enrolled observed in Muzaffarpur, relative to other districts, both male and female

⁸ Although the average probability of female child being currently enrolled in Muzaffarpur and Katihar is similar.

Table 4.1: Estimated Probability and Effect of MS on Current Enrolment

Indicators	Katihar	Kaimur	Muzaffarpur
<i>Estimated Average Probability</i>			
Male – Non-MS	0.786*** (0.026)	0.778*** (0.022)	0.557*** (0.048)
Female – Non MS	0.767*** (0.026)	0.773*** (0.021)	0.677*** (0.047)
Male – MS	0.778*** (0.025)	0.823*** (0.018)	0.661*** (0.028)
Female – MS	0.758*** (0.029)	0.819*** (0.017)	0.769*** (0.025)
<i>Difference between Male and Female by treatment status</i>			
Female (vs.) Male – Non MS	-0.019 (0.021)	-0.005 (0.018)	0.120*** (0.027)
Female (vs.) Male – MS	-0.02 (0.022)	-0.004 (0.016)	0.108*** (0.024)
<i>Estimated relative difference in probability between MS and Non MS</i>			
Male	-0.008 (0.029)	0.044* (0.024)	0.105** (0.052)
Female	-0.009 (0.033)	0.046* (0.024)	0.092* (0.048)
<i>Effect of MS on Gender Gap</i>			
Female (vs.) Male – MS (vs) non-MS	-0.001 (0.003)	0.001 (0.002)	-0.013* (0.007)

Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * – Significant at 10 per cent, ** – Significant at 5 per cent, and *** – Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered at village level are given in the parentheses.

children of MS members in MS village have a significant and higher chance of 10 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively, of being enrolled than a male and female child of non-MS women in non-MS village. In Kaimur, we observe that a male and female child of MS members in MS village has about 4–5 per cent higher chance of being currently enrolled compared to non-MS, although the effect is significant only at the 10 per cent level. In Katihar, the effect is not significant and difference is only about 0.8 per cent between

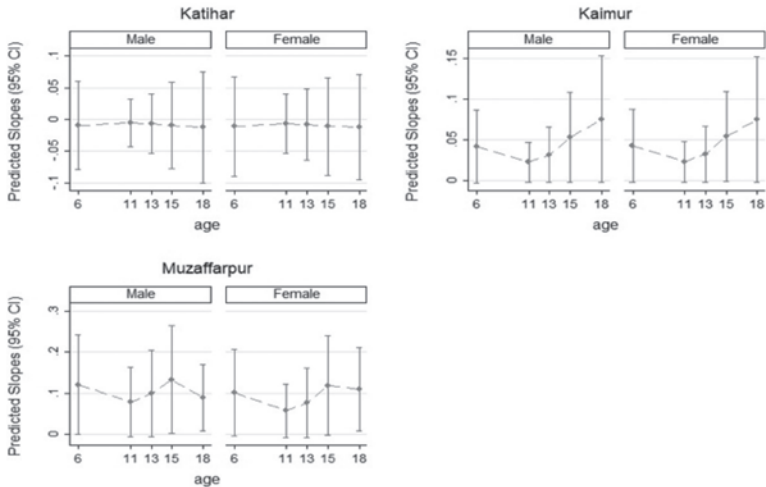
MS and non-MS. The effect of MS definitely varies based on the duration of exposure and it can be argued that the highest, positive and most significant effect is observed in Muzaffarpur, where MS has been operational for the last 23 years, followed by Kaimur (15 years of MS) and no effect in Katihar (five years of MS).⁹

The variation in estimated probabilities observed among the three study districts could be explained by the shifts in the programmatic focus of MS. In the initial years of programme implementation, a lot of effort is invested towards building a collective consciousness and improving awareness of the women, which was not as intensive in the later years with the centrality of women's literacy and education gaining more recognition and acceptance. Secondly, as we will see in the subsequent sections, the institutions that MS built for women and for the children led to changes in people's consciousness and expectations around education of girl children, although these transitions were not without its own challenges. So, it is posited here that it may take longer for women and *sangha* to leverage their increased awareness, create desire among households to send their children to schools, ensure the availability of infrastructure and human resources, and persuade the parents to continue to send their children to school.

Besides the variation in effect by duration of exposure to MS, we also observe the level and significance of effect to vary at different ages for both men and women in Muzaffarpur and Kaimur (although only at 10 per cent level). The relative difference between MS and non-MS for male and female children, given in Figure 4.1, follows a V-shape in Kaimur where the average difference in probability is observed to be 4 per cent for a six-year-old child, falling to 2 per cent for a 11-year-old child, thereafter marginally increases to three per cent for a 13-year-old child, and then further improves to 5 and 7 per cent for a 15 and 18-year-old child respectively. In Muzaffarpur, a similar curve is observed where the magnitude of relative difference between MS and non-MS is higher relative to the magnitude observed in Kaimur. To illustrate, the relative difference

⁹ This postulation is qualitative in nature, as we did not undertake any quantitative methods to estimate the difference in effect of MS from one district to another.

Figure 4.1: Effect of MS by Age and Gender



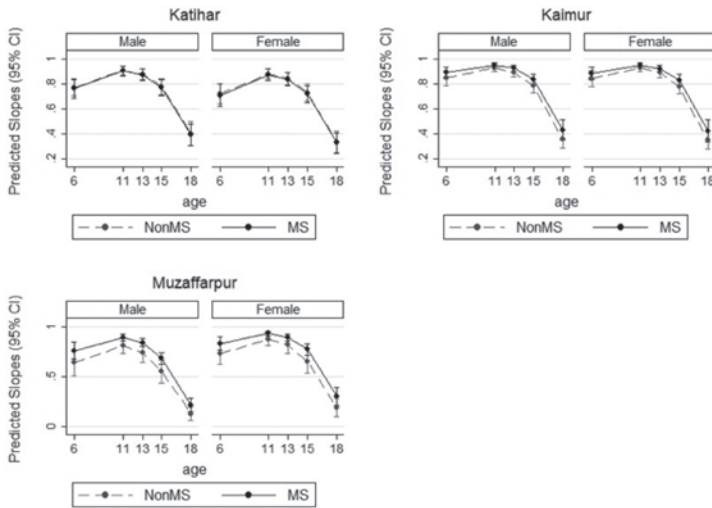
Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

for a six-year-old male child is 12 per cent in Muzaffarpur relative to four per cent in Kaimur; the difference is approximately five to eight percentage points across all the other age groups.

The only notable exception is that the level of relative difference reduces from those of 15 years to 18 years. This is primarily due to the significant fall in the average probability of being currently enrolled to 22 per cent and 30 per cent for 18-year-old men and women, respectively, from about 69 per cent and 78 per cent for 15-year-old boys and girls respectively in MS villages. In non-MS villages, the average probability for male and female children is about 13 per cent and 19 per cent respectively. This significant reduction in enrolment rate is not unique to Muzaffarpur; rather it is a general pattern observed across all three districts (Figure 4.2). This pattern confirms to the gross and age-specific enrolment rate observed at the state level where the enrolment at secondary, especially higher secondary, level is significantly lower in comparison with the elementary levels.

Despite the higher and significant relative difference in Muzaffarpur and Kaimur, at 10 per cent significance level, our analysis does reveal that an average child of MS members in MS villages dropout from school (more for female child) at the critical

Figure 4.2: Estimated Probability by Age and Gender



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

ages of 13 and 15 years old when they are supposed to be completing their elementary school and transitioning to the secondary stage.

It has to be noted that male and female children are more likely to be enrolled at secondary stages in comparison to their counterparts in non-MS villages. It is especially promising to observe that the chance of entry and completion of the secondary stage is higher for both male and female children in MS, relative to non-MS in both Muzaffarpur and Kaimur. Significant patterns regarding dropout rates for both girls and boys except in Katihar, the district with least exposure to MS, are visible.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that dropout rates noticed on the ground for adolescent girls were part of the various reasons why programme objectives evolved to include girls over the course of the evolution of the programme. These high dropout rates were also the impetus to create appropriate and supportive educational interventions like the MSKs. For example, a number of discussions within the *sanghas* often were about the problems of having to withdraw children from school and having to put them to work because of poverty. Engagement with these resource constraints

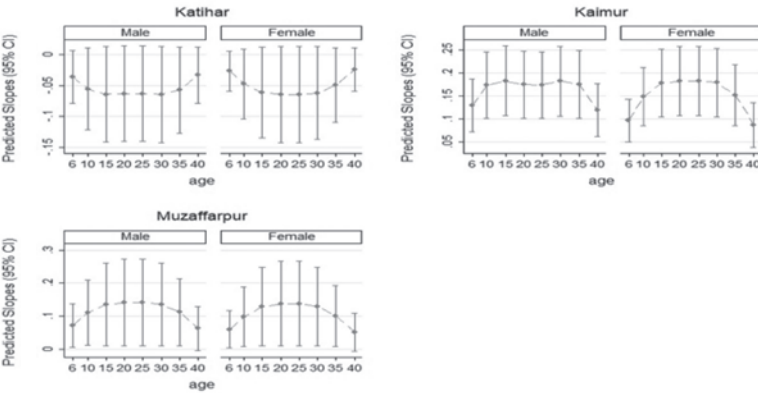
led to various institutional responses both in terms of creation of alternate institutions such as MSK but also informal discussions on the benefits of ensuring a child's future through education, educating them against child marriage and postponing the daughter's marriage or at least *gauma* by several years (Jandhyala n.d.). The engagement with enrolment and dropout rates were a natural by-product of the MS conscientisation process. Another by-product was the rise in functional literacy among both adult women and their children.

4.3.2. *Functional literacy*

We have already examined the changes in women's identity, self-image and cognitive skills due to gaining of literacy skills (in the previous chapter). To understand whether intervention by MS also has an impact on the functional literacy of children, we examined this aspect in both MS and non-MS contexts.

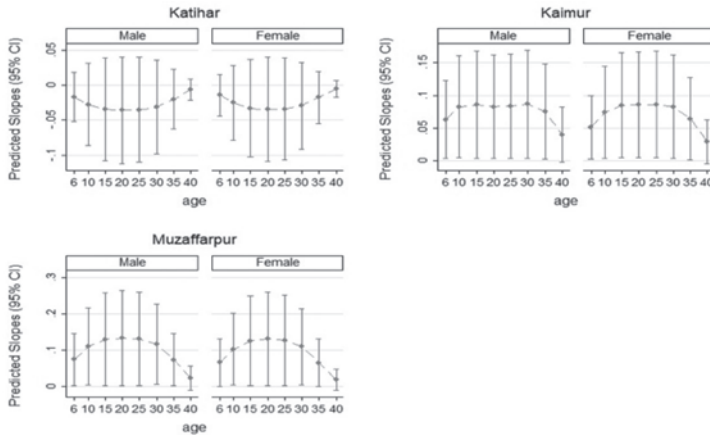
We examine the responses of our respondents on their children's ability to speak and write in Hindi and English. In general, the ability of a male and female child to speak and write in Hindi is significantly higher, observed to be in the range of 20–40 per cent, relative to their ability to speak and write in English, observed to be in the range of two to six per cent and 11–17 per cent respectively, across the three districts. Also, female children have lower probability of

Figure 4.3: Effect of MS on Children's Ability to Speak in Hindi



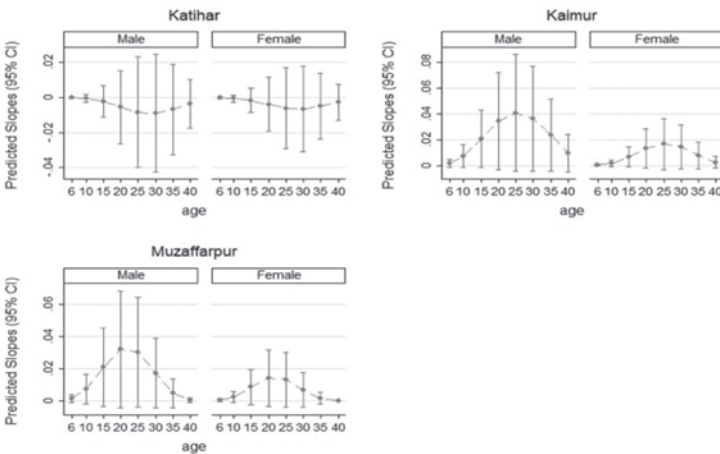
Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Figure 4.4: Effect of MS on Children's Ability to Write in Hindi



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Figure 4.5: Effect of MS on Children's Ability to Speak in English

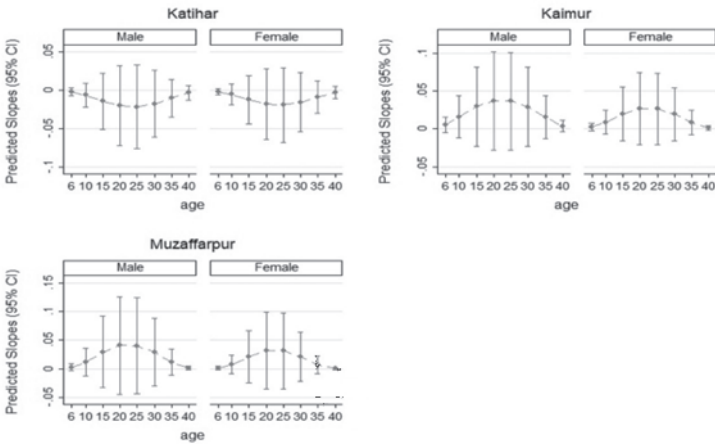


Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

being able to speak and write in Hindi/English among both MS and non-MS families, relative to male children, although the magnitude of difference and significance level varies across the three districts.

In Muzaffarpur, female children are 4 per cent less likely (significant at 10 per cent) to be able to speak in Hindi in both MS

Figure 4.6: Effect of MS on Children's Ability to Write in English



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

and non-MS contexts relative to boys. The difference is smaller and non-significant for their ability to write in Hindi and speak in English. In Kaimur, female children have a 10 and eight per cent lower probability to be able to speak and write in Hindi respectively. A similar pattern is true for the female children being able to speak and write in English. In Katihar, female children have about eight and three per cent lower probability to be able to speak and write in Hindi respectively. The difference is smaller and non-significant for the ability to speak and write in English.

In terms of effect of MS, we observe that both male and female children of MS members in MS villages have a higher and more significant probability to be able to speak and write in Hindi, relative to non-MS in Muzaffarpur and Kaimur. For example, male and female children of MS members in MS village are 13 and 12 per cent more likely to speak in Hindi, relative to non-MS in Muzaffarpur. Similarly, both male and female children in MS villages are 10 per cent more likely to write in Hindi. A similar pattern can be observed for Kaimur with respect to their ability to speak and write in Hindi.

We observe that children in MS villages have similar chances of being able to speak and write in English and very small difference in terms of effect of MS on male and female children. Finally,

the magnitude of MS effect does not appear to vary drastically by duration of exposure for Muzaffarpur and Kaimur. But the difference in the effect of MS between Kaimur and Katihar is drastic, where the effect of MS is positive and significant for speaking and writing in Hindi in Kaimur compared to the non-significant effect observed in Katihar. This again could be attributed to the programmatic focus on women and not children in the initial years.

Similar to the results that we see in current enrolment, the effect of MS varies by age in both Muzaffarpur and Kaimur only that for functional literacy, the curve is an inverted U unlike the U curve observed for the Katihar sample. The effect observed for Muzaffarpur and Kaimur is an expected pattern as children belonging to the older cohort could have stronger and established labour market and social networks, which may not have required them to engage in learning activities. The U curve and lower probability observed in Kaimur could be partially explained perhaps by the fact that the English is not the local language. Urdu, Hindi, Maithili, Angika, Bengali and Surjapuri are the local languages. Thus, the desire to learn and use English in day-to-day settings is likely to be marginal. Although some distant desire may exist to understand English, it does not form part of the environment in any manner as Hindi is the official language of communication as well as the street language for those with no other common language in between. It is important to remember that the economy is agrarian in nature, therefore, the need to learn either of these languages may be less even for exploring labour market opportunities.

Having said that, it should be noted that male and female children of MS members are more likely (at 10 per cent significance level) than children of non-MS members even at different age ranging between 6–40 years old to be able to speak and write in Hindi. The magnitude of effect is highest at 14 per cent for both male and female at the age of 20 and 25 years in Muzaffarpur. Similarly, the highest effect of 16 per cent is observed at the age of 20 and 25 years for both men and women in Kaimur. The relatively higher ability of children of MS members to speak and write in Hindi, especially in northern India where most communicate in Hindi, could be extrapolated to creating greater ease for these children to

enter the labour market and even migrate to other states in search for jobs, thereby creating higher income-generating opportunities.

While some of the reasons for this pattern are speculative, what is clear from the quantitative data is that there were significant changes in the engagement with children, enrolment and literacy due to MS interventions. A large part of these have been attributed to the systematic building of informal and formal institutions that have allowed MS to tackle the complex problem of education among the younger generation. We now examine these institutions of education through the analysis of the ethnographic data and the document review.

4.3.4. *Institutions for education*

From the qualitative data, it is very clear that women wanted better educational outcomes for their children and there is a notable shift in the nature of aspirations for girls (FGD, 14 May 2017). Families are not just sending them to schools but also to coaching centres to ensure that the girls had access to every resource (Interview, 25 January 2017). One of the women told us that while she would like her daughter to be a teacher, she can be a police officer if that's what she truly wants (Interview, 25 January 2017). Others had managed to break the social and cultural barriers in educating their children in specialised courses such as Chartered Accountancy. In fact, in this one case, the daughter was the first person in the family to have studied this far (Interview, 27 November 2016). Women also made material sacrifices such as postponing building houses or other major repairs to ensure that their daughters were educated (Interview, 16 April 2017). This progressive space was not just for the daughters but, in some cases, also for daughters-in-law.

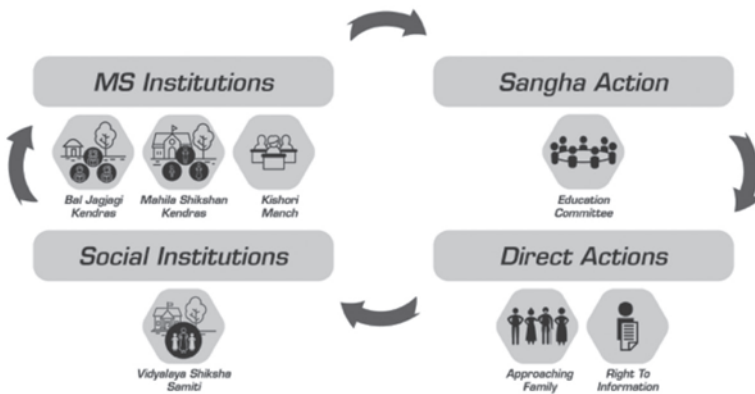
One of the women told us that:

I never think that if my daughters and daughters-in-law are there to do household work, then why I should work at home. When I wake up early in the morning, I start working myself and never expect them to get up and work. My daughter-in-law says that all the women should be like me to change society.

(Interview, 20 January 2017).

Many women told us that they wanted their daughters and daughters-in-law to be educated and have jobs. One of them told us that she feels that MS was able to teach her how to treat sons and daughters in the same manner. And when her son gets married: *I will treat my daughter-in-law as my daughter, and would give her all the rights. If she wants to take up a job, I won't have any objection* (Interview, 15 April 2017). Most of these attitudinal shifts in women came from the institutional responses of MS to women's articulated aspirations

Figure 4.7: Educational Interventions Undertaken by MS



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: 1. *Bal Jaggi Centres*: a village-based informal learning centre for girls and boys. These informal centres often allowed for the first exposure to education for many girls (who had never been to school before).

2. *Mahila Shikshan Kendras*: an informal residential learning centre for girls and women who couldn't go to traditional schools. MSKs allowed for a wide variety of girls from different age groups to learn the basics of education so that they were able to transition to traditional schooling.

3. *Kishori Manch*: A collective of girls often located in the schools or in their communities.

4. *Education Committee*: In the *sangha* (or the collective), women were grouped into six areas to ensure that they could concentrate on these areas. One of the areas was education. The group of women in the *sangha* would focus on the educational needs of the community and take action to ensure that the educational needs of the community were satisfied.

5. *Vidyalaya Shikshan Samiti (VSS here on)*: As part of the policy efforts to address the issue of low enrolments, out of school children, and gender gaps in school enrolment, VSS were formed at the school level that allowed for representation from the communities to participate in school policies and administration. Over a period of time, the role of women and mothers were emphasised to ensure greater accountability from these *samiti*.

for their children. For the sake of convenience, these can be classified into three separate kinds of institutions and processes: (i) MS' own institutions that it started in response to emerging needs from the field, (ii) engaging with existing public or community institutions and (iii) other institutions and processes that prioritised and promoted girls' education.

4.3.3.1. *Informal learning centres of MS*

One of the primary institutions that MS was able to create was the informal learning centres that functioned as a supportive institution (and in some cases, as an alternative institution) to the regular educational institutions such as schools. These were specifically designed to suit the needs and constraints of the student populations facing problems with the regular schooling. We have already discussed two of these earlier: *Jagjagi Kendras* – JKs (literacy discussion centres) and *Mahila Shikshan Kendras* – MSKs (women's residential education centres) earlier. These two informal institutions were primarily meant for adult women. However, because of the informal nature of the institutions that did not have rigid criteria of inclusion, they also involved a large number of adolescent girls who had remained out of school for a variety of reasons. Both the institutions started to cater to girls of 9+ years as they realised that a number of girls in the villages that they were working in were not attending formal institutions of education. MS felt that it was extremely important to engage (with) them for any lasting impact on women's empowerment.

They identified that the major reasons for the high attendance of girls in their adult classes were the lack of proper educational institutions, and the lack of pathways for formal school education. So, an informal educational institution was formed, especially for younger children: *Bal Jagjagis* (children's literacy centres). The *Bal Jagjagis* modelled after the adult Jagjaggi centres were the pre-school education centres where children aged from three to six years were prepared for school. The *Anganwadis* – state-funded centres for children below six years under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) – are generally present only in larger villages as it follows a population norm of 1,000. The need for alternative schools

emerged both the reasons for school-readiness and for child care since the mothers needed this support to find time for themselves. The *sahayoginis* started working with children below the age of six in *Bal Jagjagi* and on turning six, the children would transition to regular schooling. *Bal Mitra* (friend of children) was selected from these *Bal Jagjagi* centres to facilitate in mobilising other children in the village.

MS also started *Kishori Manch* – KM – a collective of adolescent girls acting as discussion forum and brought together both school-going and out-of-school adolescent girls together for discussion on various issues. Discussions centred on the status of women and gender roles of girls within family and society. Informed discussions were facilitated to ensure that girls had knowledge regarding girls' right to education, information regarding violence against girls and the problems associated with child marriage. They were also provided extensive information on health, menstruation and personal hygiene in these spaces. These spaces of discussion (*Kishori Manchs*) were also extended to the schools where *Meena Manchs* were established. This allowed MS to intervene in both spaces to encourage girls to pursue higher education and tried to connect their aspirations to action.

These different institutions were also interlinked through people working with MS in other capacities. For instance, a KM activist, known as *Kishori Manch Saheli* would often look after the running of JK as well as organise the KM meetings. Young girls were given information about sexual discrimination, health, violence and related issues in KM while they attained literacy and numeracy skills in JKs. Later, once more and more young girls started coming to these centres, MS started encouraging more girls to go to MSKs, the residential education centres where women and *kishoris* came for an eight to nine-month holistic education. The representation of girls as opposed to women increased slowly in MSKs in later years. Girls were also encouraged to enrol in regular upper primary schools after completing education in JKs or MSKs.

There was initial resistance in sending girls to live in residential institutions like MSK, as the parents believed it would be unsafe for girls. Also, parents were of the opinion that girls were not really 'their

property' and there was no need to spend energies to ensure that they went to schools. MS had to work consistently with the mothers on changing these fundamental value systems and gain their trust before institutions like MSK could be established. In essence, the cultural and social contexts were assessed and constraints addressed before institutional reforms were introduced.

These centres, once established, were also highly responsive to the needs of the girls. For example, timings for the Jagjaggi centres were from 8.00 to 11.00am, but during the sowing season, they would move it to the evenings to accommodate the daughters' and mothers' schedule of household and farm work. Institutions such as these not only helped create awareness among the parents for the importance of educating their daughters, but also created institutional structures that allowed their daughters to move to higher education and in some cases, right up to their graduation.

A common element in all of these institutions such as MSKs, *Bal Jagjaggis*, *Kishori Manchs*, and even *Bal Chaman* (children's assembly) was the underlying engagement with critical thinking and collectivisation of girls. In all of these informal institutions, apart from literacy or education on specific subject areas, girls were also taught in various forms issues related to women. In particular, child marriage, dowry system and female foeticide were often covered in formal and informal conversations in MSKs, BLs, and KMs. This knowledge and building of a collective identity among girls also created support structures for girls.

In one instance, one of the girls was forcibly taken home on the pretext of a family matter. But the friends of the girls found out that she was taken home to be married and mobilised MS to ensure that the marriage was stopped in addition to the family being counselled to prevent such incidences in the future. The girl was able to return to the MSK to complete her education. In another case, Rani (introduced in Chapter 3) herself tried to convince her family to postpone her *gauna*. When they were not convinced, she threatened to call the police on them which the family ignored. When her family resisted her threats, Rani called upon her networks in MS to help her to postpone her *gauna*. MS intervened and made it possible for her to postpone her *gauna* (Interview, 22 March 2017).

4.3.3.2. The Sangha Education Committee

Through MS, women were mobilised to start thinking of a better future for their daughters and to demand stronger educational institutions in their areas to ensure greater opportunities for their children to learn. As a practice, MS *sanghas* constituted committees of members to work on the six areas: education, health and hygiene, savings, employment and livelihood, gender-based violence and political participation. One of the primary ways that women participated in the welfare of their children was through the Sangha Education Committees (herewith, SEC) formed in each of the *sanghas*. The SEC organised literacy camps in the villages and engaged in debates around the disadvantages of remaining illiterate. Along with MS, the SEC helped to develop literacy materials on current issues using local dialects for both women and children (Bhog and Ghose 2012). The SEC would also conduct a survey in the village and work towards enrolling children above six years of age in schools free of cost. As a rule, they also worked with those parents who would not let their daughters pursue education (Personal interview, 25 January 2017).

The women in the SEC were trained to question teachers in the school if they did not come on time. They even confronted school authorities who questioned their legitimacy of asking such questions. They asserted that they were the guardians of the children and, therefore, had every right to hold the schools accountable (FGD, 28 January 2017). In addition, other issues such as food in the MDMs (quality and quantity), balanced diet for children, procurement of school supplies and furniture for the local schools, financial accountability of the schools, and distribution of free uniforms and scholarships were also monitored and discussed by the SEC (FGD, 28 January 2017).

The SEC would often raise questions if systems did not function properly. For example, in one of our interviews, a *sangha* woman told us that there used to be '*many fights* [with the school], such as why egg has not been given to children, even though it is mentioned in the menu' (Personal interview, 25 January 2017). These issues were regularly raised by the SEC and schools in the area started to become more responsive to the increased vigilance of their functioning.

4.3.3.3. *Participation in Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti*

In the 1990s, policy efforts were made to address the issue of low enrolments, out-of-school children and huge gender gaps in school enrolment. At the time, the role of women or mothers was emphasised to ensure accountability systems within school structures. So, when the Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti (VSS) was constituted by the state government as a statutory body and its constitution was slightly modified (later) to comply with the norms of the Right to Education Act 2009, it was stated that the VSS must include women from the local communities. Policy decisions at the time were made such that (1) all VSSs would have significant representation from women (50 per cent) and (2) in areas where MS was functional, at least two members of the *sangha* would participate in the VSS. As mentioned earlier, this policy move went alongside greater participation of women in the schooling environment where the government mandated that *sanghas* would be responsible for preparing the MDMs in MS villages. Because of these two measures, the representation of women from the MS *sangha* was significant and visible in the VSS.

One of the women, for example, assured us that because of their participation in the VSS, they ensured that the VSS met at least four times in a year. The women reported with pride that they are still recognised as 'committee' members by villagers and even children approach them with their problems. In due time, experienced women of MS started to be appointed in the VSS as they could take a stand against various malpractices that existed in the school (FGD, 20 April 2017).

The issues that the women in the VSS dealt with changed over the years, as is reflected in our document review. For example, in 2012, where our document reviews begin, significant movements with respect to elementary education, out-of-school children, child labour and child marriage had already been made. What was a primary focus of interventions in the 1990s was not as central in the early 2010s. Gender parity had almost been achieved at the elementary level, child marriage and child labour had reduced significantly. While some of these continue to be of importance, the transition to secondary education from elementary is now the primary concern within educational policy discourses.

These changes in the policy mandates appear to have an impact on women's participation in VSS'. The minutes of the VSS' follow a specific pattern of information provided by the Education Department and tend to be brief. The nature of the discussions or debates is rarely present. It is mostly restricted to decisions that have been made and duly noted. Despite this drawback, there certain patterns are discernible. In the minutes that we reviewed, we found *de jure* participation of women in these committees. We also found that the following themes were covered in some capacity in VSS meetings:

- Children's enrolment, attendance and learning
- VSS-related matters
- Teacher, SCR/PTR-related
- School maintenance grant
- Library, TLM grant
- Mid-day Meal (MDM)
- Incentives, stipends, scholarships
- School environment, cleanliness and functioning
- Other issues related to the school

While our document review was unable to discern particular differences between MS and non-MS villages in the activities they initiated, the National Review of 2014 indicated that participation of MS *sangha* members in the VSS's have had significant influence in the overall functioning and accountability in the schools, including raising issues regarding the construction of toilets for girls, the dropout rate of girls from schools and decisions related to MDMs.

In fact, one of the biggest influences that MS was able to exert, evident from our document review as well as our ethnographic data, is in the area of MDM. MDM appears to have emerged as a very critical issue and it is evident that policy decisions on the part of the government also played a crucial part in this focus of MS on MDM. The integration of women as community representatives within the schooling community as cooks (and informal monitors) was not smooth as there were adverse reactions especially from upper-caste parents. The upper-caste parents did not want their wards to partake of MDM if the cooks were from Dalit communities. In most of these schools, the *sangha* was able to hold their ground and

negotiate with these parents as well as the Headmaster and continue the appointment of MS women belonging to Dalit communities as cooks. This resistance to systematic caste bias also had a positive influence on the schools in relation to other caste-based practices.

4.3.3.4. *Other processes of strengthening education*

In addition to creating informal institutional structures or influencing existing structures through informal (SECs) and formal means (VSSs), women in the *sangha* also used other methods to ensure better educational outcomes for their children. For example, a *sangha* wanted to take action against a school teacher who was irregular and did not take classes. The *sangha* tried to talk to the teacher directly, but there was no change in her behaviour. So, the *sangha* approached the *panchayat* who wrote a stern letter to the Headmaster (HM) warning severe action if something was not done about the regularity of the teacher. Based on this complaint, the Headmaster was able to take action and the teacher started to be much more regular (Jandhyala and Mehrotra 2017).

Women did have a sense of accomplishment that they were able to question the quality of teaching or address teacher absenteeism but they also faced systemic barriers in terms of the resistance posed by institutional structures within the schooling system. For example, while minutes recorded discussions around specific issues such as the construction of toilets, this was not often followed up in the next meeting minutes. While one can posit that it might be because the issue has been resolved, it is more likely (based on our field work observations) that the resistance from the schooling authorities often meant that issues related to schools were often scuttled.

More often than not, the *sangha* would then resort to other means at their disposal such as knowledge of Right to Information Act (RTI hereon) to monitor the functioning of the school. For example, they filed an RTI seeking information on the details of school-level allocations and expenditures, so that the SEC could push for toilet construction. Based on the information, the *sangha* women were able to approach the HM and chalk out a detailed proposal for toilet construction. Thereafter, the *sangha* women also monitored the construction so that monies were not misutilised by the school.

Another important way in which MS was able to influence girls' pathway to education was to engage with women to change gendered narratives and expectations within families. One of the major areas these shifts in the family discourse greatly influenced was in the area of child labour. Part of the negotiation of ensuring that children go to school was also conversation about the harmful effects of child labour. MS provided information to *sangha* women who then strategised and negotiated with their families to ensure that children would have the opportunities to go to school, instead of working in their family farms or elsewhere. Another prominent area in which they tried to change the family discourse (with respect to the next generation) was related to the marriages of their children.

4.4. MS and marriage

A prominent space in which MS tried to intervene with regards to children and adolescence was around the institution of marriage, more specifically, the phenomenon of child marriage.

4.4.1. Age at marriage

When we examine whether MS had an influence on the age of marriage for the next generation, we find that chances of any child getting married, irrespective of whether they are in MS or not, increases from 8–9 per cent for the age group under 15 years to 44–45 per cent for the age group between 16–17 years in Muzaffarpur. While the difference between these two age cohorts is relatively lower in Kaimur and Katihar, the chances of any child of the age cohort 16–17 years getting married is about 29–35 per cent in Kaimur and 16–17 per cent in Katihar. Second, female children still have higher probability of getting married than male children irrespective of whether or not they are in MS villages.

The observed magnitude in likelihood of female children getting married for MS is similar to those observed in non-MS across the three districts. This observed relative difference between female and male is about 9 per cent, 7 per cent and 4 per cent for non-MS; and 10 per cent, 6 per cent and 2 per cent for MS for the age group under 15 years in Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar respectively.

Table 4.2: Estimated Average Probability and Effect of MS on Child Marriage

Indicators	Katihar	Kaimur	Muzaffarpur
<i>non-MS</i>			
Under 15 years	0.022*** (0.006)	0.076*** (0.014)	0.081*** (0.022)
16 to 17 years	0.153*** (0.029)	0.355*** (0.032)	0.456*** (0.042)
18 to 20 years	0.336*** (0.026)	0.482*** (0.028)	0.610*** (0.036)
21 and above years	0.366*** (0.044)	0.451*** (0.043)	0.543*** (0.053)
<i>MS</i>			
Under 15 years	0.011*** (0.003)	0.054*** (0.013)	0.089*** (0.019)
16 to 17 years	0.177*** (0.027)	0.292*** (0.03)	0.435*** (0.037)
18 to 20 years	0.339*** (0.04)	0.492*** (0.029)	0.596*** (0.024)
21 and above years	0.317*** (0.052)	0.452*** (0.051)	0.604*** (0.04)
<i>Relative difference between MS and non-MS</i>			
Under 15 years	-0.011* (0.006)	-0.022 (0.016)	0.009 (0.022)
16 to 17 years	0.024 (0.038)	-0.063 (0.04)	-0.021 (0.046)
18 to 20 years	0.003 (0.043)	0.01 (0.034)	-0.014 (0.035)
21 and above years	-0.049 (0.061)	0.002 (0.058)	0.061 (0.061)

Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * – Significant at 10 per cent, ** – Significant at 5 per cent, and *** – Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered at village level are given in the parentheses.

The pattern is similar for MS where the relative difference between female and male is observed to be about 20 per cent for non-MS; and about 18–23 per cent across the three districts for MS for the age cohort of 16–17 years.

Table 4.3: Difference between Female and Male in Probability of getting Married by Age Group and Treatment Status

Indicators	Katihar	Kaimur	Muzaffarpur
<i>non-MS</i>			
Female Vs Male (Under 15 years)	0.037*** (0.009)	0.072*** (0.013)	0.087*** (0.021)
Female Vs Male (16 to 17 years)	0.202*** (0.039)	0.201*** (0.025)	0.233*** (0.027)
Female Vs Male (18 to 20 years)	0.334*** (0.043)	0.220*** (0.026)	0.222*** (0.026)
Female Vs Male (21 and above years)	0.346*** (0.047)	0.218*** (0.027)	0.232*** (0.026)
<i>MS</i>			
Female Vs Male (Under 15 years)	0.019*** (0.006)	0.055*** (0.013)	0.095*** (0.017)
Female Vs Male (16 to 17 years)	0.225*** (0.036)	0.183*** (0.022)	0.232*** (0.027)
Female Vs Male (18 to 20 years)	0.335*** (0.045)	0.221*** (0.026)	0.225*** (0.026)
Female Vs Male (21 and above years)	0.325*** (0.053)	0.218*** (0.028)	0.224*** (0.026)

Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * – Significant at 10 per cent, ** – Significant at 5 per cent, and *** – Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered at village level are given in the parentheses.

It is evident that we do not observe any significant effect of MS on the probability of marriage across different age cohorts. In particular, it has had no significant effect on child marriage across the three districts varying by duration of exposure when seen for the age-ranges. This implies that the reduction in the ages and instances of child marriage over the years cannot be attributed to MS and is part of the larger discourse that has been changing around child marriage, especially given the stringency in the laws. While there is other evidence that indicates that the age of marriage is pushed by a year or two (Bhuwania et al. 2016) in MS districts as compared to non-MS districts, we do not find it to be the case when we examine age ranges. But the age of marriage appears to have changed even though early marriage is still quite prevalent; if earlier, girls were getting

married between the ages of eight and 15 years, now it is perhaps between 16 and 17. Although still early, this change is important and notable and this gets corroborated by ethnographic records.

4.4.2. *Mechanisms of change*

MS dealt with the issue of marriage in many ways. One prominent strategy was through the narrative of gender violence. In the *sangha*, the discussion in the gender violence committee also included linkages between violence against women and early marriage. The women in the *sangha* participated in plays which depicted that marriage in childhood destroys the dreams and innocence of children (FGD, 6 December 2016). The systemic ways in which child marriage fits into the larger patriarchal discourse of dowry systems and son preference were extensively discussed in each of the *sanghas* (Personal interview, 22 March 2017). Women propagated the message through songs that child marriage of the girl before 18 years is not good for girl's health and for her future. Even in the *Kishori Manchs*, these messages were strongly communicated. For example, in one of our FGDs, young girls told us that '*Didi* used to come once in a month to discuss the issues of child marriage and topics related to menstruation. *Didi* would tell us about ill effects of child marriage on girls' health' (FGD, 22 February 2017).

While the larger norms do appear to have favoured the transition for child marriages, our in-depth qualitative work indicates that MS was able to intervene and successfully improve the lives of individual women and girls by creating educational institutions, providing information as well as supporting them in negotiating with their families. For example, a *sangha* woman mentioned that because of her own experience of being married at the age of 10 and the information that she now has about the problems associated with child marriage, she is determined to wait till her granddaughters are 18 before she contemplates marriage for them (FGD, 5 December 2016). *Sangha* members, because of their knowledge were also vigilant when their own members did not live up to these new social norms. For example, there was a deep discussion and an extended argument in the *sangha* a few years ago when one of the women members was trying to get her daughter married very young. There

was discussion in the meetings regarding whether legal action should be taken against them (FGD, 13 April 2017).

In order to create this feeling of equality amongst the two genders, MS did not just engage with the families, but also tried to create a larger conversation through changing and creating new social and cultural rituals. In order to address the issue of gender equality at birth and ensure equal treatment of girls and boys, MS started and institutionalised the practice of celebrating *Beti Janmotsav*: daughter's birth celebration. Traditionally, while the son's birth was celebrated with great fanfare – songs and dances – the daughter's birth used to be a sober affair. To change the cultural discourse around this, the *sangha* women started the practice of singing *sohargeet* (songs of happiness on the birth of a child) and dancing at the birth of the daughters. Slowly, this evolved into an established tradition to celebrate the birth of both sons and daughters for all those associated with MS. Women have also started planting trees on the occasion of daughter's birth. (Personal interview, 19 January 2017).

This ritual-making allowed MS a way to influence the attitudes and mindsets of not only the *sangha* women but also their families and the communities at large. These cultural practices also allowed them to engage more directly with other cultural and social norms that were systematically stacked against the girl child. For example, one of the women told us:

My mother-in-law and other members of the family used to believe that milk and butter are not meant for girls/daughters as, if consumed, they will further give birth to daughters only. Women and girls of the family were not on priority to be served with rich or healthy food like meat and fish, etc. First priority was always the male members of the family. Women and girls were served with leftovers of the food. Now the whole scenario has changed. Now, everyone has equal share in things.

(FGD, 17 January 2017)

Similarly, other women told us that the health of the daughters and daughters-in-law were now taken better care of and issues related to illnesses were tended to (FGD, 28 January 2017). This

was primarily done through the health and the hygiene committees and gender-based violence committees in the *sanghas*. For example, vaccinations were not accepted in many villages as women used to think that their children get fever with these vaccinations. They were informed that these fevers are temporary reactions and vaccinations would give their children protection against many diseases. Additionally, part of the responsibility of being a *sangha* member in the health committee was to help pregnant women to go to health centres, ensuring that the mother and child were vaccinated. They also tried to proselytise on the hazards of quick, successive pregnancies (FGD, 30 August 2016). All of these measures have also contributed in higher immunisation rates among children in villages where MS functions (Janssens 2004).

MS also helped in pre-natal and post-partum care (FGD, 29 August 2016). The discussions often went beyond menstrual health and engaged with the larger and long-term consequences of early birth and the health reasons associated with early marriage and early child birth (Personal interview, 20 January 2017). In fact, the cultural idioms of gender parity were constantly reinforced through many diverse mechanisms. For example, *sanghas* which were engaged in thrift and credit activities have been encouraged not to provide loans to women planning to use the money for child marriages or the provision of dowries. By ensuring that the measures of emphasising equality were consistent through all their work processes, the *sangha* members told us that the practice of child marriage has completely stopped and they are very clear that this is due to the MS interventions (Interview, 20 January 2017).

Many of the women told us that now many people are scared of marrying off young children as they think that MS women would take legal action against them (Personal interview, 13 April 2017). They often faced (and continue to face) resistance with certain communities, but the women told us that despite the resistance, they continue to advocate for higher ages for marriage (Personal interview, 8 May 2017). When we spoke to adolescent girls, they also told us that they felt that their ambitions to study and undertake jobs were supported by their mothers. The daughters of MS women told us that they didn't feel that their mothers distinguished between

them and their brothers. But as we will see in the subsequent sections (and is evident from the quantitative results), these effects are mixed because of the resistance that MS encountered.

4.5. Resistance encountered by MS

Making inter-generational shifts in these cultural, social, and physical spaces was not easy for MS. As we already know, the process of change in any social norm does not come without resistance and negotiation. The *sahayoginis* had to undergo a lot of difficulties and faced hardships in their efforts to influence the women and the girls. The *sahayoginis* used arguments that were easily understood, could facilitate the process of empowerment and then try to change the norms in the long run. One of the women who had to traverse long distances across the hills to enrol adolescent girls from the villages to MSK, recalled:

We had to convince villagers that we are not foreigners and we live in the same neighbourhood...

I used to go to these girls wherever they were working to tell them to study. They were forced to listen to me as they wanted to oblige me. I constituted a group with these efforts and convinced their guardians to send them to MSK.

(Personal interview, 22 March 2017)

But the process of convincing the mothers was not an easy task either. Different arguments were made to the mothers but the constraints that the mothers faced were real. For example, one of the *sahayoginis* told us that affordability of education for many of these families was a very real challenge and women used to resist efforts argument saying, 'We have four and more children. How could we afford to send them to school?' (Personal interview, 15 April 2017). Another issue that they had to confront were the ways in which the systems treated those who had been traditionally excluded from the system. For example, one of the *sahayoginis* told us that when members of the Musahar communities (one of the most marginalised communities) were convinced to send their children to school, the

school authorities instead of welcoming the move, asked them for money for admissions (FGD, 28 January 2017). MS had to work with school authorities as well to stop the illegal practice.

MS' themselves had to face insults and pushbacks based on their own identities. One of the women we interviewed told us that working with school authorities, especially as a member of the Dalit community, was not always easy. She said:

I insisted that no money is supposed to be paid for this enrolment and the teacher told me – 'You are wearing nice clothes and carrying a bag. Then why are you trying to save a few bucks'. I told him: 'You have objections to my clothes and bag because I am a Chamar' (Dalit). (FGD, 16 February, 2017)

She told us that these forms of encounters were quite common and that women working with schools often had to face this kind of resistance from state institutions. Despite these difficulties, *sangha* women tried to negotiate their way into these systems because they felt that 'these are children of our village, our future. Today someone else's child is not going to school. Tomorrow, our own children will get affected (FGD, 28 January 2017).

Even if the women were convinced that they had to act on behalf of their children, they also needed to convince their families. They were not always successful. For example, one of the *sangha* members was pressured to get her daughter married at the age of 16. Even though the members of the *sangha* counselled her and also threatened to call the police on her, the *sangha* member told us that it was very difficult to resist the intense pressure of her family. Instead, what she tried to do was to negotiate with her family not to send the girl to her marital home after marriage. Her daughter got married but went to her marital home after five years after finishing her matriculation (FGD, 30 November 2016). Such negotiations were not uncommon and a number of *sangha* women understood that even with the required knowledge and the power that knowledge gave them; certain structural forces that influence family decisions were not easily overcome. Even the children were very clear that their mothers might want to provide them education

but sometimes it came down to family decisions based on financial and other constraints (details in the next chapter).

These limitations and discrimination that daughters faced was most visible in discussions related to dowry. MS had constant conversations with all of the *sangha* members on issues related to the rights of the girl child, including the importance of not giving dowry. Some members who had married their daughters very young tried to adhere to the social call of not giving dowry and ensuring that their relatives also did not give dowries for their daughters (Interview, 20 January 2017). But we found that this was exception and not the norm. Even when women were very active in the *sangha* on many issues, they were unable to work with their families on the issue of dowry and paid exorbitant amounts (in one case, six lakhs) to the marital families of their daughters (FGD, 28 January 2017).

Even as women sang songs regarding the practice and were able to articulate the reasons why this practice continues to impact their daughters' lives, they were not able to negotiate with their families to stop the practice completely. In other cases, their progressive moves regarding dowry were met with suspicion and derision. For example, when one of the women refused any dowry for her son's marriage, the bride's family got very suspicious arguing that the refusal indicated that the groom was hiding something.

The woman had to convince the family that if they wanted to give money to their daughter, they were free to do so in their daughter-in-law's account. Not all of the progressive moves made by women were welcomed by families and women had to work very hard against traditional practices to be able to create a discourse of equality for their daughters and their sons. Sometimes, their own ambivalence regarding this enterprise was evident. For example, when it came to cultural rituals such as fasting, daughters and the daughters-in-law were often induced to participate in the same practices as the mothers-in-law, even if they themselves felt it was oppressive in nature. So, while expectations regarding education and work were very clear, the spaces around cultural practices that reinforced the subordinate role of the woman was still a non-negotiable territory (as will be covered extensively in the next chapter).

4.6. Conclusion

The effect of MS on the next generation as measured through education and marriage is clear yet limited. It is not clear how sustained the effect of MS was over a period of time. While there is a strong commitment of women to the ideals of empowerment, there is some ambiguity with respect to influencing more deeply entrenched social practices such as marriage, dowry and religious rituals. The qualitative data and the document review indicate that women have very clear aspirations for their children and some are even able to provide supportive familial environments and are investing economic resources to give shape to these aspirations. What is likely to have happened is that the policy as well as the cultural environments have changed to facilitate educational aspirations for daughters and are also responsible for delaying the age at marriage for daughters and the presence of MS has made use of these to make the effect clearer in those areas.

The effect, as discussed earlier, is much stronger for education than for marriage. We argue that one of the reasons for education to have such a stronger effect on the next generation as compared to age at marriage might be because the education for the next generation was institutionally supported. Given MS was located within the BEP, the expertise, the administration and the resources available for the universalisation of basic education was a constant and reaffirming source of support for MS women in a way that was absent for addressing patriarchal customs within the family. The degree of ownership, volunteerism and the financial support that came their way in creating informal institutions such as the MSKs and the BJs was qualitatively different as compared to other areas. Therefore, examining the different ways in which institutions (whether informal, social, or cultural) function and the manner in which women constantly negotiate with these institutions on their journey to empowerment is critical. The next chapter discusses these contestations and negotiations.

5 Economics of Empowerment A Web of Negotiations and Adjustments

5.1. Introduction

Now I can go to the bank or to the block office and can talk to anyone. Previously, my husband would not take a glass of water by himself but now he cooks even rice and lentils. I found a new recognition for myself. If you mention my name to anyone in this village, they will tell you my address. All my brothers tell me that Didi (sister) has manly qualities now as she can go anywhere anytime and is not even afraid of going out at night...

... I have crossed the age limit to apply for any job. I had good control over my work when I was in MS but now I cannot apply anywhere. Presently, I don't have any money but I want to open a shop after getting some money. I cannot work in the federation anymore as I need money for myself and it is not possible to do that within the federation. (Personal interview, 25 January 2017)

Meera Devi (name changed) was one of the first *sahayoginis* recruited by MS to work in her district. Her journey within MS (as these two quotes indicate) embodies the varied trajectories of women who worked with MS, either as *sangha* members or *sahayoginis*. In dealing with the power structures present in personal, family, and community spaces, women in MS had to work with a larger political economy of choices. This chapter delves into this political economy of choices, as observed through the adjustments

and negotiations that women had to continuously make with respect to their lives.

As we saw in previous chapters, MS defined empowerment as the ability of marginalised groups to participate in spaces from which often systematically excluded. Engaging in these spaces through education, labour force participation, justice systems or political participation was a continual, evolving process by which women examined their lives and tried to change the underlying dimensions of oppression and marginalisation. As we saw in the earlier chapters, MS allowed women not only to develop a sense of self but also helped influence social relationships and institutions by what can be referred to as Frietian concept of 'collective conscientisation' (Sharma 2008). As mentioned before, collective conscientisation is a process by which women are provided the tools and information to engage with systems of oppression through self-reflexivity techniques and to connect it to their own subjective experience of oppression.

When this process was started in MS, the pedagogical thrust was on exercising the mind and challenging current practices of patriarchy. These then served as building blocks that fed into important arenas of women's lives such as paid work, care work, and experience of gender violence. In addition to the knowledge gained through these pedagogical exercises *and* from each other, women were able to identify definite areas of their lives – such as their families and their communities – that prevented them from functioning as citizens. Simply put, through the pathway of self-reflexivity and critical thinking, women were able to explore various aspects of their lives in ever-expanding circles.

Women's agency in exploring these spaces was constrained. Agency is not singular in that there are no unlimited choices or favourable environments in which agency is exercised (Kabeer 2005). Instead, it is bound by the forceful nature of circumstances well beyond the control of the individual. These institutional spaces, whether it is the political system, the class/caste system or the patriarchal system bound within the family, are critical in determining individual choices. Therefore, the manner in which the individual makes sense of institutional boundaries is extremely useful in understanding the process of empowerment. Empowerment,

framed in this manner, then has to move beyond understanding the ways in which women exercised their rights or accessed institutions of power. It has to take into consideration the negotiations that are done in private spaces and strategies devised for public action.

A major part of these adjustments, strategies and negotiations that we explore in this chapter is related to the following aspects of women's lives: labour force participation, care work, education, gender violence, and political participation. It is in these spaces where critical concepts such as identity, community, and family are contested, subverted and re-created. This chapter highlights the importance of understanding the nature of women's agency exerted in response to structured social systems and social norms and the implications this has on the larger conversation on women's empowerment.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first engages with women's agency constrained within the institutional structures of education, work force participation, paid work, gender violence, and political participation. The second deepens this understanding by examining these dynamics at work using a single village as a case study. The third section brings together the lessons learned in the first and the second section to summarise the complex journey of women's empowerment.

5.2. Education

In Chapter 3, we saw that that one of the catalysts for change in empowerment outcomes was through and in education. Women were given basic training in lettering and more specific training on social concepts related to gender, rights, entitlements, health, violence and political awareness. Educational efforts were directed at both women and girls deprived of educational opportunities through informal institutional such as *Jagjaggis* and *Bal Jagjaggis*. Because most of the women and girls didn't know how to read or write, information and training was provided to them through parables, stories, activities and songs. Moreover, the books used in the trainings in these institutions were written in women's own language and they felt intimately connected to it. A woman who spoke about her first encounter with these informal texts told us that

she felt that 'this is our story only' (Interview, 1 September 2016). Because women had keenly felt their own deprivation in terms of education, they also embraced the opportunity to learn to read and learn about the world. In one instance, a woman said that while her brother had become a schoolteacher, she herself was not even literate (Interview, 24 October 2016). The opportunity to gain a modicum of literacy was profoundly life-altering for many of the women. While different methods were used, they helped women in gaining knowledge; the primary shift in women's understanding came from the pedagogical intent of this training.

5.2.1. Education and informal institutions

In the informal institutions of learning, women were not treated as recipients of information. Instead of treating women as subservient or oppressed, MS treated them as equal citizens and provided training that would allow them to function in that manner. Women responded likewise. The data clearly indicates that this attitudinal shift from asking for information to demanding information came within a very short period of time. When asked about the most influential change that MS brought about, majority of the women we interviewed in Katihar (the lowest exposure district) reported that they felt confident about accessing their rights as citizens and did not hesitate to demand their entitlements. Even at the start of the programme (for example, in Muzaffarpur), access to information and awareness through educational initiatives appears to have affected women profoundly. Education was useful not just in expanding the knowledge base but also the cognitive awareness of women (Kabeer 2005). This expansion in cognitive abilities allowed for a deeper understanding of their social world in a way that they had not had earlier.

In almost all of our interviews and FGDs, one of the most common themes to emerge was that these educational initiatives were the starting point of their feeling of self-confidence and self-worth. One of the respondents told us that it was not just about the writing of her name but the knowledge that she had gained that was so memorable in the early days. Many women reported that because their world expanded in these training sessions, they were

able to navigate their social world differently. Almost all of narratives concentrate on the journey that women took from not being able to step out of their homes to going to the district commissioner's office to talk to him/her about their problems. Even well-educated women who were working with MS felt that the training sessions changed them profoundly and shifted their world view significantly. This ability and self-confidence also gave many women the impetus to pursue higher education. A woman who worked with MS told us that while she working with them, she was encouraged to study further and get her Bachelor's degree, which she was able to do with its help (Participant observation, 19 October 2016). These stories of pursuing higher education goals were fairly commonplace in many of the conversations we had with MS *sangha* members and *sahayoginis*.

Another way in which these educational initiatives were used was to push existing institutional frameworks to change. Because the mode of education was always linked to the *sangha*, the process of collectivisation was integral to the way knowledge was used. Collectivisation is important because women often tend to have fewer access to knowledge networks (Agarwal 2000), and when women collectivised under the programme, they were able to build social networks and access social resources previously unavailable to them.

For example, there were a few instances where women were able to use *Hulchul* – an informal magazine by MS – to deal with the specific problems they were facing and to push back at institutions. When one of the *sahayoginis* went to enrol her children in one of the schools, the headmaster asked for a bribe. When she refused, he told her that his hair had turned grey being in the school and that she was a young upstart who didn't know how the system worked. The *sahayogini* wrote an article in *Hulchul* detailing this incident titled: 'Teachers' hair turns white after charging money for students' admission.' The article was widely publicised and the *sahayogini* told us that after that the headmaster didn't give her any problems (Personal interview, 19 January 2017). Using knowledge networks and informal institutions allowed women to come up with creative solutions to their problems.

5.2.2. *Education and inter-generational effects*

One of the more profound changes that educational initiatives brought in women, as documented in the previous chapter, was to transform their aspirations for their children. Right from the very beginning, women were directed to tackle educational institutions by participating in SDMCs and raising issues in schools related to children's enrolment, teachers, libraries, the cleanliness of the schools, etc. (Jandhyala and Mehrotra 2017). For many of the women, the aspirations for their children were very clear. They wanted their daughters and sons to study further and get gainful employment. One of the women mentioned that if her daughter had to go to Delhi to study, she would send her daughter without any hesitation (Interview, 27 November 2016). As evidenced in the previous chapter, there is overwhelming evidence across the three districts that attitudes towards girls' education have changed for the better. But there are still some strong institutional barriers in the form of social norms that bar girls from fully participating in education.

One of the biggest barriers to education for many of the daughters of the MS *sangha* members and *sahayoginis* was the institution of marriage. For many women that we talked to in all of the districts, the inevitability of marriage as the final destiny for girls scuttled a lot of the ambition girls had for themselves. Even when women wanted to educate their daughters, the backdrop was invariably related to the prospects of marriage for the girls. This created certain kinds of pressures for the girls who wanted to pursue higher education or get jobs. Even in supportive families, we saw a divide with respect to who they would educate and who not. One of girls we interviewed told us that if she did not perform well in her exams, she would be forced to get married. Her family was paying for her brother to continue his education but would not be able to put aside money for her higher education as the priority was her marriage. She told us that even the teachers in her school would tell the girls that while they might aspire to get a professional degree like Chartered Accountancy, they were really 'waiting for their marriage' (Interview, 24 October 2016).

Girls were often told that they could pursue education, but they were also told any aspirations beyond that like a professional degree or a job ‘can make your marriage difficult. If luck will permit, then you can do job later. [But] marriage will be fixed in our own caste.’ (Interview, 24 October 2016). When education is seen ‘instrumentally’ and as a way of equipping girls to be ‘better wives and mothers’ (Kabeer 2005: 17), girls did not often identify their education as ‘empowering’. In fact, some were quite clear that education was seen as an added value in the marriage market and not in relation to any future career. Moreover, because of the prevalence of the dowry system, girls felt that their parents strategized around arranging money for their dowry as opposed to arranging money for their studies (FGD with girls, 25 March 2017). For example, some of the girls were told that educated girls would get good boys to marry and they also would have less pressure for dowry.

Educational aspirations for the girls were not empowering in all cases. Moreover, entrenched social norms with regards to girls’ mobility also influenced the ways in which they were able to participate in the education systems. For example, in almost all of the FGDs we conducted with girls, the biggest fear that they articulated was the association with ‘roaming around with boys’. Girls would often indicate that they had to be careful not to be too ‘free’ and roam around, that this was not the right thing to do. Instead, they should be good and work hard for their education. Girls often reported that while they themselves could handle the ‘freedom’ of going to school and college, others could not and therefore monitoring their ‘freedom’ was necessary. This concept of good/bad girl in many of these discourses was an affirmation of the traditional division of the good/bad girl phenomenon and was echoed by boys and men in the community as well.

Girls were also clear that there was a lot of progress made and that they were ‘allowed’ to go to school. In many of the conversations recorded in the FGDs, the girls continuously pointed to the experiences of the earlier generation of women as a reference point. They felt that their mothers were not even given the opportunity to go to school, so it felt like a huge leap to be able to go to school or

college and pursue their education. In FGDs, they discussed that they wanted to do jobs and that their mothers could not. But they also reported that they would not be able to continue doing any jobs or pursue any further education without the explicit consent of their in-laws. They felt that regardless of their own ambitions, they had to function within the boundaries of their familial expectations. Even as we documented the mothers of some of these girls being confident about travelling anywhere and being able to speak to anyone, the girls were reporting that they kept strict control over who they talked to and where they went, for fear of bringing dishonour to their families (FGD with girls, 15 May 2017).

While we found many parents, both fathers and mothers, to be very supportive of their daughters in pursuing their education, there appeared to be a threshold for most of them regarding how far they would 'allow' their daughters to pursue their ambitions. For many of the families, the kind of jobs that their daughters or daughters-in-law could undertake was also restricted. We documented in many of our FGDs that girls wanted to join government jobs or the police. When this idea was introduced to some of the men, they were largely against it, as one of the major criteria for a good job was to be home by 6.00pm. While we saw that MS was able to push women to be independent and self-confident through education, the social norms and narratives entrenched in social institutions mitigated some of these influences when it came to the next generation.

Other barriers to long-term impact of education are related to the failing infrastructure of government schools. Both girls and boys whom we interviewed reported that teachers often were unqualified to teach or did not show up to teach. They blamed large-scale corruption in terms of hiring practices and also reported that they had to pay to get their own certificates. Because of this, more and more coaching centres were the primary modes of education. These coaching centres were often very expensive and even if families wanted to educate their daughters, the cost of and the distance to these coaching centres proved to be deterrents. Only highly motivated parents such as a few families in Katihar were able to commit to their daughters being educated despite the heavy resource constraints.

MS was able to create positive outcomes for many women through education. Through the various modes of education, MS was able to create strong bonds between, in addition to self-confidence among women. It is on the basis of shared memory and the accumulated experience that women had that they were able to impact their lives in positive directions. However, we also see that these accrued benefits were not necessarily passed on to their daughters, and the influence of these creative educational initiatives on the next generation was decidedly less marked. As we saw in the preceding paragraphs, these are influenced by factors primarily related to entrenched social norms and institutional structures not very easy to dislodge. To further understand the stability of these social institutions, we move to another prominent aspect of women's lives: their work.

5.3. Work by women

Women's empowerment is connected to their work and is more valuable with employment that is regular and has social benefits (Kabeer et al. 2011). Women who are working in jobs that provide joy and are not another form of drudgery contribute immensely to the development of themselves, their families and their communities. Additionally, women's work within the rural context is also defined by everyday forms of mutual co-operation with other women (Agarwal 2000). In complex social environments, where working together is often the way social bonds and social networks are forged, women create strong networks that allow them to sustain long-term social relationships. When women engage in these labour exchanges, of providing child care during work, for example, or attempting to finish a complex task together, they are strategically piecing together some form of social and economic capital based out of meagre economic resources (Agarwal 2000). These kinds of bonds, formed out of working together, especially in the context of a collective, are integral to any form of social and economic mobility that the women experience or aspire to. In this section, we will explore two kinds work by two different kinds of women. We will be examining narratives of both paid work and unpaid care work

performed by women in the *sanghas* as well as women who worked as MS functionaries.

5.3.1. *Work and institutions*

MS first tackled the economic mobility of women through engagement with state institutions that guaranteed work for anyone who required it. One of the most common themes encountered in our data regarding paid work was the mobilisation around MNREGA. Women mobilised and created actionable strategies to ensure that they were paid full salary from the Panchayat for the work that they did. In one instance, they were even able to resist the recruitment of outside (and cheaper) labour hired to undercut the demands of the women asking for higher wages. Because most of the women that MS dealt with were primarily agricultural labourers, the mobilisation and strategizing around livelihoods were primarily related to expanding opportunities within agriculture and training to enhance the knowledge of women farmers.

As a way to ensure that there is large-scale co-operation and networks of solidarity built between farming women, MS created informal resource structures such as the *KisanSakhi* (Farmer friend). *KisanSakhi* is an informal organisation of female farmers who meet regularly to discuss their issues and receive training on various aspects of farming. The foundational identity of *KisanSakhi* was to ensure that women were given training and knowledge regarding farming practices and allowed them to function as farmers. We observed the following discussion in one of the training sessions at a *KisanSakhi*:

If all the KisanSakhis would get as well-informed as male farmers, it would help them on both the fronts – first, as well-informed farmers, they will get more money with better crops and secondly, they would become empowered as human beings. It needs lots of efforts to achieve these goals. They needed to create a favourable atmosphere in their families with love and understanding. These efforts didn't mean that they should have malice towards their male counterparts. Men and women would have to work together to make these things possible.

(Participant observation, 23 October 2016)

As MS started working to expand workforce participation, MS and the women realised that they needed to create these opportunities themselves, as the environment was not always conducive to women's participation in the labour force. For example, as evidenced in Chapter 3, women felt that one of the surest ways of gaining some employment was through saving money that could help in creating their own livelihoods (FGD, 25 October 2016). Through the *KisanSakhi*, *Apna Bank* (an informal banking system started by women) as well as their own savings groups, women started taking loans to create alternate sources of income. For example, many of the women bought buffaloes or cows and sold milk and dairy products as ways to earn income. Other ventures included fish farming, vegetable vending and grocery stores. In addition to non-traditional work such as masonry (documented in Chapter 3), women created new pathways by which to augment their income.

While the larger discourse around microfinance and self-help group models of women's empowerment endorses women's abilities to create livelihood opportunities for themselves, it is also evident that there are issues and problems (Devika and Thampi 2007). For example, no proper links have been established between access to credit and renewed economic activity *per se* (Husain et al. 2010). Because women's savings in MS were not the only activities undertaken to expand economic opportunities, these issues did not play a major role in slowing down economic mobility. What did slow down economic mobility for many women in the MS was the breakdown and closure of MS.

Some of the connections, networks and informal institutions that MS built were dependent on the institutional frameworks of MS. With the closure of MS, women who required training and support with regards to farm work, critical to ensuring women's continued livelihoods, suffered. Additionally, women who were working in MS as functionaries and were dependent on MS and MS structures (such as the federation) were also affected drastically.

Another factor that was central to the slowing down of economic mobility was the rigidity of economic structures. For example, while women were given opportunities to expand their livelihoods in their local context by helping them become entrepreneurs selling

bangles, tailoring sector helped with alternate sources of income such as participation in MDM schemes. The structure of the labour force in rural India, especially for women, is severely limited. So, there is a limit to these expanding opportunities that MS could create. For example, in one of the districts, women tried to set up a sanitary napkin-manufacturing unit, to cater to the needs of the local populace. However, because of supply chain problems in addition to the economics of manufacturing, they were unable to break even and the venture had to be shut down. Larger economic forces that influenced the rural economy also limited the ways in which women were able to expand their work. In the limited ways that they could, women did struggle against these social structures and part of the struggle was fuelled by the way in which work shaped the identity of women in MS.

5.3.2. *Work and identity*

When we spoke to women about the closure of the programme, the first reaction was primarily that their freedom was now curtailed and they were not as physically mobile as they used to be. Women working in MS in various capacities felt that they had been able to expand their horizons in MS and the work that they were doing was meaningful to them. After the closure, women felt that they had not only lost a job, they had also lost a purpose and the independence they had had. This framing of an identity (in relation to work) also plays out in conversations related to the care work that they were undertaking in order to attend to their paid work duties. The complex relationship between work, paid work and identity will be explored in the next section.

In the Marxist-feminist framework, women are tied inexorably to the idea and identity of work, as both care work and work are often the burden borne by women (Pearson n.d.). Paid employment, therefore, is critical to understanding work, as economic capital tied to work is considered to be one of the factors essential to women's independence. But the way that MS has framed work differs from this tradition in that it examined the larger context in which work took place and concentrated on more than paid work or savings as ways to approach economic mobility or participation in the labour

force. For MS, the central issues appear to be around equal pay, child care and access to entitlement schemes that provide opportunities for women to work. In this view, employment is empowering when they are able to connect and benefit from the labour that they were producing. Working for oneself meant that they had independence to spend on what they wanted to spend on and they felt that they didn't have to rely on anyone else for their money. This process of identifying with one's work and gaining an identity from work is central to our understanding of women's workforce participation.

One of the key factors identified in earlier research around women's workforce participation is the support of the family (Kabeer et al. 2011). Without this support, both material and emotional, it is very hard for women to function effectively in their jobs. In fact, the invisibility of women's roles as producers and contributors to the economic sphere within the household (Anderson 1996), can often lead to underestimation of women's economic role within the household. Within MS, we found that the knowledge gained through the *sangha* allowed women to prioritise their work. For many women, especially those working in MS in various capacities, this involved dealing with the other invisible work that women did: care work.

While our fieldwork did not engage centrally with care work nor asked explicit questions around it, care work emerged as a major theme in many of the conversations that we had with women. These were primarily related to the (non)-support of their families in dealing with a demanding job. In one of the FGDs that we conducted, we heard:

She used to cook in the morning and come back home around 9 pm in the evening. Her husband was not comfortable with it as [the women] were behaving like male members of the family. It was a difficult road for them, but [the men] were changing.

(FGD, 29 August 2016)

In most of our conversations, we found that women were very open about the fact that they had to finish their housework before they could do their 'actual work'. For many of the women in our sample, the husbands stepped in for most of the care-giving duties,

including cooking, cleaning and taking care of their children. When the fathers were also busy, then care-giving was provided by relatives, often grandmothers or aunts. Husbands who helped out and were supportive had to deal with the social expectations that women were supposed to be the primary caregivers in the family, as evidenced by a conversation we had with the husband of a *sahayogini*:

Initially, her work created lots of problems as she had to take care of children, do domestic chores and she was also required to go to Katihar again and again. I suggested her to not to visit her fields and "write whatever you want on paper, nobody would check", but she genuinely wanted to work. Then, I thought that she should do what she has learnt. She was unable to take all the responsibilities and that is the reason I used to serve my breakfast myself, which was cooked by her. I could not call any relative to serve me food as they would point out at our lifestyle where the wife is going out. Even now, I live alone and manage by myself as she has to go live with my daughters many times.

(Interview, 8 May 2017)

It was clear from a number of our focus group discussions with women that while men were resistant in the beginning, they were quite supportive over a period of time. It also helped that the family started to be benefited from the women working in MS and felt that her time in MS was valuable for the family:

They started getting jobs and earning money and it helped them in getting free at homes and in the outside world. Family members understood that they should not be pressurized. Earlier, they were not asked for their opinions on anything but now family members wanted their opinion on every domestic matter, like farming, education of children and marriages.

(FGD, 22 February 2017)

But not all families were supportive nor were they uniformly supportive. For example, we interviewed a few women whose husbands still resented the work that their wives did outside their homes and refused to help them out financially. In cases such as these, women identified the *sangha* and MS to be their only support systems.

Even in the cases of supportive families, we see that the flexibility and the demands of the MS job proved to be a constant source of tension and conflict with the extended families and many women had to constantly negotiate with their families to be able to work.

While some women alluded to other family members helping out, such as husbands or mothers-in-law, women were much more reticent (probably involuntarily) about the role their daughters played in managing the bulk of the care work in the household. From talking to the daughters of *sangha* women as well as through FGDs with girls in the villages, we found that for women who were working in MS or for women who had to go to the fields to work, the burden of the care work fell disproportionately on younger girls. From the earlier chapters, it is clear that women's empowerment influences favourable outcomes for children but from what we have gathered in the qualitative data, these are not uniform or universal. As we saw earlier with respect to education, while girls have gained a foothold in certain areas (such as going to schools), there have been slippages in others (inevitability of marriage). Similarly, with respect to work, girls whose mothers are in MS have gained a lot more support for pursuing their education but have also lost some aspects of their physical mobility. In examining the narratives of the FGDs that we did with girls, we found that their mobility is quite low. A typical day for a girl appears to be as follows:

Most of the girls get up at 4 in the morning and as Bihar Police recruitments are about to start, they go for running to prepare for it. After coming back from their exercise, they do domestic chores at home like cleaning utensils, cleaning their homes, cooking etc. As mothers of most of the girls do farming work, they help them in taking care of the house. After finishing household chores, they take bath, study, etc., and then go for a quiz at around 3 pm and come back at 5 pm and again work at home and try to study as well.

(FGD, 25 March 2017)

When we asked the girls whether their brothers help out, they told us that cooking is not the job of the male members of the family. One girl said that the people would make fun of the (male) person

who would do housework. When we asked young boys the same question, the boys reported that while men do household chores at home (when their mothers are sick), it is mostly confined to girls (FGD, 16 May 2017). Thus, care work responsibilities in general, and for working women in particular, were often transferred to young girls in the village and from what we have gathered from the data, this did have some influence on their ability to attend school and college regularly.

Part of the conversation around care work is around the social norms and rules entrenched in the social context, as we saw before. When women do not perform traditionally defined duties linked to their social roles or do not take responsibility for them, there are some social pushbacks that they experience. Women were then obliged to perform these social roles not just for their own benefit but also for the benefit of their communities. For example, we recorded a number of narratives that articulated the struggles of MS women who had to wake up at 3.00 or 4.00am in the morning to finish all her care work duties before they were able to go out into the villages.

This stretching of time to ensure that they finished their 'duty' allowed them to negotiate with their families regarding work outside the home. As long as nothing was 'suffering' at home, they did not have to broker any argument regarding their status as a good wives or mothers. While some interviews clearly indicate that women were thinking quite actively about the implications of the burdens of care work (Interview, 20 January 2017), it was also clear that a number of MS women were not fully engaged with changing these social norms in their home harmful not only for themselves but also for the daughters.

One of the most obvious ways in which this non-engagement with care work is harmful is related to time poverty of women. We found in our conversations with girls and women that they were overworked and had very little time for leisure. This had implications for their participation in empowerment activities organised by MS. For women and girls to be truly involved, they need to carve out additional time from their hectic schedules to be fully involved. While most of the women told us that they did manage to do it, we assume that their involvement probably came at a price, either in

terms of longer hours at care giving or someone else bearing care work responsibilities. There was also caste dynamics associated with work and empowerment activities. From one of our FGDs, we found that while OBC women were easily able to attend meetings, women from SC and ST communities had particular problems. Because they were agricultural labourers and had to work in the fields apart from having domestic responsibilities, they couldn't partake of all the empowerment activities. In fact, meetings were arranged for them at night (FGD, 29 August 2016). For women who were involved with empowerment activities, either as *sangha* members or as MS functionaries, being active and engaged with work related to empowerment activities also had other costs.

5.3.3. *Work and empowerment*

As mentioned earlier, one of the ways in which women in the rural contexts were able to expand their livelihoods and create pathways to social and economic mobility was through jobs either in MS or associated with MS (such as *Jagjaggi* centres or MSKs). The narratives we heard about women's work with empowerment in MS could be divided into two main categories. One, women were passionate about their jobs, and two, women were grossly underpaid for their jobs.

One of the major narratives encountered in MS was the passion, the *junoon* with which women worked in MS. At the time of the closure, many women felt bereft and bitter that MS had closed down, as they had formed a community of peers in MS. But women were also bitter about having lost the one source of social and economic mobility anchored within MS. The philosophy of MS, as indicated in Chapter 1, was to ensure that all women become self-reliant and independent (Sharma 2008). It was also observed in our conversations with MS that MS did not create clear pathways for social and economic mobility within its own ranks. This is particularly poignant if we observe the high level of unemployment among MS staff even a year after the closure of the programme (details of which will be discussed in the next section). Additionally, women were also paid very low salaries that did not translate into any form of economic security for women, especially if

she was the only breadwinner of her family. For example, a number of women started with a salary of Rs 200 and after ten or twelve years of working, received Rs 4,500. This, in their opinion, was not enough to run a family and be economically mobile.

While it can be debated whether these sacrifices by individual women actually harm the empowerment process laid out by MS (Sharma 2008), it was clear that women themselves were ambivalent about it, at least, after the closure of the programme. For example, while women were very proud and happy to be working with MS, they were also unhesitant in their understanding that their labour was 'exploited' and that in the end, their sacrifices felt useless. In general, women seemed to feel that while the empowerment work was happening, the progress they were making felt reward enough. With the closure of the programme, the loss of regular pay and the severe lack of social and economic stability that came in the aftermath, the women also felt that they had given the best years of their lives to MS and had gained only the experience. They felt that they had nothing to pass onto their children. But even as women complained about the abandonment of MS, they also saw their work, even for a short period of time, as a vital aspect of their lives. One young *sahayogini* told us that without the passion and the commitment, things simply could not be done. The expectation from MS was that women should be willing to work at any time and at any hour. This mode of work was not seen not as 'feminisation of work', but empowerment work necessary to generate social change. These attitudes to what and how 'empowerment work' should be also had implications for all women who attempted to get jobs in sectors similar to MS.

5.3.4. Work and closure of MS

As mentioned earlier, there was a significant overlap between the women in the *sangha* and the women employed by MS, through various informal institutions such as *Bal Jagjaggi* and *Jagjaggi* centres. The closure of MS affected these women the most as they did not always have the educational qualifications to move to other government departments. They also did not have enough money to buy into these jobs, as reported by several of the women in all three sites of our study. Although the villages in which they were

living were inundated with SHGs who wanted their knowledge and their skills, these organisations too required a minimum level of educational qualifications (especially related to writing reports) and MS women were not considered for these jobs. Instead, more ‘professional’ women who can speak well and can write well were chosen. In addition, women identified a class dynamic in that because upper caste and class women were much more likely to be literate, especially in these age groups, the lower caste women in these organisations (and according to a few, even in MS) were systematically being side-lined in favour of those more ‘professional’.

Women who had been working in MS for a really long time were particularly hit by the closure of MS as the work that they were doing was ‘more than just bread and butter for them’ (FGD, 29 August 2016). Even when they procured jobs, they had a hard time acclimatising to their new positions. Women reported that they were ‘spoilt’ by MS and that they could not tolerate any work culture that did not treat them as equals or treated them like second-class citizens (Jandhyala and Mehrotra 2016). Women who worked in MS were unable to take the bureaucratic and often autocratic ways of the jobs they subsequently took up. Some of the women complained to us that they didn’t last long in any of these jobs as they were unable to be work in any place where they were not valued. For example, a *sahayogini* had a job as a teacher in her son’s school and, therefore, was able to get subsidised fees for her children. At the same time, she was considering quitting the job at the time of our interview as she was very unhappy in the job and felt that she couldn’t function as well in it as she was able to in MS.

This lack of job opportunities had implications for women. Women who had been asserting their independence in their homes through the basis of their work were suddenly bereft of not only steady money but also consistent support of the organisation. Some of the women reported being taunted about the lack of contribution that they were making to the household. Those who had borrowed money in hopes that the programme would start again were in debt to their families and friends. This was especially difficult for some women for whom the scope of job opportunities was shrinking. Another way that they felt deprived was the sense of mobility that

they had. Women in MS have reported that one of the primary ways in which they felt liberated was that they were able to find spaces outside the confines of their home and that they were able to interact with anyone in public (Sharma 2008). Given there were no jobs and nowhere to go to, women felt trapped inside their homes and missed the opportunities to engage with other women. Some women decided to continue the work they were doing in similar spaces such as Jeevika, as evidenced by the following interview:

I cannot leave our village women. I feel for them and don't want to lose any opportunities to work for them. Now when I am working with Jeevika, I know more about women issues than the BPM. I can go and make groups in any village. MS is almost like my identity now.

(Interview, 19 January 2017)

To conclude, it is undeniable that work, both paid and unpaid, is very important to the development of human capabilities. It is also clear that this burden is often borne by women (Folbre 2006). From our conversations with MS women, we observed that while increasing women's labour force participation in the market is important, it is equally important to expand women's choices for work as well as engage with the men's low levels of involvement with care work. There is clearly a trend towards the feminisation of poverty and the pauperisation of motherhood not just in India but in several countries (Folbre 2006). In the light of the empowerment work done in MS, there needs to be a re-examination women's distribution of time and the shrinking of opportunities for developing their own capabilities and capacities.

This is especially important because the current mechanism of creating a 'good woman' narrative constructed around the immense workload of women creates an invisible shroud around the ways in which individual families work out care work responsibilities. Whether the extra burden is taken up by husbands, grandmothers, mothers-in-law or daughters, the dynamics of work and care work have to be clearly addressed for a better understanding of the politics of care work. Whether it is the sacrifices that women make in the service of the family or in the service of 'empowerment', the

deification of labour of love has to be revisited and re-examined to understand the material sacrifices that women and girls are making in order to achieve empowerment.

In order to examine the dynamics within the family that have specific influences on the ideals and institutions of empowerment, we now turn to violence experienced by women.

5.4. Gender violence

Violence was a central concern for MS and *sangha* women right from the beginning. The process of collectivisation meant that women were encouraged to talk about the most pertinent issues of their lives. More often than not, these conversations invariably turned to domestic violence. MS itself felt that one of the areas where they had had the most impact was gender violence. When we asked women the most memorable experiences that they had within MS, most *sangha* women as well as *sahayoginis* often mentioned the different cases of rape and domestic violence that they were able to tackle. More importantly, women felt that they no longer needed to be silent about the different forms of violence that they experienced. Additionally, by creating institutional structures such as the *Nari Adalats*, MS felt that they had been effective in tackling issues such as female foeticide, child marriage, domestic violence, rape and prosecution against alleged ‘witches’.

As mentioned before, education was one of the primary platforms through which women saw the world differently; gender training specifically related to violence was provided. Trainings with regards to gender violence dealt with basic gender concepts such as trying to distinguish between what is deemed ‘natural’ and what is ‘social’. Women were encouraged to move away from differences stemming from biology (such as skin colour or physical strength) and were trained to think about the social construction of gender and of violence.

5.4.1. Gender violence and collective knowledge

The knowledge base for gender training related to violence for the *sanghas* came primarily from the *sahayoginis*. *Sahayoginis* or resource

persons went through a rigorous training process where the very constructs of gender were critiqued. One of the more experienced resource persons told us that while she had previously observed differences among men and women in her life, it was only when she went to the training and to the field that she realised the inequalities that existed in the field:

It was only after going to the field that I realised and understood properly about these inequalities. Earlier, I didn't even know what violence against women means. Later, I understood that apart from physical violence, verbal abuse and not giving them proper food is also violence.

(Personal interview, 1 September 2016)

Women started to define the violence in ways that were not just physical violence. In expanding this meaning, women were able to articulate the various impositions that families place upon them, especially related to their own ambitions and their mobility as part of the larger spectrum of violence that families imposed upon them. In addition to the violence that MS encountered in the lives of *sangha* women, MS also encountered threats of violence against them because of activities aiming to build collectivisation. Men were very suspicious in the beginning and were often absent from the process. While others have documented active forms of resentment (Sharma 2008) on the part of men in response to the MS process, we found that men started to feel threatened only when they perceived that they were losing out on things. In general, it appeared that when women broke traditional rules of the household (which was often in the beginning of the collectivisation process), men raised strong objections to it, primarily through verbal and physical abuse. Often, these kinds of violence simmered down with active mediation from MS and by encouraging men to participate in many of the activities that MS conducted. For example, one of the *sangha* members told us that her husband finally understood the importance of the work she was doing when he accompanied her to one of the village visits.

One day when I and my husband were going to my workplace, a car stopped close to us and tried to kidnap me. But when they saw that I was

standing with my husband, they fled from the spot. When my husband reacted and told me, 'You could escape only because of me', I responded immediately, 'So, you see, women are still unsafe, and you ask me why I speak so much in favour of women'.

(Interview, 1 September 2016)

In addition, the systems of accountability that MS was setting in place in relation to the villages did not always endear them to the powerful in the village. Invariably, threats of violence were commonplace for many women in the *sangha* as well as for MS women. But women often persisted, primarily because they were able to see the ways that traditional justice mechanism systems worked against them. For example, one of the MS women spoke how heartbreaking and terrifying it was when she first accompanied a rape victim to a medical examination:

The rape victim had to face a lot of humiliation. The way the doctor disrespectfully examines the victims after removing their clothes was disturbing in the extreme. Even the female doctors had no sympathy for the victim – it was heart-ripping. In fact, a female doctor declared that the girl was not raped, even though blood was dripping from her vagina. A person's education is worthless if she/he cannot show solidarity towards another person. Humanity cannot be taught by education.

(Interview, 1 September 2016)

The more women got involved in the issues related to violence, the more motivated they become to act against it. When asked about why attitudes have changed with respect to gender violence, women often pointed to education. They felt that before they joined the *sangha*, all of them knew each other but did not know how to talk about these things to other people. When MS came, they finally felt like there was a space where they could speak openly about their experiences and they were able to understand and reflect on their own experiences. Earlier, they were more concerned about keeping 'peace' in the family but with the support of the *sangha*, they were able to talk about how to end the violence. Because of the training that they had as well as the solidarity that they felt with other women,

they started to informally challenge the normative rules around gender violence in their village. For example, women argued with their husbands when their husbands forbade them from going to meetings. They negotiated their public participation by asking the husbands to join them, arguing that they were not doing anything wrong (Interview, 10 May 2017). Even in cases where police were involved in acts of violence, women gathered together to ensure the transfer of a corrupt police officer (FGD, 23 April 2017). Through these small acts, women were able to create the impetus, motivation, and resources necessary to start *Nari Adalats*.

5.4.2. Gender violence and alternate institutions

Through more involvement with the village, women in the older districts soon realised that the gender representation in the panchayats did not favour them. Because most of the panchayat members were male, they felt that they were unlikely to get any form of justice in these quarters. So, MS (following the Gujarat model) introduced the concept of *Nari Adalats* in the *sangha*.

The *Nari Adalat* allowed women to seek forms of justice routinely denied to them in formal courts or arenas of justice. While the institution is semi-formal in nature, women felt that by engaging with *Nari Adalats*, they were given a platform to present concerns unique to women. Women within the *Nari Adalat* were also accountable to each other, and to the panchayat, so that the decisions taken within the *Nari Adalat* might be implemented. For example, accusations of witchcraft are often directed towards women who are vocal or are creating trouble for the powerful in the village. While the usual interventions end in violence against the accused, women in the *Nari Adalats* have been able to successfully intervene and ensure that these cases are heard out in the open, so that the woman is well-protected in the future as well. Similarly, women were also able to tackle problems of domestic violence, rape and marital discord between families.

One of the reasons these arbitration mechanisms worked in the rural contexts was because of the legitimacy that women derived from the empowerment work that they had already done in the

village. Additionally, because they were connected to the panchayat and held meetings close to the panchayat office, they were seen as an extension of the governing mechanism. Moreover, the *Nari Adalat* often employed the carrot and stick approach whereby parties who refused to abide by the mutually agreed upon resolution would have to answer to the police. Moreover, given that women in the *Nari Adalat* were trained in many aspects of the law, they were able to use their knowledge against anyone who tried to circumvent or subvert the process. The support from these institutions along with the credibility that women had built in the village was the primary reason why *Nari Adalats* were able to create spaces of justice for women in the villages.

Not all of the cases ended triumphantly and women often had to face accusations of being home-wreckers and destroyers of families. But most of the women who were working in *Nari Adalats* told us that it was one of the most fulfilling engagements that they had had in MS.

5.4.3. *Gender violence and co-option*

In many ways, families have been one of the major sites of engagement for MS. There is also a fundamental consensus among almost all of the women in our study that families are often the perpetrators of violence. But we also see evidence that women continue to project the patriarchal family as a 'caring, supportive, and natural institution' (Sharma 2008: 173) and marriage as an inevitable destiny of girls and women.

The underlying structure of patriarchy is questioned but it is never seen as the primary source of violence. In many of the conversations that we heard about families, violence is seen as an aberration in the family instead of immanent to its power structure. We see many women often struggling with holding these contradictory positions. For example, we saw many women describe the myriad ways in which their families were systematically letting them down and that their obligations and duties in service of their families (either through work or care work) as being detrimental to their own well-being. They also endorse, at the same time, the larger concepts around family

in terms of honour, safety and security. While both Uma Narayan and Deniz Kandiyotti have documented the ways in which women are formed as 'women' within families and the manner in which they strike different patriarchal bargains to retain their identities as 'women', there was no awareness of this formation and these bargains in the MS as part of the critique of the family.

Part of the reason for the documented ambivalence and lack of interrogation of the fundamental structure of the family has to do with the depth of engagement with the institution. For example, we noted that early in the training period, women were trained about gender violence by deconstructing the very notion of gender – about what is natural and what is biological. In recent times, even while we saw that the training materials dealt with the fundamentals of the causes of gender violence and the ways to tackle it (both of which are necessary for any member of the *Nari Adalat*), time was not provided for basic self-reflection on why violence exists, and how the family is implicated in it.

The influence of this can be seen in a rally that we observed that was taken out as part of the *1 Billion Rising* campaign. We noticed that while women realised the importance of the idea of gender violence, they had no curiosity or did not enquire about why 14 February was chosen or even why the rally was organised. When, after a long discussion, the *sangha* members were told the purpose of the rally, it did not attempt to engage the village or the community in creating a dialogue. Women felt that the issue was important but they made no further attempts to engage with it. This does not mean that the dialogues and the narratives of violence have not changed in the villages that we visited. Clearly, women's attitudes towards violence has significantly changed. However, the process of engagement has not pushed hard enough against institutions that support these kinds of violence.

A more commonplace example of this can be seen when women deal with men who are resistant to women joining *sanghas* or moving around. As mentioned in the earlier section, one of the tactics that MS uses is transparency. Men are invited to the meetings to prove the legitimacy of their work and to prove that they are not 'prostitutes' or corrupt women. While this tactic is ostensibly to assure the men

of the legitimacy of the women's work, the underlying narrative that they are tapping into (whether or not they recognise it) is the good/bad woman dichotomy.

By constantly reaffirming that they are not sex workers and that they are doing 'empowerment' work, they are also providing credence to the idea that there is something wrong with sex workers. The solidarity with women that they have cultivated within the *sangha*, therefore, was not (at least, from where we stand) conceptually extended to other women who are doubly indicted within patriarchal structures.

There is no question that informal institutions such as the *Nari Adalats* have been very useful in creating alternate justice mechanism systems and allow for women to confront patriarchal structures and institutions. At the same time, the very heart of patriarchy – the family – is often left unexamined. Engaging with the fundamental methods used by MS such as critical thinking and self-reflexivity is, therefore, crucial to re-examine the manner in which the family is able to direct women's actions with respect to their education, their work, and their experience of gender violence. We deepen our analysis of this complex relationship by examining women's political participation.

5.5. Political participation

Participation in democratic processes or institution-building has often been seen as beneficial for two reasons. The first is that it is seen as a tool to achieve better social change outcomes and the second is that it 'enhances the capacities of individual to improve their own lives and facilitates social change to the advantage of disadvantaged or marginalised groups' (Cleaver 1999: 598). The very idea of democratic local governance implies building participation and accountability into local governance (Blair 2000). This ensures that the stakes of the local governance are located within local communities and their needs. The idea for engaging in the political space is to create governance systems highly responsive to citizenry. What MS tried to do in this sphere was to actively encourage the participation of women in this process.

They felt that the needs of the women were often absent from these conversations.

5.5.1. *Political participation and process of engagement*

Political participation for women in MS started out with small steps such as voting in elections, attending *gram sabha* and panchayat meetings. Through these small interactions, women slowly started taking part in village politics and strategized together regarding any action that they wanted to take. Women also understood that they were likely to face direct and indirect repercussions of their actions. As documented in other studies (Sharma, 2008), women were able to use the information that they had to bypass, strategize and negotiate a different outcome, using the legitimacy and authority of the state, or bypassing it entirely to ensure that they were able to get the results that they wanted.

The first hurdle was to get women to the meetings. Many *sahayoginis* told us that they had to spend long hours trying to convince women that the political spaces were also theirs. They cited cases where even when women were elected as ward members, their husbands went to represent them. Once MS started creating the *sanghas*, they questioned these practices and encouraged women to participate in the panchayat (Interview, 19 January 2017). Women also tried to change the cultural practices associated with their presence. For example, a number of women told us that often women would sit in the back rows of the meeting. It was only after a lot of discussion and understanding that they started sitting in the front rows and asking questions. Slowly, the women started participating more. They started to demand funds for building toilets and water tanks. As mentioned earlier, women also started engaging with job cards associated with MNREGA and demanded full payment for their work.

These activities cannot strictly be termed as only accessing material entitlements (Sharma 2008). Instead, they were the foundation for women's realisation of a different identity other than the one based in kinship networks. Even if actions were taken primarily to procure material conditions, it too required a different level of self-motivation and identity not tied to traditional boundaries of what women can or cannot do. For example, it is clear that caste

still plays a major role in elections and who one votes for has to do with family connections and kinship networks.

In the spaces created by MS, there was an opportunity for women to wear different hats or create different selves that could actually engage with the merits or demerits of candidates instead of merely following the family's decision to vote. While women might still vote with their families, the ability of being able to discuss the candidates and the election process provided women the ability to imagine their own participation in the political process.

5.5.2. *Political participation and impact*

The impetus within MS to encourage women to participate politically is to create a more inclusive and participatory politics within the system. The idea was that women, especially those trained within the *sangha*, would not only participate and represent their constituency but would also create benefits for their local communities (Blair 2000). In order to do this, one of the biggest taboos that MS had to fight was the idea of women's participation in spaces strictly outside the domain of the family and in public spaces. Public interaction and public meetings are considered to be non-friendly places not just for rural women but also for urban women. Resistance and reaction against women participating in public spaces as political actors led to some very hostile reactions, especially if it was felt that women were successful in their work. As one woman told us:

The change [in the village context] came through MS. Seeing this, a lot of men had started calling 'Mahila Samakhya' as 'Mahila Samasya' (Women's Problem)! Women would engage in ensuring that children are going to school and keeping a watch on whether school teachers are coming on time. People started saying that women had become very smart and have started answering back. They are not scared of police or any officer. Women learnt all this from MS.

(Interview, 1 September 2016)

The impact that they were able to create within a short period of time through political participation vindicated their presence in

these political spaces and women started actively strategising for their continued presence in public spaces. For example, women reported that they had started to become more aware of the systemic and creative ways in which they might stop corruption. Before MS, they were privy to the power dynamics in the village but they did not have the knowledge, experience and the solidarity provided by MS to use this knowledge. With the backing of MS and fellow *sangha* members, many women mounted fierce campaigns to be ward members, *sarpanchs* and *mukhiyas*, some of them being elected more than once. Their early experience in dealing with district offices, their understanding of their rights and entitlements and the training that they received through MS allowed them to be much more confident in dealing with larger institutional structures at the block and district levels. As one of them put it:

I also contested for BDC (panchayat) election. I contested the elections on the strength of my group. The decision was not taken in the group. It was taken after talking to my family. I lost the election because many members in the group did not vote for me. The opposition was very powerful and there was some politics that played against me. I do not regret my decision as I came into contact with many people during the campaigning. I got all the strength to contest from the experience I had from working in MS.

(Interview, 23 February 2017)

Even when women lost elections, the experience that they gained allowed them to get a better understanding of the village dynamics and some of them were hopeful to try again. But participating in these spaces, especially given political structures at the local level, is not easy.

5.5.3. Political participation and institutional constraints

Women often participated in public life because of the strong backing of the *sangha*. Women felt that they had knowledge, a name and a reputation and people respected those (Jandhyala and Mehrotra 2016). But political spaces were especially hard for women to navigate. Starting from their own families, they often had to face resistance and abuse. Almost all of the women who participated

politically told us that men often threw very nasty comments at them and threatened violence. The spaces in which women were venturing into were very difficult to deal with and many women, after the first time, did not want to engage any more. Even some MS women felt that they were not able to make as much headway into the political spaces as they would have liked (Jandhyala and Mehrotra 2016). While there have been clear successes we observed in that women from the MS clearly banded together and were quite active in the discussions within the panchayat, the institutional frameworks against which they were working were too strong.

In addition to the resistance from these institutional structures, political participation was also heavily constrained by prevalent social norms and gender roles (Agarwal 2000). Women's responsibility towards care work not only extends to cooking, cleaning, child and elder care but also to fetching water, firewood and, in many cases, farm labour. This vastly shrinks the time that they have for looking after their constituents in their respective wards. While we see that most of the care giving burden (as mentioned earlier) falls to the younger members of the family, participating politically took a heavy toll on women's time and energies. Additionally, the way that the political scenario worked for women was complicated (as it is for women in all other contexts as well).

On the one hand, women have to ensure that they are functioning within the boundaries of the 'good woman' scenario. This means that they have to ensure that they are seen to fulfil all the social roles of a good wife, a good mother, a good daughter-in-law for them to be re-elected. At the same time, as indicated before, this version of the 'good woman' meant that they could not be seen spending too much time travelling to villages and neglecting their care work duties. At the same time, they were also required to be actively responsive to the community needs, by taking in meetings, by visiting their wards, and by ensuring a good relationship between the panchayat, block level officials as well as local communities. Moreover, to be able to gain political currency, they needed to spend time with the officials and create social networks. All of this was not often possible or feasible given the workload of women and the demands of prescribed social roles. The political structure, by its very design,

is not seen as a legitimate space in which women might participate and does not allow women to engage with it effectively.

This problem is exacerbated by the presence of *mukhiyapatis* (leader-husbands). While 50 per cent of the local governing bodies have been reserved for women, the husbands of the women elected often represent the wives. This means that women who are legitimately participating in the governing process are often sidelined (because of their low numbers). We found that women felt discouraged and at a disadvantage compared to men in these spaces but they were also confident of their abilities and contemptuous of those who were only token members of the ward:

Regarding reservation for women in the panchayat, women do get the seats reserved for women but all the work is done by their husbands. The mukhiya (village head) from their village is also a woman but her husband does all the work. That woman is not from MS. The sarpanch (head of panchayat) at Baijnathpur village is from MS. There is a big difference between these two women. She goes everywhere herself.

(Interview, 25 January 2017)

Women reported that even failures and defeats had immense value for them. In the process of leading a campaign, they were able to gain knowledge and skills regarding the electoral process and there is some evidence in the literature to indicate that these forms of participation are useful especially for the younger generation (Blair 2000).

To conclude, it is important to remember that when women's bodies enter the public realm, they have to face certain kinds of social and political realities (Benhabib 1993). One of these realities is the element of compromise. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, women are not dealing with unlimited choices or unlimited means of gaining a foothold in either public or private spaces. In general, the options for women are limited and empowerment efforts are primarily to expand these choices or to enact any form of agency within these limited choices. It is well documented that women do not always look out for the interests of gender and are

subject to the same divisive politics as men (Sharma 2008). This is precisely why it is important that these spaces within institutional structures are expanded so that small transformations, as we see in the personal lives of these women, can take place.

To understand the importance of these small changes and transformations in the lives of women within the larger context of patriarchal structures and social norms, we explore the dynamics of a single village as the site of our analysis. We examine the perspectives of men, women, boys, and girls living in the village. By analysing all of their stories, we can arrive at the layers of oppression and agency that women have to navigate in their journeys towards empowerment.

5.6. A village study

To get a well-rounded view of the village dynamics, we interviewed three types of actors: women, men, and adolescents. We interviewed a *sahayogini* who worked with MS from the very start of the programme in her district. We also interviewed a *sangha* woman who became the sarpanch in her village for three consecutive terms. Additionally, we spoke to the ward members of the village who were part of MS. We also spoke to a group of men, boys, and girls separately to get their perspectives on the gender dynamics in their village and their own experiences of MS. In addition, we attended a panchayat meeting where we observed the relationship between the women and the larger political structures.

5.6.1. *The village and its people*

The entrance to Shantipur is marked by a railway crossing. Once the railway guards open the gates, a very narrow road across fields of young and ripening wheat leads us toward the village. On the way, we pass by a *Musaharitola* that circles a large freshwater lake. On the side of the lake, buffaloes are being washed and young boys play in the water. Another winding road flanked by mustard fields ready for harvesting, lead us right into Shantipur. The village is tightly packed, the houses built close to each other. The thick concentration of the houses is surrounded by vast acres of fields. In the distance, the chimneys of the brick kilns can be seen against the sky.

The village of Shantipur, like many villages in Bihar, is primarily dependent on agriculture. Most of the villagers are either farmers or work in agriculture as labourers. There is no other form of employment in the village. The men are often travelling to Delhi, Punjab and Haryana for seasonal employment. Recently, a few brick kilns had come up in the neighbourhood so some labourers go to the kilns to work. The kiln work requires at least 200 people at a time but the kiln owners tend to hire workers from outside Bihar as they work for cheaper rates. During the monsoons, the kilns shut down. This also prompts many of the men to travel for seasonal employment. The villagers felt that only about 20 per cent¹ of the village had sufficient food to eat for the entire day. The rest of the village starved.

The primary concern of most villagers is the scarcity of water for irrigation. No canals have been constructed in the village and the village suffers greatly when the rains do not come in time and crops fail. Another major problem that the village faces is inadequate drainage systems. During monsoons, all the roads get flooded and there is severe water logging in the village. Villagers also identified the lack of toilets as a major problem. Even though government funds were available for the building of toilets, a number of people used this money to buy household things and continued to use open spaces to defecate. The younger generation had access to education but according to most of the villagers, the primary problems that the village faced were still related to poverty and education.

It did not help that the head person of their panchayat (the *mukhiya*) was ineffectual and did not appear to care about the village. Almost everyone in the village told us that even though the seat of the *mukhiya* was reserved for a woman, the woman who was elected did not work there. She was the daughter-in-law of the previous *mukhiya* and her husband was looking after all the work on her behalf. As the village men put it: 'He was concerned only about his facilities, as roads and drains around their house got repaired

¹ This percentage was a number that was stated in the meeting as a way to give us a sense of the problem. It can be seen as an indicator of their perception of the extent of the problem.

and he didn't pay attention to rest of the village' (FGD with men, 26 March 2017).

Most adolescent boys were studying in local schools, colleges in a nearby town or preparing for government exams. Although some of the boys help their families in farming activities, they do not appear to be doing much by way of work. The boys said that they wanted to work but there were no jobs available. They were aiming for government jobs as those had some level of security. The private jobs often involved long hours, low pay and highly insecure. Some of them want to start their own business but had no money to do so. They explained that the landholdings their family possess are just enough for the family to survive. When crops fail (which happens often), there is no money in the family. Under these circumstances, there is no possibility for opening up a business. One of the boys commented that: 'One can survive on farming but it cannot provide a quality life. And that is the reason all of us are busy preparing for government jobs' (FGD with boys, 27 March 2017).

As for the girls, all of them are enrolled in colleges but not all of them attend regularly as they have housework to do or tuitions to attend. None of the girls who have completed schooling or college are pursuing jobs. Only 2 per cent of the women² in the village have some job and these appear to be either in the teaching services or with the police. Some of the girls are preparing to write government exams. Previously, the girls were unable to compete in these exams as they didn't have a place to hold the tuitions. They were not allowed to go near the Panchayat Bhawan where the boys were getting their tuitions. Recently, alternate arrangements had been made within the village in the local community hall. So, the girls were able to assemble and be guided by the tutor and practice their quizzes.

We spoke to two women who we felt anchored the conversation of empowerment in the village. One was Meera Devi and the second was Veena Devi (names changed). Meera Devi is in her mid-40s and was recruited as one of the first *sahayoginis* when the MS programme

² This percentage was a number that was stated in the meeting as a way to give us a sense of the problem. It can be seen as an indicator of their perception of the extent of the problem.

started in her district. She got married shortly after she completed her matriculation. She studied for inter and B.A. after getting married. Her husband has also completed his Bachelor's degree. The family primarily survives on the farming work that her husband does. They have about 10 *katta* land which they cultivate throughout the year. Even though they have the land to build a house on, they have not been able to build a house because of financial constraints and are currently living in a house elsewhere. Meera Devi has two sons. Her elder son is 23 years old and has never attended school. We were given the impression that her son might be disabled and could not be left unsupervised so going to a traditional schooling environment was impossible.

Her younger son is 18 years old and is currently studying science in the 12th class. He does not live with the family. He has been living at his maternal grandmother's house and studies at a school closer to where his grandmother lives. Meera Devi said that given her socio-economic condition, she has to depend a lot on her natal family. Given the disability of her son and their meagre income, the only way that they were able to educate her younger son was with the financial and emotional support of her family.

She worked as a teacher in a primary school before she joined MS as a *sahayogini*. She met the *didis* (sisters) of MS when they came to her village. She was selected and went to the district headquarters for the training. Her family was largely supportive of her job because of two reasons. One was that the family was in severe financial trouble and she needed to find a job. The second was that MS was primarily working with women and there were no interactions with men (at least in the beginning). Her husband looked after the family when she travelled for training and/or related to her work. She quit MS a few years ago as it became difficult for her husband to look after her son alone. We also understood from conversations with other women that she had had issues with the federation and left because she disagreed with the unethical practices of some of the members. She is currently working in Jeevika but is considering quitting the job as she doesn't feel the job suits her.

Veena Devi is the *sarpanch* of the panchayat block which includes Shantipur. Veena Devi was elected as a *sarpanch* for the first time

in 2006, then in 2011 and for the third time in 2016. When she laughingly gave the credit of her victories to MS, one of the *sangha* women responded saying, ‘Your behaviour also adds to it. You were always very supportive and people wanted you again’ (Interview, 18 March 2017). Veena Devi is in her mid-50s and has studied up to the eighth standard. Her husband is a tractor driver and has never learned to read or write. Her two elder sons (25 and 20 years of age respectively) didn’t go to school. She also has three other children – an 18-year-old daughter (who left the household after marriage). Her two younger children are daughters, aged 13 and 10 respectively. They are both studying in the local schools.

When asked about her sons, she told us, ‘One cannot force children to study’ (Interview, 18 March 2017). Her husband and both her sons are alcoholics. She feels that life after prohibition has become slightly better for her. She told us that she raised and is maintaining her family through sheer will power. When her husband separated from her, the family had almost nothing. They had a small hut which was not even sufficient for everyone to sleep in. Even though she wanted her sons to study, they drank and left school. When her husband stopped working for a time, she started working in the local school as a teacher. That was when she was introduced to MS. She was soon appointed as a *sakhi* in MS, went to Patna for training and started working diligently in MS.

5.6.2. *Institutional structures*

Meera Devi told us that it was very difficult in the beginning to get the women to find the space and time to form a *sangha*. She told us that she faced the most resistance from village elders, both men and women, who would accuse her of breaking homes. When she went to form groups, they would accuse her of wanting to break up families and taunt her by saying, ‘Here she comes to make husband and wife fight’ and ‘She wants husband and wife to sleep on separate beds’, i.e., separate them, etc. (Interview, 25 January 2017).

While most of the time she would ignore it, direct threats of violence were often dealt with sternly. She told us that once when a man taunted her that she was roaming around in the village in the

night (because that's when women could find the time to meet), because she was a 'lady of the night'. Meera Devi got very angry and told him, 'I will take out my slipper and beat you'. Men would also snigger and pass comments at her when she was in the village, telling her that now women are carrying shoulder bags because 'they are big officers' (Interview, 25 January 2017).

Opinions about MS differed in the village. Some men felt that they had done some good work with MDMs but 'no one has done anything special' (FGD with men, 26 March 2017). This was sharply contrasted by other villagers who recalled that the *sangha* women had organised cleanliness campaigns, constructed toilets and provided information to women regarding government projects, like health, education and scholarship. One of the men also recalled that '40–45 women used to gather for Mahila Samakhya meetings, 'They sometimes would organise meetings in hot summer afternoons and some times in the evening, but meetings were very regular' (FGD with men, 26 March 2017).

They also admitted that they would pass comments on the 'women with bags' but the women persisted. Another recalled that 'women used to sing, would do role plays and discuss through those activities'. One man said that a lot of the initial hesitation had to do with tradition. He said, 'People's behaviour depends on their thinking and the purdah system is an age-old tradition. That is the reason women were being pressurised as most of the men wanted to keep women behind veils. When women started to go out for meetings, people commented on the women and even tried to disrupt Mahila Samakhya meetings' (FGD with men, 26 March 2017). Later, we found out that the man had actually been a champion of MS from the very beginning and had organised to ensure that MS had space for meetings.

The majority of the village turned slightly favourable towards the women after they realised that there were financial gains that women were incurring due to the informal savings and loans that MS was organising. One participant told us that 'after joining MS most of the women started saving money and helped their families with loans' (FGD with men, 26 March 2017). They said that because of MS, a number of NGOs and banks started giving loans

to women in the village and even after MS has been shut down, they continue to do so.

This understanding of what MS had done in the village did not fully percolate down to the younger generation. Most of the boys and girls that we spoke to did not seem to know a lot of the MS activities in the village, even though the mothers of at least two of the children were part of the *sangha*. One of the boys (whose mother was a *sangha* member) pointed to Meera Devi (standing close to the group) and told us that ‘initially, she had to face a lot of opposition from people, but she kept working in a focused way. Later, some of the women left MS, but some of them kept working and achieved a lot’ (FGD with boys, 27 March 2017).

Two of them, then, recalled Meera Devi teaching them in their childhood. When prompted, one boy said that MS had worked for girl’s health and had worked closely with schools. The girls that we spoke to knew even less about MS in their village. They told us that they heard about it but didn’t really know what it was. One girl ventured and said that ‘it’s a committee which works for the development of the village and tells women to unite to develop the village. It had also started a campaign for prohibition,’ she added (FGD with girls, 25 March 2017). When asked more about it, they said that ‘these women raise slogans. Initially they had also made a group, but village women didn’t support it’ (FGD with girls, 25 March 2017). None of them had heard or participated in a *Kishori Manch*.

Despite the fact that there appeared to be a generational gap in knowledge related to MS and its activities, it was clear to us from our interactions with the village that MS had brought about a few changes in the village. One prominent example was mentioned by the girls – the campaign for prohibition. This campaign had also simultaneously tackled corruption in the village. As a man told us, ‘When women started campaigning for liquor prohibition, facts were revealed that men used to spend grants from Indira Awaas projects on alcohol. That was the reason government began to grant money to women only’ (FGD with men, 26 March 2017).

Apart from this, the other major improvements in the village attributed to MS were in the arena of education and political

participation. For example, some *sangha* women told us that the *Musaharitolas* were resistant to any kind of 'governmental' venture and it took them a lot of time to gain their trust. They told us that the achievement that they were most proud of was that MS had finally facilitated the process of ensuring that children from the *Musaharitolas* were attending schools. Additionally, through their intense lobbying efforts at the school and at the block levels, almost all of the children were enrolled in schools and 50 girls of the village were going to college in a nearby town.

5.6.3. *Politics of participation*

With regards to political participation, *sangha* women were first encouraged to get information regarding government schemes go to the blocks and represent their interests. When we spoke to the ward members, they told us that they knew that entering politics would be difficult and that the people were quite corrupt. But a number of their families and friends wanted them to join as they had gained so much knowledge after working with MS, they were qualified to be ward members. One of the women was encouraged to stand against the present *mukhiya* but she felt 'I cannot use unfair means to win the election as people buy votes to win even in Panchayat elections' (FGD with ward members, 28 March 2017). Women opted to contest for positions that they felt they could win without having to compromise any of their stated ideals.

When we asked Veena Devi about her journey to being the *sarpanch*, she told us that the reason was very simple: the seat of the *sarpanch* was allocated to a Scheduled Caste woman. When the seat opened up, her family advised her to contest the election. MS also supported this move and lobbied for many votes and she has kept the seat for three consecutive terms. In the beginning, she was hesitant because she felt she couldn't abandon her family for politics. But then she said, 'Everybody wanted me to go ahead and I, also thought that if I could go for the literacy mission leaving my family behind, then why not I could work as a *sarpanch*. Poor people have to work hard to earn some money for their families'. (Interview, 18 March 2017). It was clear that given the limited means of the women, they strategised around their political involvement. For example,

two women from the same *sangha* were interested in running for the *sarpanch* post in their village. Instead of having the two women run against each other, one of the women decided that she would run for the post of ward member instead, so that both the women could be part of the governing process in the village. Additionally, they used their social influence to ensure that members who already served a term did not run again, so that new members might have the opportunity to be part of the political process. This way, women in the *sangha* were able to run unopposed, so that they did not have to spend money on campaigning. When women did campaign, they did so on their own, including filing their own paperwork for eligibility etc. All the ward members told us that they were very confident of their abilities to do their job and felt particularly contemptuous of the women whose husbands showed up to do their work.

Despite the confidence, women had a hard time dealing with the political machinery in their *panchayat*. For example, one of the women told us that they had done a lot of work for her ward, including obtaining job and BPL cards, etc., but could never build drains or roads in her village. After trying for a long time, she was able to requisition two hand pumps for her ward. All the ward members as well as the *sarpanch* felt that the *mukhiyapati* (the husband of the *mukhiya*) and other male members did not take the women seriously. Even though they attended the meetings religiously, they were seen as intruders. Because these women took their jobs seriously, the male members also reacted negatively as there were pressures on them to do so.

One of the ways that MS women tried to deal with this problem was by ensuring that they organised meetings for all the ward members to discuss their problems. One of the ward members told us that she had ‘learned the concept of unity from MS and now want to work similarly in my present assignment. The rest of the members are convinced with my approach and they all have constituted a committee of their own to work in the desired direction’ (FGD with ward members, 28 March 2017). The purpose of the committee was to ensure that all the ward members are active in their roles. ‘If a member does not attend the meeting, then she/he can be fined with Rs 100. Previously this amount was Rs 50, but

now it has been increased,' said a ward member. (FGD with ward members, 28 March 2017).

Despite these measures and their very vocal presence in the panchayat meetings, the political culture of the panchayat was against the women. For example, Meera Devi had worked with the *mukhiyapati* for many years and with his father on many occasions. Still, she was subject to the vagaries of power that he exhibited. In a panchayat meeting we observed, she had come to collect disability benefits for her son. She has only received a portion of the benefits and had come to the *mukhiyapati* to get the rest of the funds. He very condescendingly told her that she should just be glad that she was getting anything at all and that pursuing the matter was of no use. When she came back to sit next to us, she was seething with anger and helplessness. She refused to go back to talk to him, even though other ward members requested her to do so. She told me that she didn't want to be seen going begging to him after he had dismissed her so contemptuously. She told us, 'How is it justified to say things like others don't get that much and that I should be just grateful? Why? Why and whom should I be grateful for? It is something that the government is providing for my family and I have every right to use it.' (Participant observation, 20 March 2017). But even she knew that regardless of how unfair it was, she still had to get his signature to even approach the block office to get the benefits and she knew she would have to eventually talk to him to sign the papers.

Meera Devi was not the only person in the village who was bitter about the little progress they had made despite their presence in the *panchayat*. Many of the villagers told us that even though *mukhiya* seat was reserved for women, the *mukhiyapati* ran it as if it was his own personal fiefdom. This was particularly demoralising for many ward members because they felt this gave strength to the general feeling that women didn't work as well as men in the panchayat. Our conversations with the men confirmed this feeling. The only person that the men identified who was working well was Veena Devi. They said, 'Veena Devi was working with Mahila Samakhyas and that is the reason she visits village to village and is working properly. She is unlike other elected women' (FGD with men, 26 March 2017).

In turn, Veena Devi believes that reservation was key to ensuring that women have a greater role in politics. She feels that because of her position in the village, she is able to support women and they know where they could go to seek help in their crisis time. She said, 'I go to their homes to solve their problems' (Interview, 18 March 2017). She told us that during canvassing, she had to finish all her domestic chores and walk 15 kilometres daily with her children to connect with her constituents. Even Meera Devi told us that no one in her family objected to the job because 'my parents-in-law did not mind me doing anything as long as I did all the housework also' (Interview, 25 January 2017). Both the women view this as a marker of their dedication to their life of service. But it is equally a marker for the stability of gender roles and gender norms.

5.6.4. Gender roles

An important issue MS tried to tackle was related to gender roles and gender norms. Through the training that both the *sahayoginis* and the *sangha* women took, they were able to question and critique the fundamental concepts of gender discrimination. As we saw in the earlier sections, women in the *sangha* were able to reject a few ideas about what women could or could not do, in reference to their political activities. However, in other areas, they often reverted back to patriarchal frames. For example, over the course of the interview with Veena Devi, we asked her about her ambitions for her daughters. She told us that her two daughters can study 'until their honour was at stake' (Interview, 18 March 2017). When we asked what this 'honour' really means, she said that 'honour is not to make friendship with a boy or to love somebody' (Interview, 18 March 2017). She feels that she wants to have her daughters be teachers or nurses but that they should also get married.

We noticed these clear gender demarcations in the roles of and expectations from boys and girls in a meeting where education schemes were discussed in the Panchayat Bhavan. The behaviour of both boys and girls offered lesson in gender norms in that it was almost a clichéd display of female demureness and male aggression. During the information session, the girls were sitting in the room very demure and mostly quiet. The boys were right outside the room,

being aggressive and boisterous. When the forms for the scheme ran out, the girls murmured amongst themselves, while the boys went on an angry tirade. The girls were much more vocal and confident in all-woman company but they instantly clammed up and became passive in the presence of boys. Given that the larger social construct of gender was defined along these traditional patriarchal lines, it was not surprising that the young boys and girls had inculcated these values and echoed them when it came to the prescribed gender roles for both girls and boys.

When we talked to girls about their mobility, they told us that they sometimes go out to meet friends but this was not always possible. When asked whether they could go out alone in the village, they all looked uncomfortable and did not answer the question. When asked whether there were any particular places that they were barred from going, they said no. But after a short pause, one girl told us that girls cannot go to the place where boys were going to study for the quiz. When asked why, one said, 'It is not a city where you can do whatever you want as people are concerned for each other. Everyone keeps an eye on a girl: where she is going, with whom she is going, nobody observes these things in a city but here they do' (FGD with girls, 25 March 2017).

The boys in the village, in a separate conversation, told us that the girls' quizzes were conducted in a different place because families didn't want to send their daughters to the same place as the boys. Before, the girls were not studying as there was no suitable place for them. Once they found the place, the girls were able to study. When asked why this was the case, one told us, 'After a certain age, girls and boys cannot interact with each other in the village' (FGD with boys, 27 March 2017). Someone also suggested that girls are not allowed to be out after five in the evening, so the classes were also inconvenient for them. Boys openly admitted that apart from the obstacle of money, boys were free to go out and stay on their own, unlike the girls in their village.

This internalisation of different gender roles and rules was also evident in other areas. When girls were asked about their job prospects, they said that they wanted to get good jobs and study further but the prospect of marriage was hindering. One said that

‘People don’t want girls to study and girls get married in the young age of 15–16 years’ (FGD with girls, 25 March 2017). Another girl said that she does not want to get married and has dreams to study further but it does not seem possible. They also felt it was a bit unfair that ‘boys have a say in selecting their partners. Girls are forced to marry early’ (FGD with girls, 25 March 2017). As evidenced in our earlier sections, girls also understood that their parents were strategizing around their dowry compared to their studies when allocating their limited financial resources.

Boys too attested that girls are studying but that ‘marriage was the only destination for them and they were not getting higher education. Girls are interested in getting employment and want to do some job and that is the reason that now they continue their studies even after the marriage and also appear for competitive examinations’ (FGD with boys, 27 March 2017). Two of the boys felt that women should get jobs. Yet they were of the consensus that even if she has a job, she should have time for her family and children. Women do all the household work including cooking. Working in fields, looking after cattle and other outside jobs are men’s responsibility (FGD with boys, 27 March 2017). The origin of these stable and entrenched gender roles, as one can see from the previous discussion, is heavily grounded in the patriarchal family, the narratives of which were hard for even MS women to resist.

5.6.5. Family dynamics

As mentioned earlier, most of the girls were very clear that cooking or cleaning was not the domain of their brothers and fathers and that there was a lot of social ostracism when it came to men cooking or doing any household tasks. This meant that girls often had to do a lot of household chores, both in the morning and in the night. While they did not do any farming themselves, they helped their mothers out in the household when the mothers went out to work. Even men were in agreement regarding the division of labour within the household: ‘Men even make cow dung cakes in their houses but social norms say that girls should learn cooking and boys should go out to study and to do business or farming’ (FGD with men, 26 March 2017).

While girls did not always like it, they also professed an acceptance of their status quo. For example, we asked them to tell us a little bit about their own ambitions. While most of the girls told us that they wanted to study and get jobs (given they were writing the government exams), they also felt reconciled to the idea that they are most likely to get married before they can do both. When asked about whether they could choose to marry on their own, or marry for 'love', one girl responded with 'What is the use of love when you cannot marry the person?' Another said, 'If a girl decides to marry by herself, then family would not support her in the time of crisis, but if she marries with a boy of their choice and something goes wrong then family says that it's your luck' (FGD with girls, 25 March 2017). While all the girls laughed, it was clear that they understood that the choices in terms of marriage, education and career were limited and they felt that it was only luck that determined the way in which they were to live their lives.

The boys in the group seemed a bit more amenable to their future wives holding jobs but were very specific with regards to the suitability of these jobs. When asked about what they would want in their future partners, the boys said that they wanted their wives to be educated so they would 'allow' them to continue their studies. They felt that *jobs in schools as teacher or in banking sector are suitable for women. Railway and police jobs are not apt for women as they won't get enough time to look after home and family* (FGD with boys, 27 March 2017).

The men appeared to echo these sentiments but had clearer reasons for barring women from pursuing careers. They felt that there were primarily three reasons for which education was acceptable for girls but jobs were not. One was that they felt financially empowered women often dictated the terms of the conversation, which was not acceptable in families. The second was that they felt women would take away men's jobs. The third was mentioned in passing but was perhaps the most significant – they felt that women who come in contact with men would start illicit relationships and earn bad names for their families. Girls were married off at an early age to fend off any threats to their 'family honour'.

This question of 'honour' was central to the conversations around girls and their social, economic and physical mobility. Almost all of

the people we interviewed professed that apart from the physical differences between men and women, women could do anything that they wanted to do. But if we scratch the surface of that statement, qualifications quickly follow. For example, when we were talking to the men in the village, they told us that ‘there is only one obstacle in letting [children] study and that obstacle is money constraints and, in the case of girls, one more obstacle is the fear of disgrace in society’ (FGD with men, 26 March 2017).

Even in this context, Meera Devi feels that there is hope for things to change. She feels that the children of MS women feel that their mothers are doing something special and it does inspire them. She added, ‘Girls have changed a lot. Now they go for coaching. Discrimination between girls and boys does not exist now. Both of them are served the same food. Their lifestyle has changed. Girls are wearing jeans now and love marriages are being accepted. Inter-caste and inter-religion marriages are heard of now’ (Interview, 25 January 2017). She personally feels that girls should marry who they want to and feel happy and happily endorses that her son should find a girl himself. In fact, she feels that women and men should have equal rights and control over money. She feels that having money in one’s hand is very important for the self-confidence of women. ‘If I don’t have my own money than I would have to ask for everything. If I have money, then I can take my own decisions.’ (Interview, 25 January 2017).

For any kind of social change to occur, it is important to understand and internalise these ideologies of equality and independence. As Meera Devi herself indicated to us, sometimes holding these ideals are harder in the face of institutional structures. This is why the women devised strategies and engaged in negotiations with power structures to create small transformations that pushed the process of empowerment further.

5.6.6. Personal transformations

Meera Devi told us that even though things are hard for her financially, she feels that she made some impact through her work. She feels that women have their own identity now. They were actively participating in decision-making within the household. Young people

also understand the importance of the girl child and are starting to feel that girls can support them in their old age.

When asked about what she found the most fulfilling about her work, she said that the tactics that she used to attract women had been very useful and creative. She would start singing in the meetings and women would also want to sing. She taught all the women songs and through these songs, they would start discussing the troubles that they faced. She has also trained all the women in various livelihood options. For example, she conducted training workshops for making detergent, lac bangles, blue liquid used for white clothes, *bindis*, jute floor mats and mats. Women were also provided training for mushroom farming and compost manure, etc. Most training would be held at the district and village levels. There was emphasis on collective employment, and therefore, the *sanghas* had collectively done farming on leased land. But it did not continue.

Even though she was bitter about the way the federations were running and that Jeevika was taking credit for all the work that MS was doing, she was proud of her work. She felt that that even after the breakdown of the programme and the savings groups, women were still saving in other programmes like Jeevika and are in control of their money. She strongly feels that this knowledge that they gained through MS cannot now be taken back.

These small achievements will remain regardless of whether or not MS exists. Currently, she was getting very little salary working in Jeevika and given she had not received much salary in MS, she had very little savings and her economic condition was poor. She is currently surviving with the support of her marital family. But she does not regret working in MS. Her family and community respect her and she feels that the village has also changed because of the work that she has done over the years.

Veena Devi also feels that she has learned a lot in MS. She attributes her ability to do her job to MS. She told us that she was considered so good at her job that for subsequent elections, even though other women had thought of entering the race, they dropped out because they didn't want to waste their money. 'When I contested for this seat in first two elections, this seat was reserved for women

but in 2016 it has been converted into a general seat and I still won the election,' she said (Interview, 18 March 2017).

She feels her role is very important as it allows her to influence change in the villages. For example, through the village courts (*Gram Kachahri*), arbitration can be done at the village level and this has also been used as a way to fund the panchayats. As *sarpanch*, she is part of the *Gram Kachahri* and oversees cases of domestic violence, property disputes and other village conflicts and feels that she is able to do so because of the respect afforded to her. Although she sometimes resents that her husband is addressed as *sarpanch*, she told us, 'I do all my work myself. As I don't have much education, I have to take the help of my younger brother-in-law, who is a B.Ed., sometimes. But nobody goes to village court with me' (Interview, 18 March 2017).

Even the women who became ward members feel that the 'MS has played a vital role in our political participation. We used to get a lot of information during MS days which helped and guided us in our work as ward members, i.e., organising *gram sabha* meetings' (FGD with ward members, 28 March 2017). They strongly feel that 'participation of women effects all and particularly women. A woman who has been elected gets recognition and respect in her home, in her village and in the society. Other women feel comfortable discussing her problems with a woman' (FGD with ward members, 28 March 2017).

Moreover, it was important to be part of the political process because she will be able to understand other aspects of the village as well. They felt that 'participation of the woman in politics would help in giving right place to women's issues in politics. When she interacts with national and international issues, then it will expand her boundaries. She will create her own perspective and participate in decision-making with her vision and better understanding' (FGD with ward members, 28 March 2017).

Even though all of the women faced tremendous barriers in changing the political landscape of their village, they also simultaneously felt that they have been able to be self-confident and fearless in their own lives. They also feel that this inspires other women, and, hopefully, that will bring about the changes

that they envision for their village. The women we spoke to, were clearly well aware of the ways in which power acted against them but as observed in the meetings and from their conversations, we also observed that they were also aware of the ways to subvert this power to ensure that it is used to fulfil their needs and to change the current social landscape.

5.7. An intricate web

*We are women of Bharat
Not flowers but flames
Without a woman's help, every change is partial
Don't imagine that we have lost as usual
The flame is still alive under the cinders*

This song sung by MS women in meetings embodies the spirit and essence of the MS journey. As we see in this chapter, the story of MS and empowerment is not a simple linear path. Instead, empowerment in the MS framework is a constant re-imagining of a different world than the one that women currently inhabit. The song also captures the philosophy of MS, the obstacles that women faced *and* the resilience of the women. The MS process, in a sense, allowed for a space so that a multiplicity of voices with their varied positions of power and interests could emerge. It stemmed from the core belief that when individuals have had a long history of oppression and silencing, it is important to provide spaces to find their voice (even if it is discordant) and articulate their needs.

What was first established in this space was the central learning that women do not become economically and socially mobile just because they have money in their hands (Pearson n.d.). It requires a more holistic approach that engages with the structures of informal employment, care work, education and access to justice mechanisms and systems, along with good governance. In fact, social capital by way of building social relationships of trust and reciprocity are central for any claims of social and economic mobility (Lowndes 2003). It enhances individuals' capacity to join in solidarity to resolve common problems that the individuals may not be able to

resolve by themselves. The question, therefore, is not only then about only about the 'achievement' of women's empowerment but how that process unfolds.

Other research on similar programmes has also questioned the singular narrative of empowerment and considered the possibility of different forms of regressive practices gaining a foothold in the wake of empowerment efforts (Devika and Thampi 2007). As we saw in our village study, who participates and the manner in which they participate is a shifting combination of empowerment efforts made by MS, women's own resolve, supportive family networks as well as regressive patriarchal structures and social norms. Social action, therefore, is rarely smooth, with different actors with different stakes constantly having to make sense of and negotiate the power plays between social narratives and social action.

One of the problems that have been documented in this chapter is the disjuncture between smooth narratives of MS empowerment and the jaggedness of their experience. Even though women were living a negotiated existence between their own personal confidence and self-worth and the impositions laid on by the patriarchal structures around them, they did not openly acknowledge it. They often became defensive when these discrepancies were pointed out. The women appeared to be comfortable with the narrative of resistance but not that of negotiation. For example, in dealing with the *mukhiyapati* in the panchayat meeting, almost all of the ward members, including Meera Devi, did not want to admit to the vulnerability of their positions in dealing with the power structures of the panchayat. They did not want to acknowledge (perhaps to us) that it was a necessary step in dealing and negotiating with these stable institutions.

Moreover, we found that while women informally admitted having to consider caste and family dynamics in relation to their voting choices and political participation, they were reluctant to do so publicly. So also were their attitudes towards the shifting cultures within MS. For example, when educational qualifications started to be added to the hiring and promotional process of MS, some women who were educated felt the impetus to gain further education to be eligible for promotions. At the same time, other

women who did not have the social capital to engage in this process were invariably left behind. This emphasis on the markers of education, therefore, changed the working culture of MS to shift more power to the women who were more educated and often upper class. While many women spoke bitterly about this transition, there were only a few times in the federation meetings that we saw this conflict raised as an issue.

This shift in the MS culture, otherwise termed as the 'bureaucratisation of empowerment' (Sharma 2008: 193), invariably lead to the reduction of most empowerment ideals into the markers of empowerment. This means that literacy becomes a mode of measurement rather than knowledge. Mobility became a marker of empowerment instead of freedom from social norms. We see this dynamic play out especially in relation to role expectations with regards to their daughters. While women worked hard and were successful in changing the social discourse on education, work, gender violence and political participation (to a large degree), the underlying social roles and structures determining gendered behaviour among the younger generations remained unchallenged.

This might be because women internalised the philosophies of MS in different ways and created their own versions of concretising the empowerment narratives they had heard. Their personal stories and histories, therefore, became the natural foil and filter through which these empowerment narratives were internalised and externalised. We noticed that a number of women were convinced of the ideals and ideologies of MS and could neatly reproduce it for us as Sharma (2008) would suggest, performed it for us. However, the patriarchal constraints on their lives, on their families and in their communities did not always allow them to reconcile their ideals with their lives. While it might be tempting to note these blind spots and negotiated stances as regressions, we argue that the very process of MS, in its methods, allows for these departures. The idea of MS is to be able to provide women 'the analytical capacity and courage to question unjust practices' (Kabeer 2005: 24) and to keep creating 'alternative political cultures and participatory institutions and practices' (Fischer 2006: 20) that can create long-term sustainability of an empowering ideology.

If we believe that empowerment is not a linear process, then the process itself or the shifting interests of the community cannot be known *a priori*. It can only emerge as part of the interactions with social norms, social constructions and social institutions around them. Even needs of the community then are ‘discursively produced by actual political struggles over how needs are to be defined’ (Marx Ferree and McClurg 2004: 580). By this, we mean that the needs of the communities or even the *sangha* are not always an emergent quality of the *sangha* but also produced through a political struggle within the *sangha* and created against a particular context. These negotiations and struggles to name the needs of the *sangha* have to be taken into consideration when we try to understand the empowerment process.

We have already established that empowerment is not merely a process that moves women from point a to point b. It is the material manifestation of relentless negotiations by women, their families and their communities that are constantly re-created and examined, as they try to grapple with various power structures. So, empowerment far from the idealised form of expanding the social worlds of women is centrally about the process of women’s struggle to change their individual, family, and community circumstances. Essentially, we have to be tentative about the conclusions that we draw regarding the idea of ‘creating empowerment outcomes’, especially when we examine the complexity of the social worlds that we engage in and the complexity of women themselves.

It is clear from our qualitative data that women, in any empowerment programme, cannot be treated or considered as a singular whole. Not all of them are equally ‘oppressed’; they have differences and conflicts with each other and despite wanting women’s equality in principle, might still hold onto certain patriarchal oppressive traditions.

In its design, MS was able to find space for this diversity, while not losing the larger narrative of empowerment. In fact, when we examine the narratives of MS at the time of closure, we find that there are certain ways in which these nostalgic memories and history of social action allowed women to reinforce and strengthen their current feelings of empowerment. We also saw that women

are active participants in their own depiction of themselves and are clearly invested in the creation of an emancipatory trajectory that MS has provided them.

The question for the future, therefore, rests on the interaction between institutional structures and women's agency without losing sight of both. Agency might be restricted by social structure but is not bound by it (Risman, 2004). In fact, the patriarchal structure itself can be transformed by agency to create alternate ways of doing things and alternate ways of being. As depicted in the song at the beginning of this section, we argue that as MS women continue to be glowing embers under the ashes and engage in the MS process and methods, they are likely to actively create new flames and new realities that have the potential for transforming these structural institutions.

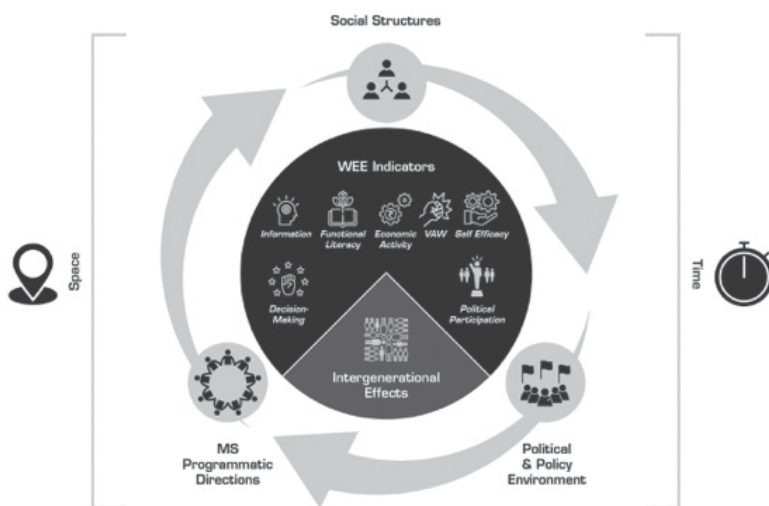
6 Conclusion

Lessons for understanding pathways to women's empowerment

We had set out to answer a few research questions as outlined in the first chapter. Our research helped us answer most, but it has also thrown up new questions that need to be discussed and explored further through a variety of means as we go along. This chapter summarises the major conclusions and lessons that emerge from the study and analyses how various external and internal factors come to play in the journey towards women's empowerment in a deeply patriarchal society operating through a democratic polity.

Figure 6.1 depicts our analytical framework of research. We first examined the effects of MS on the economic empowerment of *sangha* women who collectivised as part of the MS programmatic design and efforts in three districts: Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar in Bihar. These districts are different from each other in locational features and development indicators and MS had entered these three districts in different phases: Muzaffarpur in 1993, Kaimur in 2001 and Katihar in 2011. These characteristics allowed us to understand the effects with respect to space and time. Based largely on the feminist approach, MS was designed as a programme of education for women's equality and we first examined the extent of MS effects by constructing a composite economic empowerment index, as explained and discussed in Chapter 3.

Figure 6.1: Framework of Analysis



Source: Authors conceptualization.

The index was based on seven measures (refer to Figure 1.6 in Chapter 1) identified by taking the MS philosophy, approach and design into account. We then explored women's responses regarding their children's education and marriage status to understand the inter-generational effect of MS, which we have presented and discussed in Chapter 4. We also made use of qualitative data emanating through ethnography to explain and understand these effects better in these two chapters.

We then argue that the potential of MS or a programme such as MS is highly influenced by (i) social structures and processes (ii) political and policy environment and (iii) internal programme dynamics and choices, as these determine the functioning and thrust of the programme itself to a great extent. Chapter 5 delves deeper into processes and pathways of change as well as the negotiations and contestations that exist in real lives, especially in view of the unfailing omnipresence of social structures and institutions such as caste and marriage. Here, in this chapter, before making final conclusions, we map out the political and policy environment, as well as MS's internal shifts over time and space, to examine the ways

in which these could have influenced the functioning and in turn the effect of MS on women's economic empowerment.

The chapter is divided into two major sections. The first section of the chapter deals with 'micro' level changes: it summarises the MS effects on women's economic empowerment and discusses factors that could have influenced the outcomes: both external and internal. The external here refers to the larger policy directions and political environment while the internal refers to the programmatic approach and processes. The second section moves on to discuss the 'macro' level changes using the MS experiences: what are the best approaches to change deep-rooted social norms, derived through powerful institutions such as patriarchy, through public policy intervention? Is there a clear and straight answer or does it remain hazy? What are the lessons learnt from the MS experience in terms of policy design, scale, pace and processes? What are the potentials and what are the constraints of realising a radical feminist philosophy of social change into an implementable policy frame in a democratic polity? Finally, the chapter concludes with lessons and answers that are clear while flagging questions that remain unanswered.

6.1. MS effect on women's economic empowerment: Understanding internal and external influences

6.1.1. *MS effects: A recap*

At first blush, what emerges is that MS exposure led to a high and significant difference in the attainment of economic empowerment in all three districts. This is because MS women reported significantly higher levels of empowerment as compared to non-MS women in all three districts after controlling for all other possible and potential differences between the MS and non-MS populations. However, the extent of difference in MS and non-MS women seen in the three districts varied. The difference was the highest at 28 percentage points on the Composite Economic Empowerment Index relative to non-MS respondents for Kaimur (15 years of programme exposure), followed by a 17-percentage points difference between MS and non-MS in Muzaffarpur with longest programme exposure (23

years) and a 14-percentage points difference in the newest district in our sample, Katihar.¹

If we plot these results we get a concave, or an inverted U-shaped curve, indicating a potential inference that the MS effect size is maximum for the medium run exposure. This suggests that the effects are positive but low in the short run (say, five to six years), becomes higher in the medium run (suggesting that 10–15 years is perhaps an optimal or highest desirable level of exposure) and then tapers off downwards, suggesting that continued presence beyond one and a half decade does not add much value; rather it can be counterproductive. While this can be a valid inference, we need to be cautious in this case as this is not a longitudinal study of the same set of women in the same locations. A discussion of the various external factors would help in better understanding the estimated effect of MS and we examine those in the following subsections. However, there still remains a case for surmising that too short an exposure can prevent effects from taking roots but this too can be said with certainty only when a longitudinal study is carried out using panel data.

Another dimension gets added to this when the composite index is deconstructed into individual measures. MS effect is observed to be greater and consistently positive in all three districts for awareness of laws and entitlements regarding employment and age of marriage relative to the other individual measures. This perhaps indicates that this effect was gained and retained even with short exposure, as evidenced by positive and significant effect in Katihar. Retention also implies that the efforts to gain new information about laws and entitlements have been active in districts such as Muzaffarpur, as our survey questions pertained more to recent, rights-based legal entitlements that came into existence in the previous ten years. However, we find that on an average, a MS woman is more likely to be aware of her rights and entitlements than her counterparts in all three districts but the difference is the highest for Kaimur. This indicates that although the effect can be high in the short period of four to five years, it has much higher potential with an exposure period of 10–15 years.

¹ Please refer to Chapter 3 for details of estimations.

This inference or conjecture remains largely true for one other measure: participation in economic activities. The measure of economic activities included participation in savings and in paid employment and the difference between MS and non-MS was the highest for Kaimur, followed by Katihar, the newest one, the difference being insignificant in the oldest district, Muzaffarpur. Although this may seem to be a little puzzling at first instance, analysis shows that both internal programmatic priorities and external environment contextualises such results.

The pattern changes slightly in the case of decision-making where the difference between MS and non-MS is the highest for Katihar, closely followed by Kaimur and the lowest for Muzaffarpur. In case of decision-making, the measure tried to assess if the woman had any role in deciding about four things: her own labour force participation, health care for self, mobility within and outside the village and spending the money that she had earned. This difference is significant for all constituents except decisions about expenditure in Kaimur.

In Muzaffarpur, the results are not statistically significant for any of the constituents other than healthcare for the self. In Katihar, with five years of exposure to MS, we observe a significant and relatively higher effect of MS on variables related to labour force participation, health decisions for the self and mobility within the village. On the whole, although an average MS member, irrespective of the length of exposure to the programme, is more likely to take or participate in decision-making process for matters related to her own participation in economic activity, such as labour force participation, mobility and her own health care, there is no significant difference when it comes to control over the issue of spending the money. This result, however, also needs to be seen from the perspective that these women come from poorest strata of the society and they do not necessarily have much choice in terms of what to spend their money on; almost their entire earnings going meeting basic needs and, therefore, absence of control over spending may not be a reflection of the complete absence of control over spending.

This pattern for self-efficacy remains almost the same as seen for the measure of decision-making. Women with MS exposure

are significantly more likely to have greater self-confidence and better self-image as compared to those with no exposure in Kaimur and Katihar, this difference not being significant in Muzaffarpur. However, the scores for MS women are significantly higher for Muzaffarpur as compared to their counterparts in other two districts. This shows that though MS women in Muzaffarpur are not much above the non-MS in their own district, they are likely to be more confident than MS women in the two other districts. While the fact that in Muzaffarpur, the MS women were older as compared to non-MS women and this could have influenced the result to an extent, external factors too could have played a role, especially as one observes high scores for both MS and non-MS in Muzaffarpur.

In case of political participation and attitude towards violence against women, the MS effects are higher for Muzaffarpur as compared to Katihar and Kaimur. Although there is no significant difference between MS and non-MS in term of voting in state elections in any district, differences are present when it comes to discussing the candidate to vote for in state elections and this difference becomes highly significant when it comes to participating in *gram sabha* meetings. What is important here is that the probability of participation in *gram sabha* meetings is so low for non-MS women that the difference between MS and non-MS becomes very high and it is the highest in Muzaffarpur.² However, we do not observe statistically significant difference when it comes to voicing their concerns at *gram sabha* meetings.

What this pattern of participation tells us is that political participation itself is a layered term where voting, discussions about voting, attendance and speaking are not only different from each other but women's participation (or lack of it) in these are also guided by tensions of numbers and norms. Where numbers become important, such as in voting, most women vote; whether they themselves are deciding who to vote for is another matter. MS is enabling women to discuss the candidates and also encouraging

² As a recollection, the probability of MS members, on average, attending *gram sabha* meetings is about six per cent relative to three per cent in Muzaffarpur; about 10 per cent and 2 per cent in Kaimur, and about 21 per cent and 11 per cent in Katihar for MS and non-MS respectively.

them to participate physically in meetings but this is not necessarily always translating into an independent voice in general. Although there exist a number of cases, as discussed earlier, of MS women actively voicing their concerns either as ward members or as general citizens, their number is obviously not as large and, therefore, the effect not high in the quantitative analyses.

The layered nature of these dimensions becomes even clearer in case of attitude towards VAW. While a significantly higher number of women exposed to MS consider violence against women unacceptable, the difference is highest for Muzaffarpur followed by Kaimur and Katihar, perhaps revealing that it requires longer engagement to internalise such notions in a highly patriarchal society. However, what is more important is that even with MS exposure, women are not unequivocal in their position. A good proportion of women who consider VAW unjustified in cases of bad cooking or for stepping out without asking the husband or joining the labour force without his permission consider violence justified in particular circumstances such as a woman going for an abortion without her husband's consent or when the husband suspects infidelity. Nevertheless, the fact remains that MS was instrumental in making a large number of women aware of the power equations within familial relationships and enabled them to question their experience of violence in relation to certain aspects of independent decision-making even though it could not fully penetrate the patriarchal socialisation in relation to control over their own bodies, an aspect of patriarchy that has remained largely invincible almost universally.

MS engaged with literacy and education most significantly not only through collectivisation but also through specific institutions such as JKs and MSKs but its effect on functional literacy, as defined and observed in the quantitative analysis, is not necessarily as high as observed for other dimensions. The ability to speak, read and write in Hindi, the state's main language, is significantly higher for MS women in Muzaffarpur and Kaimur but Katihar shows an opposite association. While we would discuss the possible reasons a little later, it is important to highlight how gains in literacy played an important role in the changing self-image of women for whom it was a major symbol of pride and achievement. This pride is

also clearly seen when it comes to inter-generational gains in the education of daughters.

The analysis of inter-generational gains shows that MS had positive and significant effect on the continuation of girls' education but it not as widespread when it comes to practices such as early marriage or dowry. Although many women associated with MS fought for postponing their own or their daughter's marriages, they succeeded at most only in postponing the marriage by a year or two, not impacting the prevalence of child marriage in any significant manner. The inevitability of marriage as the path for a girl also remained as deeply entrenched despite clear shifts in educational aspirations for daughters. Women associated with MS wanted their daughters to first educate themselves and then get married but not necessarily first educate themselves and then decide whether or not they wanted to get married.

The analysis also made it clear that MS effects are not the results of a linear process; MS worked with the tools and mechanisms of collectivisation and holistic education to generate social consciousness among women who would then bring a transformation in gender relations, social norms and practices and economic spaces. This is a far more complex process than a standard policy intervention in the form of service delivery. The process of change was also marked by a continuous process of negotiation and sometimes also by alternate processes of progress and regression. Both kinds of women, those who were to be the agents of change – the *sahayoginis* and other MS resource persons – and those who were to be the subject of change – the *sangha* members – had been continuously engaged in a process within as well as outside the household of widening their own freedoms while also not completely disturbing the institutions of marriage and family. Also, these negotiations were also not always external; women were also negotiating with themselves as many of these ideas were convincing yet too radical and contrary to what they had grown up with.

Further, the MS programme itself also operated as part of the state structure and had been continuously negotiating its own space as a flexible and process-based programme within a large and rigid bureaucracy. This also meant that larger policy frameworks and

directions often influenced MS processes and priorities. Any shift in policy focus and political environment also influences the focus of already existing schemes even though the basic programmatic designs remain unchanged. Is it possible that MS's priorities and focus also shifted from one district to another given that it entered those at different points of time and the already existing situation in terms of development indicators also varied from one place to the other? In the following section, we examine the shifts in MS design, structure, processes and priorities in Bihar as it grew and try to see if there is any association with the effects that we see in the three districts.

6.1.2. External Environment: An analysis of policy and political directions

We argue that the effects of any policy or programmatic intervention cannot be understood fully without analysing the political, policy and locational contexts. The estimation of effects and understanding of processes help us in quantifying and also deepening the potential of such interventions whereas an analysis of contexts in terms of space: where the intervention was located, and time: when it was being implemented, help in understanding the possible barriers and potential for replicability for policy emulation elsewhere. While issues such as remoteness, distance from the centre of power (e.g., the state's capital, Patna) or existing development indicators become important from the perspective of space, the issues of programmatic approach and focus as well as the changes in the wider policy directions and political environment become important from the perspective of time. India witnessed significant policy shifts and Bihar saw new political developments during the last decade of 1990s and early years of this century. In this section, we analyse these developments and examine their possible linkages with MS priorities in different districts. We start by understanding the environment in which MS was conceptualised in the 1980s. In our analysis, we deliberately go beyond the policies dealing with only education or women to emphasise the point that public programmes in these sectors also get influenced by wider political and economic shifts, and these linkages need to be understood better. For instance, MS's

effects in political participation discussed earlier can be understood better in the context of the Panchayati Raj Bill that was passed during that time through a national consultation process with active participation of civil society.

The 1980s, especially the second half of the decade, was a decade of renewed hope and aspiration for civil society in India. Rajiv Gandhi, who became Prime Minister in 1984 after a landslide victory of Indian National Congress following the tragic death of his mother Indira Gandhi, took a number of bold steps in the areas of education and decentralised governance, especially in context of reviving and institutionalising the *panchayati raj* as the third level of governance in the entire country. Although the Panchayati Raj Act became a law in 1993, Rajiv Gandhi had tried to pass the bill in 1989 when it was defeated on the floor of Parliament. The new Congress government formed after Rajiv Gandhi's murder in 1991 finally passed the bill. Although the *panchayats* are still to find their feet as real third level of governance, at that point the step was viewed as radical and progressive, giving civil society the hopes of reviving the Gandhian idea of *gram swaraj* or village republics in a modern context.

This hope found its echo in the formulation of New Education Policy (NEP), 1986 and the subsequent Programme of Action (PoA), 1992, which saw unprecedented engagement of civil society organisations, grassroots activists, feminist groups and academics from across the country in a wide, democratic and consultative process. It is, therefore, not surprising that the chapter on Education for Equality in the new policy document (NEP, 1986) used a language of transformation and empowerment and not only of gender parity in education:

Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of woman. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-

makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and social engineering. The removal of women's illiteracy and obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in, elementary education will receive overriding priority, through provision of special support services, setting of time targets, and effective monitoring. Major emphasis will be laid on women's participation in vocational, technical and professional education at different levels. The policy of non-discrimination will be pursued vigorously to eliminate sex stereotyping in vocational and professional courses and to promote women's participation in non-traditional occupations, as well as in existing and emergent technologies.

(New Education Policy 1986, Part IV, <http://www.educationforallinindia.com/page53.html>)

Although the country faced economic as well as political crises at the beginning of 1990s, the NEP 1986, remained more or less committed to education for women's equality as before.

During the early days of the 1990s, the Gulf War led to an international oil crisis and the swelling of oil import bills, leading to a severe Balance of Payments crisis, combined with a large fiscal deficit. This resulted in the 1991 Indian economic crisis. However, the new Congress government that came in power with P V Narasimha Rao as Prime Minister brought the Programme of Action 1992 to enable the implementation of the NEP 1986, where the first chapter was on 'Education for Women's Equality'. This chapter embodies a lot of MS principles and philosophy already initiated as a small programme in 1989³.

The policy of economic liberalisation that ensued in response to the economic crisis also pushed the agenda of school education reforms, funded largely through external grants or soft loans, under the umbrella of social safety net. This led first to a number of state-specific education programmes in several states in the 1980s and 1990s followed by national programmes across the country in the

³ http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/POA_1992.pdf

mid-1990s. This included the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project (APPEP) funded by UK's Overseas Development Agency (UKODA), later renamed DFID (Department for International Development), Lok Jumbish in Rajasthan funded by Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Bihar Education Project (BEP) in Bihar, funded by UNICEF and Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Project funded by the World Bank in Uttar Pradesh. A few other programmes such as Shikshak Samakhya in Madhya Pradesh with UNICEF's support and Shikshakarmi in Rajasthan with the Swedish government's support attempted to address the issue of teacher shortage, classroom environment and teacher motivation. Finally, the multi-donor (the World Bank, European Union and DFID) supported programme named District Primary Education Project (DPEP) was started in 1994 with 42 districts in seven states and eventually covered more than 200 districts in the country, becoming one of the largest externally-funded social sector programme globally.

These programmes were different from the earlier schemes in one major way: they usually covered almost all, including the so-called soft, aspects of the chosen sector, e.g., primary or basic rather than just making provisions for certain inputs as was the case with earlier schemes, like Operation Blackboard where all schools were provided with certain teaching materials, equipment and teachers. These programmes were more flexible and allowed district or block-level planning and in that sense provided greater space for local priorities to be addressed. Despite this flexibility, these education programmes operated under defined boundaries and MS, funded under the DPEP umbrella in several states, at times faced this dilemma of maintaining the balance between the DPEP objectives of universal primary education and promoting gender parity and equality in education and its own agenda of women's empowerment of the most marginalised.

In Bihar, MS was launched as part of BEP in 1992–93. The objectives were defined in a manner that while focusing on education goals, it also incorporated the dimension of 'equal educational opportunity to adults and children belonging to the lower castes,

ethnic communities and the poorest sections of society',⁴ which helped in integrating MS within the BEP. However, when the BEP was merged with the DPEP in 1997, the objectives overlapped except for this one, as DPEP did not address the issue of adults at all⁵. While the DPEP supported MS in Bihar and also in several other states, the rationale came from the instrumentality of encouraging girls' education, especially those belonging to marginalised groups, to achieve gender and social equality in education participation. Till the time MS in Bihar remained with the BEP as part of the DPEP and formed its independent society in 2005, it faced pressures to function only as a gender unit of the DPEP and it is likely that this had some impact on MS priorities as well.

The political scenario at the national level also influenced these changes. The early years of the present century with the first Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in power were marked more by economic policies oriented to bring in greater fiscal discipline rather than by any major shift in social policy or programming. However, civil society movements and judicial activism did play a role in influencing some social policies with implications for the MS approach and programming.

One example is the Right to Food campaign that led to the landmark Supreme Court judgment in November 2001, where the court directed state governments to introduce cooked mid-day meals

⁴ More about BEP and their objectives here: <http://www.bepcssa.in/en/Components.php>

(i) Universalisation of Primary Education, viewed as a composite programme of access to primary education for all children up to 14 years of age, aimed at universal achievement at least of minimum levels of learning.

(ii) Orientation of the educational system so as to serve the objectives of equality for women and their empowerment.

(iii) Making necessary interventions to provide equal educational opportunity to adults and children belonging to the lower castes, ethnic communities and poorest sections of society.

Source: http://planningcommission.gov.in/reports/sereport/ser/bihsita/stdy_bihsita.pdf

⁵ More about DPEP here: <http://www.bepcssa.in/en/dpep.php>

in all government and government-assisted primary schools within six months. This led to all state governments eventually initiating mid-day meal (MDM) programmes and India's school mid-day meal programme becoming the largest nutrition initiative in the world. It also generated demand for jobs and public engagement. As we have already discussed in earlier chapters, MS *sangha* women saw opportunities and got associated with MDM management in schools, which also enabled greater engagement with school functioning in the long run.

The passing of a new Act in Bihar around this time, the Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti Act 2000, also facilitated the school engagement of MS women. This Act created a new, statutory school-level committee, known as Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti (VSS) that replaced the existing Village Management Committee (VEC), which used to be an executive body with nominated members. The VSS was to be constituted for each school separately – one each for primary, middle and high schools – and provided adequate representation to women and weaker sections of the community. This included nine guardian members elected by the *aam sabha* (general meeting), three non-guardian members elected by the *aam sabha*, two nominated members by the *mukhiya* of the village panchayat/chairman of the notified area committee/municipality/corporation and Headmaster/head teacher of the school, ex-officio member. It also reserved half of the membership for women. The Act was amended in 2007 and later in 2011 but maintained the 50 per cent reservation for women in all amendments.⁶ This definitely played a role in allowing MS women play a role in the school governance, as they were already used to being more mobile and vocal, and therefore, more likely to be elected.

The political environment in *Bihar* was also conducive to change. The extension of reservation of seats in higher education institutions and government jobs through implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission Report in the early 1990s by the short-lived non-Congress government for the middle caste communities, officially referred to as Other Backward

⁶ <http://www.bareactslive.com/BIH/BH213.HTM>

Classes (OBC), led to large scale protests by upper caste youth in the country.

This changed the nature of politics, making numerically strong middle castes an important political group in many parts of India, including Bihar. In 1990, the Janata Dal, led by Laloo Prasad Yadav, came to power and remained in power for three consecutive terms despite issues of corruption, court cases and intermittent President's rule. This ended decade of Indian National Congress's hold over Bihar politics. Starting his politics as part of the famous students' movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan, which had eventually led to the end of Congress rule in the Centre, Laloo had also become the symbol of self-respect for all non-upper caste groups.

Despite the fact that Congress had many leaders from different castes, people had started viewing it as an upper-caste-centric party, as all chief ministers between 1980 and 89 belonged to the upper castes. Although Laloo belonged to a middle caste – Yadav – which was not necessarily the poorest or the most marginalised caste, he symbolised the possibility of an alternative politics and renewed identity even for the most marginalised groups including Dalits and Muslims. This has often been identified as one major reason for his successive electoral wins (Kumar, Sanjeer Alam and Joshi 2008). This may have translated into a fertile ground for work with marginalised groups in that period in Bihar as in Laloo's rule people saw hope and possibility of challenging traditional caste relations despite failures of governance. MS would have benefitted from this as they were primarily working with Dalits and other most oppressed social groups at the grassroots.

Along with state-wide ventures to increase women's participation in political spaces accompanied by women-led initiatives, there was a shift in the kind of social and political discourse around women and the need to include women in the political and social arenas. We see some effect of this combined move with active representation of women in Panchayat bodies, especially in the Naxalite areas, during this time (Srivastava 2007). The Naxalite movement that spread from Bengal and had a stronghold in Bihar was partly a reflection of the massive historical forces of oppression faced by peasants, especially women, in Bihar (Sharma 2005).

In the 1990s, we see women participating in violent resistance by being part of the Naxalite factions but also trying to create their own organisations to work with the Naxalite factions to address the particular vulnerabilities faced by women in Dalit communities (Srivastava 2007). It is during this time that independent social movements such as Mazdoor Kisan Samiti was formed that demanded land rights to be under women instead of male or the family as a whole. Additionally, the All-India Progressive Women's Alliance (AIPWA) in 1994 which combined Marxist-Leninist beliefs with women's liberation in 1994 was also formed at the same time (Srivastava 2007). It is important to note that even when many of these movements were opposed to the government of the day, they supported MS in its operations at the grassroots.

The early 2000s also saw some changes in national politics. The NDA coming to power in 1998 at the centre started the era of coalition governments in India. The first United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by the Indian National Congress with the participation of the parliamentary Left parties came to in power in 2004 and stayed there for the period between 2004–14.

The first UPA term was distinctly marked by major shifts in social policies, as a number of rights-based laws were enacted with major implications for programmes such as MS. A new mechanism called National Advisory Council (NAC), chaired by the Congress president Sonia Gandhi and a number of members drawn from civil society, was formed to advise the prime minister on key policies in 2004. The NAC played a major role in the drafting and passing of a number of progressive acts passed by the UPA governments, including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2000), Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act (2005), Right to Information Act (2005), National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005), Right to Education Act (2009) and National Food Security Act (2013).

The better-known achievements of UPA: Right to Information Act, Employment Guarantee Act, Right to Education Act and Food Security Bill are also very important landmarks in giving justiciability to citizens' rights and converting somewhat opaque concept of rights into more real entitlements. The Right to Information Act

2005, made all public institutions accountable to maintain and share information with the public with some caveats; the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, which was later renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) 2005, was aimed at providing livelihood security to all households by ensuring at least 100 days of wage work every financial year. This was later changed to 120 days in general and 150 days in tribal areas. The scheme based on the Act also had special provisions to promote women's labour participation and protect their rights: one-third of the employment was reserved for women, equal wages ensured as also the provision for child care facilities at work sites. Studies have suggested that though there has been variability, in general, MGNREGA witnessed high participation of women⁷.

Given that MS entered Kaimur in 2001 and our study took place in 2016–17 and that the period has been full of policy initiatives that widened the rights of women and those coming from marginalised groups in particular, it is not surprising that this district shows the highest level of MS effects. It is obvious that MS would have taken full advantage of the prevalent political and policy environment where these new laws were subject to public discourse and would have given MS important tools to work with. In Katihar, while the effects were not as high as Kaimur perhaps because of the short period of MS exposure, it was still significant and the presence of these laws would have made the task that much simpler.

The Right To Education Act was particularly useful in Bihar as it was seen as having tremendous influence on the lives of girls in the state, with the number of girls not attending school reducing from over 20 per cent to 6 per cent by 2009 (Banerji, Challenging Bihar on

⁷ Khera and Nayak. 2009. 'Women Workers and Perceptions of the NREGA.' <http://www.epw.in/special-articles/women-workers-and-perceptions-national-rural-employment-guarantee-act.html>

Narayanan and Das. 2014. 'Women's participation and Rationing in NREGA.' <http://www.epw.in/special-articles/women-participation-and-rationing-employment-guarantee-scheme.html>

Coffey. 2013. 'Children's welfare and short-term migration from rural India.' *Journal of Development Studies*, 49(8).

Papp, J. 2012. 'Essays on India's Employment Guarantee'. Ph.D. thesis. Princeton: Princeton University.

Primary Education 2011). This is further corroborated by the NFHS report in 2015–16 (International Institute for Population Sciences [IIPS] and ICF 2017). The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005, amended the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 and expanded daughters' rights to inherited property. With this new Act, daughters had the same rights and same liabilities as sons in case of inherited property. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which became an Act in 2006, defined domestic violence for the first time and the definition included physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal, emotional and economic abuse. It was also progressive in terms of recognising live-in relationships alongside marriage for the purposes of this Act.

Although MS started work on domestic violence and also on equal rights for women long before these Acts were passed, the presence of Acts made the tasks easier in the later phases. There is a difference in entering a field with or without defined and legally protected entitlements in hand. The UPA government in its second term also passed two more acts of this nature: the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) 2012 and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. Interestingly, these Acts and amendments are not as well-known as other achievements of the UPA government⁸. This perhaps reflects the fact that the protection of women's and children's rights are still not a major priority in the country.

In the later years, the consolidation of power by Nitish Kumar and the wide publicity of his 'development' agenda with women as one of the important vote banks also helped MS. With Yadav embroiled in the fodder scam, Nitish Kumar was able to increase his political power by creating strategic partnerships that engaged the voters with a specific pitch towards good governance and safety; in particular women's safety. The 'new development' discourse that was started by Nitish Kumar during his reign found a lot of prominence in the kinds of policies that were targeted towards the marginalised, notwithstanding the fact that some claims of change may not be as real as claimed. For instance, according to the Central

⁸ A simple Google search for UPA achievements establishes this fact.

Statistical Organisation (CSO), in November 2009, there had been significant growth in the state along with other struggling states such as Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Orissa and Chhattisgarh but deeper inspection shows that the growth in the 2000s were part of trends that had started during the earlier regime and continued for this period (Gupta, 2010). But some other policies in social sector brought real changes.

For instance, in April 2006, he began implementing the *Mukhyamanthri Balika Cycle Yojana* in the state providing a cycle through a Rs 2,000 conditional cash transfer for the girls of the ninth and 10th standards (Datta and Rustagi 2012). This tackled the important issue of mobility for girls and led to a visible influence on school attendance by girls (Muralidharan and Prakash 2012).

Other cash transfer schemes were also promoted, such as the provision of uniforms to middle school girls under the *Balika Poshak Yojana*, money transfer to parents on the birth of a girl child under the *Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana*, transfers made to the families of girls upon their marriages for families whose incomes were below Rs 60,000 a year under the *Mukhyamantri Kanya Vivah Yojana* (Datta and Rustagi 2012). The government during this time also initiated scholarships given to minorities to reduce the number of dropouts in the state. These schemes helped MS by adding some concrete benefits for the same causes for which MS had been mobilising, and in turn MS helped the schemes through awareness and creation of demand.

The analysis of data clearly shows an upsurge in girls' secondary schooling participation rates during the first phase of Nitish Kumar's rule. We argue that it was probably a result of a combination of factors. As is widely recognised, Laloo Yadav's politics and period of rule had given voice to the communities that remained on the margins leading to high aspirations (that remained unfulfilled during the Laloo Yadav regime, which got embroiled in corruption cases and scams). These high aspirations in the larger discourse also benefited the work of MS who were able to use this discourse to augment their efforts in giving voice to women from marginalised communities. This, in turn, led to their own high aspirations for their daughters and might have resulted in creating an environment for success of

incentive schemes brought by Nitish Kumar. This can potentially explain the upsurge in school enrolment of girls.

Another state government policy that seems to have influenced MS work in Katihar is the anti-alcohol law brought by the Nitish Kumar led JD-RJD government after he came to power in 2015. Ironically, he allied with Laloo Yadav's RJD to fight for the third term and won elections again in 2015. Despite odd political combinations, the Nitish-Laloo win can be viewed as signifying support for both identity politics and hopes for good governance. Nitish Kumar's election campaign was marked by promises of introducing prohibition and he kept his word by bringing the anti-alcohol law upon coming to power. Women voted for this alliance in large numbers and probably one major reason was this promise (Kapoor and Ravi 2014). MS groups in Katihar had particularly worked against alcoholism right since the beginning and the law gave them the teeth to act more firmly.

The microfinance movement which gained momentum during the 1990s and later years was another important development with relevance for MS. Although SEWA had started a women's bank in the 1970s and self-help groups had come into existence earlier, NABARD started SHG-bank linkages in the 1990s and the real acceleration took place in the late 1990s and early 2000s (E&Y India, 2016).

MS *sanghas*, even when they got into savings in the beginning, it was not the central focus. In the initial years, the idea was that savings activities should start after the initial orientation of women into the *sangha* and only after they become more aware of their rights and positions. MS also had no provision for seed money unlike most other SHG-based schemes. However, the proliferation of SHGs and the growing discourse around SHGs in the wake of Grameen Bank's apparent success in Bangladesh and subsequent awarding of the Nobel Prize to Mohammed Yunus and Grameen Bank in 2006 also led MS to give it a greater priority.

As a result, MS *sanghas* in Muzaffarpur reorganised themselves to be registered for NABARD linkages. Kaimur followed by Katihar reported high effect sizes in the Economic Activity Index reflecting the primacy of this activity in MS programming in the later years.

We do not see these effect sizes in Muzaffarpur for two reasons. One, as explained earlier, savings were not given priority in the beginning stages, and *bacchat samooths* (savings groups) were created only at a later stage. Savings started much later as compared to the other groups.

Second, MS had already moved to Federation-based functioning in Muzaffarpur. The main mode of operation had already moved from the *sangha* to the federation by the time the SHG movement was taking over the rural landscape. We posit that these might be the two reasons for the smaller effect size that we see in Muzaffarpur.

The above analysis clearly shows that policies and the political environment played a major role in influencing MS priorities and helped in pushing one or the other agenda in different periods of course in combination with MS own directions and shifts as witnessed in different periods. The next section discusses the shifts in focus and priorities as seen in the MS design, structure and processes over time, which also influenced its functioning and choices in different districts entering at different periods of time.

6.1.3. Internal Influences: An analysis of the MS design, structures and process and priorities

The MS scheme faced several challenges and underwent a few changes along its journey. The challenges faced nationally had implications for all states whereas specific states also came across particular challenges not common to all. As discussed earlier, MS in Bihar faced a particular situation of being part of the BEP Council unlike other states where they were being run by an independent society.

Although the MS was located within the Ministry of HRD at the national level, MS in other states did not have much to do with state education departments. This created a particular kind of pressure for MS in Bihar, especially after the DPEP's arrival, when they faced pressures to make girls' education their priority. This was a mixed bag as, on the one hand, this took away some of the focus from other priorities but it also provided MS in Bihar with opportunities to mainstream and upscale the interventions such as *Jagajagi Kendras* for adolescent girls in the DPEP programme

under the name *Angana Vidyalayas*, providing bridging educational opportunities to a much larger number of dropout girls.

While DPEP's agenda was primarily education and did not always fit the gender equity agenda of MS, without the DPEP, MS would have had limited resources. For the DPEP, MS helped bring new insights to its work, which helped make it more sustainable. In general, MS played a major role in bringing a sharp focus into primary education initiatives (Kameshwari 2003). Some even view this collaboration with the DPEP as particularly symbiotic: DPEP officials provided MS officers with infrastructural resources and the work of the MS was used by DPEP to help mobilise villages into education campaigns (Unterhalter and Dutt 2001).

The scaling up of MS interventions also meant different kinds of responsibilities and shifts in priorities. For instance, when *Jagjagi Kendras* were expanded in the DPEP as *Angana Vidyalayas*, MS acted as the resource agency for all DPEP districts, including those where MS had no presence. Similarly, one of the biggest successes of MS nationally has been the adaptation of the MSK model into a national scheme: *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya* (KGBV). The KGBV is a scheme of residential schools for girls in 11–14 age bracket (grades VI to VIII), opened in blocks with low levels of female literacy, and started in 2004 by the Government of India with an objective of bringing dropped-out girls back to the fold of schooling.

All states, including Bihar, where MS was present, were entrusted the responsibility of running KGBV schools in blocks where they had a presence and provide training to the remaining ones. This brought a new opportunity to scale up the MSK philosophy of holistic education but it also meant that the MS machinery spent a high proportion of their time in managing KGBVs and related responsibilities while also negotiating with the Department of Education for retaining norms not necessarily the same as those of the Department. For instance, MS in Bihar was forced to change the teacher identification strategy even for KGBVs in MS blocks that they were running where the understanding of gender and other forms of inequalities was given higher weightage than educational qualifications (Jha et al. 2015). This also adversely affected the

morale of the MS workers at all levels as it undervalued their knowledge and autonomy (Jha et al. 2015).

The focus on girls' education would make one expect that the MS effects on inter-generational gains, especially in terms of girls' schooling, should be high. We have seen that though there are significant effects on children's education, the difference between MS and non-MS in terms of probability for completing higher number of years of schooling is not very high and significant in these three districts, especially in Muzaffarpur or Katihar. While the case of Katihar can be justified as MS entered the district after the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the flagship programme for universal basic education had functioned for more than six to seven years, and the Right to Education 2009 was already in practice, the case of Muzaffarpur needs examination.

It is also important to note that the numbers used for the inter-generational quantitative analysis are low, as this was not the guiding point for the sampling strategy. A perusal of both programme and general policies suggests several other explanations. One is that while MS was operational in selected blocks, the BEP/DPEP has been active with high focus on children's education in the entire district during the same period and hence the difference between MS and non-MS in this particular respect is bound to be low. Secondly, the MS effect needs to be viewed from the perspective of holistic education and schooling alone does not capture that fully, as made clear by ethnographic evidence discussed in Chapter 4. Thirdly, the MS mode of operation had shifted in Muzaffarpur to the federation mode early on; individual *sangha* members were not as central in the federation mode and hence the contact with them was not as close and intensive as in Kaimur at the time of the study.

Creating federations as independently registered entities that would evolve into a sustainable, self-motivated and autonomous institution became officially part of the MS strategies during the 10th Five Year Plan period (2002–07). While most states adopted to register federations for the group of *sanghas* that had already functioned for more than eight years at the block level, Bihar registered district-level federations.

The leadership came for federations came from within while MS machinery provided technical support. MS machinery was supposed to slowly withdraw completely but this was not an easy process in any state (IIMA Report 2014; Sarin). Although the Jyoti Federation of Muzaffarpur has been functioning actively in certain areas, especially in the area of work such as undertaking contracts for mason work or undergoing training as *kisan sakhis*, the linkages with all *sanghas* did not remain as strong also because all of the above activities were carried out at the district-level federation. This also meant that although the federation did significant work in the area of work-participation, the effect was not necessarily as widespread in terms of number.

As discussed earlier, Kaimur, which has reported higher difference between MS and non-MS women on four measures: information and awareness, functional literacy, economic activity and self-efficacy, obviously benefitted from the general political and policy environment that existed in the period with all the rights-based acts being passed when MS activities were also at their peak in the district but certain reasons internal to MS also seem to have contributed. Kaimur was carved out as a new district by bifurcating Rohtas district and when MS entered Kaimur in 2001, it had the benefit of learning from the Rohtas experiences. In that sense, it was not completely a new territory.

Another important point in this respect is linked with the notion of space: Kaimur was and remains more backward as compared to the other two districts in terms of development indicators and infrastructure, as discussed in Chapter 2. This meant that the level of exposure to many ideas and information that MS tried to impart could be really low in the non-MS areas in Kaimur as compared to other districts where access to roads and other facilities may have created greater opportunities for non-MS areas as well, translating itself into lower differences between MS and non-MS women on these parameters.

Muzaffarpur, on the other hand, reported a high level of effects and significant differences between MS and non-MS for three measures: self-efficacy, the attitude towards VAW and political participation. This means that in these respects, the effect was

not only high and widespread but also that it has sustained over years despite MS changing its mode of operation in the district. Here, again, the links with MS priorities and focus as well as with the external policy environment can be easily drawn. MS entered Muzaffarpur at a time when VAW had already emerged as a major concern in the first phase states and Nari Adalats were being successfully tried out in Gujarat as a response. The first phase districts in Bihar benefitted from this experience and Muzaffarpur was one of those. This was also the period when the national discourse was heavily centred around dowry deaths, custodial rape and the larger problems of violence that women faced in their homes. Additionally, the Panchayati Raj Acts were passed in the form of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments leading to high excitement about possible political participation by women at a decentralised level. MS emphasised issues of self, gender violence, gender roles and focused on training in non-feminine vocations such as masonry also as a means to challenge existing gender norms.

The MS philosophy itself also came under question from several quarters, especially in policy circles for being ‘too open-ended’ and for ‘lack of evidence’ in claiming its achievements. Despite being a low-cost scheme, the fact that it did not have ‘targets’ in terms of quantifiable outputs made many within the government question the need and efficacy of the programme (Sarup 2018). The change in funding arrangements from Dutch to DFID also brought a different monitoring regime; the focus on log frames, identified targets and quantitative reporting emphasised by DFID was a new learning for MS.

Several changes coincided for MS in Bihar around 2004–06. The change in funding arrangements meant a major shift from locally-based UNICEF who acted more as partners to distant donors whose demands had to be responded to by developing new skill sets for its staff in all districts. Around the same time, the very able state leadership changed⁹ and Bihar MS also got

⁹ Sister Sujitha, who had been the State Project Director since its inception, left the programme in 1996.

separated from the BEP Council. While this separation was a longstanding demand and gave MS Bihar a separate identity, it also created a crisis that proved detrimental to the programme in later years. The BEP Council had shielded MS from the need to deal with the larger bureaucracy directly and the fast and frequently changing leadership of the MS in Bihar in this phase prevented the newly formed MS society from gaining strength and developing the relevant skills it needed to stand on its own. This lack of leadership and absence of support from places such as the BEP Council, which are much more powerful, proved costly at the time of MS closure, when despite a high level of support from outside the state, they could not convince the Government of Bihar to continue the programme.

All these changes implied that the MS functioning underwent a shift from being entirely focused on processes to making attempts to convert these processes into quantifiable targets to reporting nationally and to funders. This also meant that though MS maintained the basic philosophy and six priority areas, the focus was on aspects more amenable as quantifiable targets and this too could be the reason for the patterns of effects that have emerged for different measures in different districts. In the end, what is clear is that women's empowerment is a continuously negotiated process and the impact of MS on various aspects of empowerment is also subject to a variety of factors within the household, community, policy and polity. MS had led to positive effects on economic empowerment, if defined as a multidimensional index, in all three districts in Bihar. This shows that MS design was inherently capable of leading to these changes while responding to both the challenges and potentials that came its way.

In other words, though the effects and impact of any public or perhaps even private intervention for women's empowerment is dependent not only on the design and strength of the intervention but also on social, political and policy environments, the fundamental strength and design play a critical role in either withstanding the challenges or in enhancing the potential posed by both external and internal factors.

6.2. Changing social norms through public policy: a mirage, a distant dream or a reality?

This brings us to the final question on changing social norms, as women's empowerment amounts to change in social norms in many respects and on many fronts. MS was aimed at achieving women's empowerment through changing social norms about gender roles, relations, positioning and expectations. History tells us that social norms do change over time but often it takes centuries to achieve even a small change especially in the context of gender and therefore public policy interventions are considered desirable to hasten the pace of change.

One of the most important inferences from this evaluative study of MS is that such public policy interventions definitely have the potential for changing social norms but it is important to remember that changes are always subject to negotiations and tensions; they are not necessarily unidirectional and continuous movements. In other words, although the objective of changing social norms through public policy interventions is not a mirage, it also does not become a reality very easily.

Women in MS were also engaged in negotiations at multiple levels: self, household, community and state and in the process faced dilemmas not easily resolved. One of the major dilemmas faced in the process relate to the fact that women (or individuals), society and state in India or perhaps everywhere remain deeply committed to two societal institutions: family and marriage. These two institutions also happen to be at the root of women's secondary positioning and unequal gender relations, as social norms that inhibit women's freedoms are often linked to these two in the Indian or South Asian context. Therefore, the biggest challenge for MS has been to raise these issues of women's rights and enable them to act for themselves as well as their peers and daughters as a collective but not come across as an anti-marriage or anti-family programme.

MS, though using a radical language for its education and training, was also aware of this conflict, the limitations and the challenges. Therefore, while it focused on the process of internalisation and

enabling action on women's part, it also facilitated reconciliations and hoped for additive rather than radical change. Given that MS was located within the state structure and was determined by its priorities and directions, this was inevitable. But even for non-state actors, the experience may not have been very different, as the process involves internal and external clashes with powerful institutions and symbols of patriarchy and hence remains a complex and difficult process.

Our research showed that women associated with MS often realised very soon that they did not have equal rights or voices anywhere, not only in the community or in public space but also within marriages or households and also that these institutions perpetuated violence against them in several forms. But they were often cautious when confronting these institutions. Some women did act against these institutions but these actions were neither uniform for all women nor did it remain the same for the same person in different times and space.

In the end, it remained a negotiated process where though they often worked for greater freedoms within these spaces, they maintained fundamental institutions of patriarchy and unequal gender relations to maintain peace. For example, women would fight for their daughter's education and for postponing their very early marriages but were unlikely to support them if they did not want to marry at all or want to marry someone from another caste or someone of their own choice.

They would break caste barriers in terms of women belonging to collectives, eating and sleeping together but would not support inter-caste marriages of their own children. They would oppose all forms of violence against women but not if it is for an abortion or even suspicion of infidelity. All this is to point out and reiterate that although MS succeeded in hastening the pace of change in social norms and practices, the process and nature of change was gradual rather than radical. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the MS approach was successful in bringing about these not inconsiderable changes, especially for the most marginalised classes whom most other social policy interventions had entirely failed to address. This could also be a lesson that change comes in such

societies only when programmes are planned as a gradual change rather than in a radical fashion.

6.2.1. *What enabled success?*

Based on our perusal of MS design, experiences, successes and limitations, we attempted to identify the features that led to successes and features that prevented it from becoming a greater success. The greatest strength of MS came from its initial detailed design that included a well-defined core philosophy, structures, processes and non-negotiables, identification of six areas to choose from and the centrality of the *sangha* in its conception and implementation. While the list of six core areas to choose from gave the *sanghas* the flexibility to decide for themselves, the frame of non-negotiables helped in defining boundaries and maintaining consistency in the chosen strategies and paths. In this, MS has been successful in breaking the challenge of centralisation-decentralisation dilemma of the policy designs to some extent.

Large countries often face this dilemma of what and how much to define centrally, what and how much to leave for the decentralised levels and how to arrive at a balance that allows autonomy but also ensures accountability at lower levels. It is here that MS has a major twin principle to offer: (i) do not define what is to be done fully – give a menu to choose from and (ii) define what is not to be done or what cannot be violated. This combination worked well in MS and embodies a critical policy lesson for up-scaling good practices in diverse locations and contexts.

Another major strength of MS that led to its success came from the ability to respond to various needs that emerged from the field and the institutionalisation of the responses. The original MS design had not conceptualised institutions such as *Nari Adalat* or *Jagjagi Kendras*. These often evolved as a response to needs from the field; the commonality of emergent experiences and needs led to evolution of these ideas.

For instance, the realisation that domestic and community violence are common experiences and available legal recourse mechanisms are distant, costly and incomprehensible led to the idea of the *Nari Adalat*. Once an idea emerged in one state, the

central MS office and support mechanisms were very active and supportive in taking the idea forward to other states and helping them adopt/adapt suitably. This too is an important lesson for framing social policy, especially those that aim at impacting social norms pertaining to deep-rooted practices and norms. Rigid and pre-determined interventions may not have had the same impact as one reported in case of MS.

6.2.2. *What weakened MS?*

We have identified several features and factors that weakened MS, some internal and some were external. An important weakening link was the absence of well-defined non-negotiables based on MS philosophy for its own management. The most notable example comes from the lack of a clear stand regarding women employed with MS to do the 'empowerment' work. While there are no two opinions that the whole process was a transformative journey of empowerment for them too, despite their own ambivalence, what also remains true is that their jobs were insecure and low-paid.

Volunteerism was often invoked as a virtue and the women were told that they are not only in a job; they are part of a movement. They themselves also felt part of a movement, as we have discussed earlier. But the fact that those who were the main means of enabling change or empowerment had no means to fight for themselves also became possible because it was an all-women scheme with relatively much lower financial allocation and visibility which made it powerless and weak within the larger structures of governance. The tension between whether it was feminisation or merely genuine volunteerism is difficult to resolve but these features made it further marginalised and weakened its position in a highly hierarchical system where they were always placed at the bottom of the ladder.

Another feature that weakened its position vis-à-vis the mainstream structure was its relative isolation from the rest of the departments, although this was not as true for Bihar as for other states. MS viewed itself as an NGO located within government machinery and therefore did not see much reason for connecting with the rest of the departments unless necessary. The attempt to locate a GO-NGO model of functioning with the state apparatus worked

for MS in initial years but the absence of any effort to complement it with other gender mainstreaming efforts to sensitise government structures and mechanisms meant lack of understanding of and support for MS philosophy or processes within government departments in the long run.

With a very strong training in processes and MS philosophy, MS staff also found it difficult to appreciate the need for quantifiable targets and indicators made necessary due to several factors in later years, leading to a widening gap between MS and the Education and other departments. During our policy¹⁰ advocacy work, we discovered that the relationship between MS and the parent department also remained such that rather than being mutually appreciative and understanding, there was contempt on both sides: MS considered the others lost in targets and numbers – something that is not necessarily desirable – and the government departments considered MS engaged in something that has no accountability. Presence of in-built sharing mechanisms could have curtailed this isolation and perhaps led to greater success of this GO-NGO model.

What weakened MS also includes features that are external to MS; the emergence of better-funded programmes in the current policy framework that borrowed the language of MS but did not pay attention to the non-negotiables or essential processes, also weakened MS. For instance, Jeevika, a livelihood programme introduced as part of the rural development agenda which also spoke of women's empowerment and used collectivisation as a means, offered village-level-workers much better remuneration but had no flexibility in terms of time or areas of work. These remained largely self-help groups focusing mainly only on savings.

A number of MS staff found this a viable alternative: it offered them better remuneration and the programme benefitted as these were already well-trained workers. But, as evidenced from our field-work, MS women largely detested the programme as they found the processes weak and the time provided inadequate for

¹⁰ CBPS engaged in intensive policy advocacy for continuing MS when it suddenly stopped receiving funds from the Union Government. This has been referred to in Chapter I.

a genuine women's group to emerge; in essence, they did not find it a transformative experience. Greater convergence between these two in design as well as operational details would have perhaps been mutually beneficial for both but the lack of inter-departmental coordination from top to bottom prevented such synergies from emerging.

The strong and detailed design of the MS, well worked out and rooted in feminist philosophy, which also enabled contextualised implementation, has been the strongest aspect of the programme and led to sustained economic empowerment of women who came into contact with it in Bihar. It also took advantage of the political and policy environment to find synergies in using spaces and opportunities provided. On the other hand, what pulled it down and perhaps prevented it from maximising its effect included inadequate attention to similarly detailed strategising on its relationship with the 'other' in the larger government system of which MS has been a part. It obviously had a lesser degree of control over what happens outside the programme but a better understanding of the political economy of bureaucratic processes and decisions would have helped in dealing with such pressures better.

Nevertheless, what remains a fact is that the programme has influenced larger policy interventions evident in the emergence of several institutional responses in education and VAW (residential school programme called KGBVs and *Nari Adalats* are examples), and has the potential to directly strengthen policy responses to women's empowerment in states where it is still surviving and the wider policy directions in many contexts. What survives MS include detailed methodology, abundant resources and strong evidence of its potential to influence social norms in diverse contexts and also knowledge of the pathways that work: providing enough leads for designing appropriate policies or for including appropriate processes for strengthening existing policies to make them more effective and sustained. What also becomes clear from the discussion above is that the scaling up of process-based-policy interventions calls for greater attention to clear formulation of non-negotiables or a no-list; this list needs to include operational aspects of the programme as well as the management of the programme.

6.3. 'We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars'¹¹

The manner in which MS was closed as a national programme funded by the Union Government in India without any conversation with the MS team and external resources that it had closely been working with and without much consideration for the repercussions of the programme areas is reflective of how policies are made and unmade.

It is important to understand this process in order to understand the potentials and effects that programmes like MS has or might have. A close look at the closure process points towards three important and interlinked aspects that women's empowerment policies need to confront in the current global scenario that finds echoes in many countries. One, the resurgent appeal of the instrumental logic and reaffirmation of gender images, two, the importance of visibility and its implications for empowerment as an indivisible exercise, and three, the primacy of large market-oriented, and techno-centric solutions over small, process-based, community-centred interventions.

The instrumental logic of the policy-making is evident from several prevalent, large-scale policy interventions such as cash transfers in India and elsewhere. Although the evaluation literature on cash transfer schemes is clear in India that they have not helped in changing the attitude towards girl children and women's positions in any significant manner (Jha 2017) and, therefore, cannot be a tool for sustained women empowerment without having elements and processes that simultaneously address these issues directly, the policymaking is yet to clearly discuss or take this lesson universally.

The sheer size of cash or other transfer programmes in terms of allocations and coverage make them more appealing to governments. One thing that went against MS was its relatively smaller size where the closure was viewed as a step towards rationalisation of schemes. Vested interests and market play an important role in influencing policy and tilting it towards techno-centric solutions and it is

¹¹ An Oscar Wilde quote from his play *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

important to counter these with evidence, experience and force. While it is absolutely unnecessary for women's movements and other allies to succumb to these forces, awareness, strength and counter-strategizing are crucial.

In this endeavour, MS itself provides several solutions. Rather than being bogged down by its closure and complete lack of response from the state government in Bihar, a large number of MS women, including those that came together as part of *sanghas* and federations, and those who worked for the programme, show resilience and resolve to create a future that is different.

There is obvious despair but there also exists a clear imagination of a future: '*Wapas ghar mein nahi bitha sakte*' (No one can force us back to our homes, sitting and doing nothing). This is a common feeling, expressed and articulated in different forms that we came across several times in several contexts during our conversations with the women of MS in Bihar. With seemingly insurmountable challenges all around, they can still see and follow the stars, and this is, in our opinion, the true pathway to empowerment.

Annexure

Note 1: Selection of districts and matching of villages

The first stage involved identification of districts which would render possible the examination of MS' effects varying by duration of programme exposure. We held several rounds of consultations with MS officials at both state and district levels to understand the processes of identification and programme implementation at district and village levels. During our consultations, it became evident that MS officials decided to intervene in a particular district and chose the villages on the basis of high percentage of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) population and low percentage of female literacy.

It is critical that pre-treatment information was available for these variables and used as a control in the treatment-assignment function, so that the potential outcomes are independent of the treatment assignment. The only source of reliable data for these two variables at the district and village levels is the Census Survey, available for the years 1991, 2001 and 2011. We shortlisted districts such that difference (in years) between year of data availability and year during which MS was implemented was minimum. Then, the available data for a particular district would reflect the ground realities of the village before implementation and may have played a role in the choice of villages for treatment-assignment.

Second, the pre-treatment information used by us to estimate the probability of selection and matching with non-MS villages would

be similar (or at the very least less dissimilar) to the MS officials at the time of implementation. Given this, along with consultations with MS officials, we identified three districts, namely Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar, where the MS had begun its operations in 1993, 2001 and 2011 respectively. Muzaffarpur was to constitute our sample for measuring the long-term ATT of MS whereas Kaimur and Katihar are our sample for measuring the medium and short-term ATT of MS.

In the second stage, we identified and selected the villages within each district on the basis of SC and ST population and female literacy rate using the propensity score-matching technique (PSM).¹ Here, it was important to consider only those MS villages where the *sangha* was formed between the period of 1991 to 2001 in Muzaffarpur, 2001 to 2011 in Kaimur and 2011 to 2015 in Katihar to enable the estimation of treatment effects by varying duration of MS exposure.

We identified 201, 43 and 55 MS villages in Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar respectively during our time period of interest.² We considered all the 43 villages for our Kaimur sample. For Muzaffarpur and Katihar, given the higher availability of MS villages, we generated 10 different datasets containing of fifty MS villages which were randomly selected. Each of these ten datasets were compared with the dataset containing all MS villages to ascertain whether there was any statistically significant difference in terms of the two identifier pre-treatment variables. At the end of this process, there were eight datasets of fifty MS villages in Muzaffarpur and Katihar which were statistically indifferent on the two identifier pre-treatment variables with all the 201 and 55 MS villages respectively.

In the next step, we constructed the potential pool of non-MS villages which were to be matched with MS villages on the basis of probability of selection (or propensity scores) as explained in the chapter. We constructed our potential pool of non-MS villages from

¹ Refer to Lunt (2013), Rosebaum (1983), Caliendo and Kopeinig (2008), and Rubin (1973) for details on PSM.

² It should be noted that these villages include only those that MS officials were able to ascertain of its year of operation confidently. MS, obviously, has *sanghas* in more than 200 villages in each of these districts.

blocks (sub-district level) where MS had not intervened at all in order to avoid any possibility of spill-over or contamination problem. For instance, MS had intervened, at the village level, in the blocks such as Bochaha, Kurhani and Musahri in Muzaffarpur. Consequently, our pool of potential non-MS villages from which the control villages were to be selected through propensity score-matching belonged to the blocks where MS had not intervened at all, such as Baruraj, Dholi, Kanti, Minapur, Paroo and others. There were 739, 736 and 839 potential non-MS villages in non-MS blocks in Muzaffarpur, Kaimur and Katihar respectively.

We have now both the potential pool of MS and non-MS villages in each district. Using probit regression, we estimate the probability of selection which is then used to match and identify our final sample of non-MS villages. For Kaimur, 43 MS villages were matched with forty-three non-MS villages with no statistical difference between these two groups in terms of the two identifier variables and the average difference in propensity score was about $6.5E-05$.

Since we have eight different sets of 50 MS villages for Muzaffarpur and Katihar, the estimation and matching process was undertaken with each of these datasets with their respective potential non-MS villages. The final selection of the randomly selected fifty villages and matched non-MS villages was determined by two criteria: (a) non-

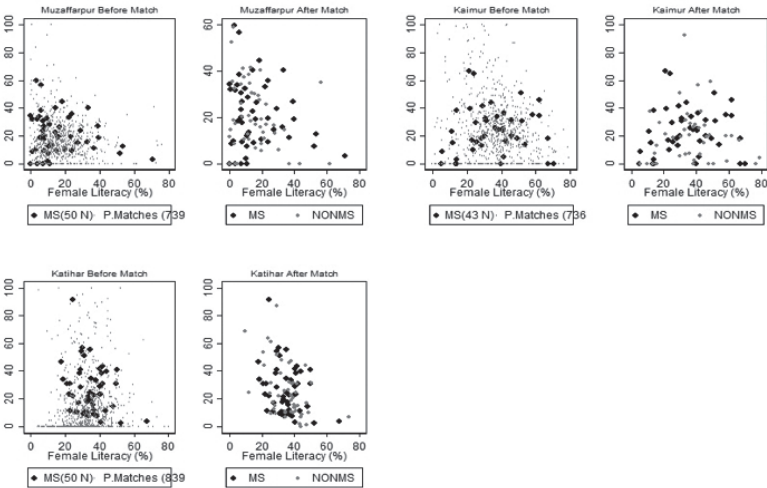
Table A1: Quality of Matches of MS and Non-MS villages

Tests/Variables	Muzaffarpur	Kaimur	Katihar
T-Test - P Values			
SC and ST (%)	0.87	0.67	0.88
Female Literacy (%)	0.81	0.88	0.72
Bias Reduction			
SC and ST (%)	85.93	-50.54	95.30
Female Literacy (%)	59.09	80.63	64.80

Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: From the above table, we can accept the null hypothesis that there is no statistical difference between the MS and non-MS villages in all three districts. The 'bias reduction' is a standard measure used to understand the level of standardised difference of the identifier variables before and after match. For instance, we were able to reduce the standardised difference in the percentages of SC and ST populations between the MS villages and non-MS villages by about 86 per cent after the matching process in Muzaffarpur.

Figure A1: Pictorial Representation of Reduction in Bias Between Randomly Selected MS and Matched Non-MS Village



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: In the above figure, the x axis represents the percentage of female literacy and the y axis represents the percentage of SC and ST populations. Figure 4 illustrates the reduction in bias on the two identifier variables as a result of the matching process in each of the three districts. This is evident by the closeness of the selected MS villages and matched non-MS villages.

significant statistical difference of the two identifier pre-treatment variables and (b) maximum possible reduction in standardised bias before and after matching. In general, the final sample of fifty MS and non-MS villages were not statistically different in terms of the two identifier variables (refer to Table A1).

Note 2: On sampling strategy

Our consultations with the MS officials, both at the national and state levels, indicated that MS primarily targets and works with marginalised populations in a village. In addition, our review of the socio-economic characteristics of MS members in these three districts indicated that majority of the members belonged to below

poverty line households and also SC, ST and Other Backward Castes (OBC) households. It is paramount, then, to ensure that any such differences are addressed and steps taken to account for, or reduce, the differences between MS and non-MS Members.

For the MS sample, we collected the name, husband's name and socio-economic profile of MS members in each of the selected MS villages from the MS officials. This list was used by our survey team to visit the village and collect information on the MS member's caste, BPL status, and their availability for the primary survey. As a precautionary measure, we enquired about the year during which each individual MS member had joined the MS. The rationale was to make certain that our sample constitutes individual MS members who had joined MS during 1991 to 2001 in Muzaffarpur, 2001 to 2011 in Kaimur and 2011 to 2015 in Katihar. We created a list of potential survey respondents who had joined MS during our time period of interest and belonged to socio-economically disadvantaged groups. From this list, we randomly selected 10 MS members in each village for our survey.

On the other hand, a listing process was adopted to identify the potential non-MS sample belonging to BPL households, with emphasis given to OBC, SC, ST and minority households. The individual respondents from the general category was included only if there were no households belonging to OBC or SC or ST or minority households in the village. Even then, only those households which were BPL were selected for the sample. Similar to selection of MS members, we randomly selected ten individuals from the listing process for our survey.

In sum, our sampling strategy was designed to ensure that (i) our sample was distributed identically (ii) that there was equivalence between MS members and non-MS respondents on important parameters such as caste and economic status and (iii) individual MS members had joined MS during our period of interest. This was adopted to facilitate the estimation of long, medium and short-term treatment effects of MS on overall economic empowerment of rural women.

Annexure 2: Tables and Figures for Chapter 3

Table A2: Potential Responses and Transformations of Scale of Constituents

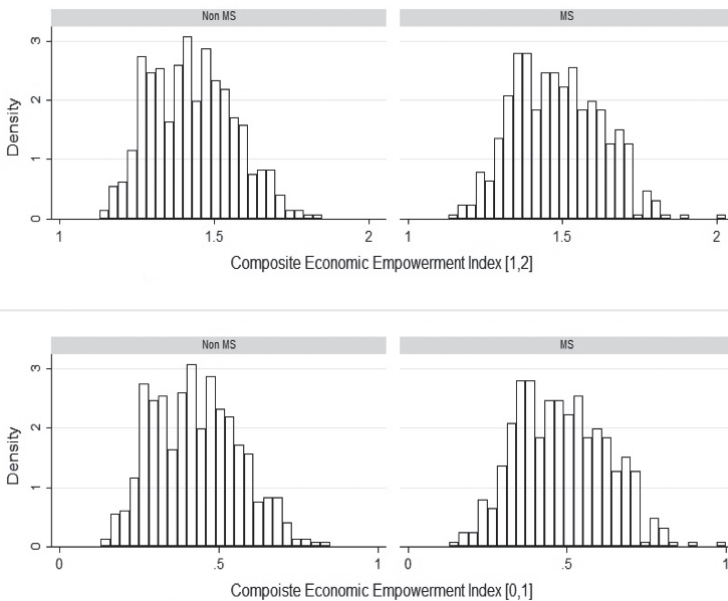
Measures	Constituents	Possible Responses	Transformations
Economic Activity	Current or recent employment in paid work; and savings/investment.	1 – Yes; 0 – No	1 – if the respondent answered Yes; 0 – otherwise.
Political Participation	Attendance and participation (voice) in local body meeting; discussion about and voting in state elections recently held	1 – Yes; 0 – No	1 – if the respondent answered Yes; 0 – otherwise.
Autonomy and Decision-making	Participation in/taking decisions regarding paid work, spending self-earned income, major and minor household purchases, loans and investment, healthcare choices for self and family, mobility (inside and outside the village, visiting her friends and relatives)	1 – Respondent; 2 – Husband; 3 – Husband and wife jointly; 4 – Self with someone else; 5 – Someone else	1 – if the respondent was consulted in the decision-making process*; 0 – otherwise.
Information / Awareness	Knowledge about MGNREGA*, maternity leave, sexual harassment at workplace, minimum age of marriage, candidate contesting from the constituency for state assembly	1 – Yes; 0 – No; 999 – Unsure	1 – if the respondent answered Yes; 0 – otherwise.
Functional Literacy	Speak, and write Hindi, English and other local language	2 – Yes, fluently; 1 – Yes, a little; 0 – No	1 – if the respondent can speak / write even a little in Hindi/ English / Other language; 0 – Otherwise.
Attitude towards VAW	<i>If the husband was justified in beating in the following situations:</i> Neglect of care responsibilities: children, in-laws, cooking; acts independently: going out of home, aborting a child, joins a collective, takes up a job; suspected of being unfaithful	1 – Yes; 0 – No; 999 – Don't Know	1 – if the respondent answered that it is not justified for the husband to beat her in a particular situation; 0 – Otherwise.

Self-Efficacy	Self-confidence and positive Self-image: ability to act in adverse circumstances, coping and problem-solving	1 – Not at all true; 2 – Hardly true; 3 – Moderately true; 4 – Exactly true.	1 – if the respondent answered that it is even moderately true; 0 – Otherwise.

Source: Authors compilation.

Note: * - a response of 1, 3 and 4 was coded as 1 under autonomy and decision-making measure.

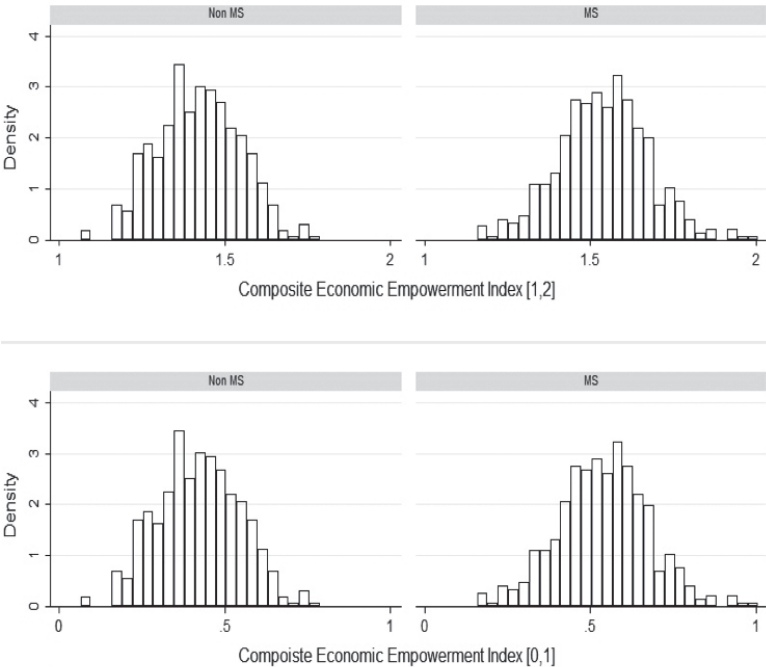
Figure A2: Robustness Check of Composite Economic Empowerment Index – Muzaffarpur



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note that 'Composite Economic Empowerment Index [1,2]' was derived by changing the range of individual measures from [0,1] to [1,2]. Thus, the values here range between [1,2]. 'Composite Economic Empowerment Index [0,1]' was derived by deducting one from the initially computed Composite Economic Empowerment Index. Here, the values range between [0,1]. The distributions for MS and non-MS are the same across these two variants of Composite Economic Empowerment Index; indicating neither loss of information nor change in different distribution by undertaking the transformation to ensure that Composite Economic Empowerment Index range between [0,1].

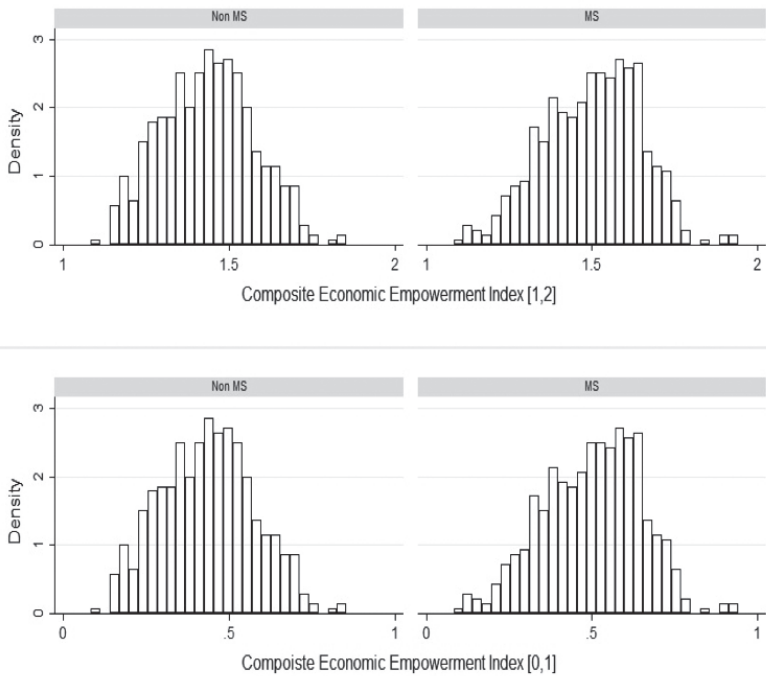
Figure A3: Robustness Check of Composite Economic Empowerment Index – Kaimur



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note that 'Composite Economic Empowerment Index [1,2]' was derived by changing the range of individual measures from [0,1] to [1,2]. Thus, the values here range between [1,2]. 'Composite Economic Empowerment Index [0,1]' was derived by deducting one from the initially computed Composite Economic Empowerment Index. Here, the values range between [0,1]. The distributions for MS and non-MS are the same across these two variants of Composite Economic Empowerment Index; indicating neither loss of information nor change in different distribution by undertaking the transformation to ensure that Composite Economic Empowerment Index range between [0,1].

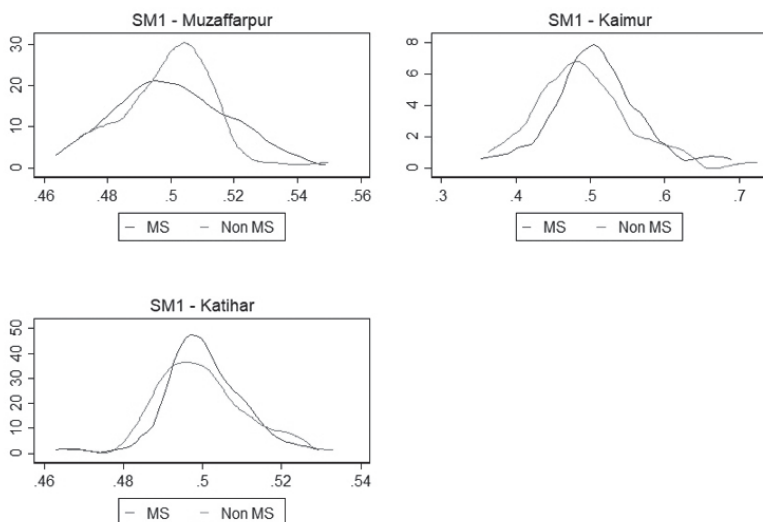
Figure A4: Robustness Check of Composite Economic Empowerment Index – Katihar



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note that 'Composite Economic Empowerment Index [1,2]' was derived by changing the range of individual measures from [0,1] to [1,2]. Thus, the values here range between [1,2]. 'Composite Economic Empowerment Index [0,1]' was derived by deducting one from the initially computed Composite Economic Empowerment Index. Here, the values range between [0,1]. The distributions for MS and non-MS are the same across these two variants of Composite Economic Empowerment Index; indicating neither loss of information nor change in different distribution by undertaking the transformation to ensure that Composite Economic Empowerment Index range between [0,1].

Figure A5: Overlap Plot of Treatment-assignment Model for the Three Districts



Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: Figure 5 provides the estimated density of predicted probabilities of MS and Non-MS respondents for the three study sites. There is no evidence that the overlap assumption, or common support over $\pi(Z_i)$ is violated as the three plots indicate that the estimated densities of MS and non-MS have most of their respective masses in region in which they overlap each other; and neither of the masses is near 0 or 1.

Table A3: Estimated Co-efficient of Information/Awareness Index and its Constituents – MS, Non-MS and its Relative Difference

Selected Variables	Katihar		Kaimur		Muzaffarpur	
	MS	non-MS	Relative Difference	MS	non-MS	Relative Difference
<u>Information/Awareness Index</u>	0.361*** (0.012)	0.277*** (0.008)	0.301*** (0.057)	0.456*** (0.013)	0.292*** (0.009)	0.564*** (0.065)
C1. Aware about MGNREGA	0.204*** (0.019)	0.097*** (0.014)	1.097*** (0.357)	0.445*** (0.026)	0.194*** (0.019)	1.270*** (0.252)
C2. Aware about Law against Harassment at Work	0.091*** (0.014)	0.033*** (0.008)	1.785** (0.781)	0.113*** (0.017)	0.049*** (0.01)	1.324** (0.583)
C3. Aware about Law related to Maternity Leave	0.215*** (0.02)	0.153*** (0.016)	0.412** (0.201)	0.255*** (0.024)	0.105*** (0.015)	1.442*** (0.412)
C4. Know the Legal Marriage Age	0.796*** (0.021)	0.770*** (0.022)	0.034 (0.04)	0.897*** (0.015)	0.718*** (0.022)	0.251*** (0.044)
C5. Aware about candidate contesting in the State Election	0.494*** (0.024)	0.344*** (0.025)	0.437*** (0.126)	0.561*** (0.027)	0.391*** (0.023)	0.434*** (0.106)
						0.533*** (0.06)
						0.481*** (0.029)
						0.107 (0.141)

Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: (a) The coefficients of MS and non-MS were estimated by making use of the strategy discussed in sub-section 3.3 in Chapter 3; (b) Relative difference was calculated by subtracting the estimated co-efficient of non-MS (control) from estimated co-efficient of MS (treated) and dividing it by estimated co-efficient of non-MS (control); d. Standard errors are given in parentheses; and (c) * indicate statistical significance at 10 per cent level, ** indicate significance at 5 per cent level, and *** indicate significance at 1 per cent level.

Table A4: Estimated Co-efficient of Functional Literacy Index and its Constituents – MS, non-MS and its Relative Difference

Selected Variables	Katihar			Kaimur			Muzaffarpur		
	MS	non-MS	Relative Difference	MS	non-MS	Relative Difference	MS	non-MS	Relative Difference
<u>Functional Literacy Index</u>	0.304*** (0.008)	0.349*** (0.008)	-0.129*** (0.028)	0.354*** (0.009)	0.282*** (0.007)	0.256*** (0.044)	0.416*** (0.016)	0.349*** (0.009)	0.189*** (0.054)
C1. Speak in English	0.017*** (0.006)	0.027 (0.019)	-0.386 (0.499)	0.021*** (0.007)	0.026*** (0.008)	-0.189 (0.384)	0.094* (0.054)	0.016*** (0.007)	4.748 (4.043)
C2. Write in English	0.063*** (0.012)	0.083*** (0.012)	-0.237 (0.177)	0.081*** (0.02)	0.056*** (0.01)	0.453 (0.426)	0.047*** (0.023)	0.071*** (0.011)	-0.338 (0.346)
C3. Speak in Hindi	0.538*** (0.023)	0.641*** (0.028)	-0.160*** (0.05)	0.531*** (0.026)	0.345*** (0.022)	0.539*** (0.121)	0.797*** (0.031)	0.642*** (0.024)	0.242*** (0.067)
C4. Write in Hindi	0.334*** (0.022)	0.330*** (0.022)	0.011 (0.09)	0.414*** (0.025)	0.243*** (0.019)	0.703*** (0.159)	0.568*** (0.044)	0.341*** (0.027)	0.666*** (0.183)
C5. Write in Other Language	0.034*** (0.009)	0.053*** (0.012)	-0.363* (0.221)	0.116*** (0.022)	0.049*** (0.011)	1.360** (0.679)	0.091 (0.056)	0.043*** (0.01)	1.133 (1.401)

Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: (a) The coefficients of MS and Non-MS were estimated by making use of the strategy discussed in sub-section 3.3 in Chapter 3; (b) Relative difference was calculated by subtracting the estimated co-efficient of Non-MS (control) from estimated co-efficient of MS (treated) and dividing it by estimated co-efficient of Non-MS (control); d. Standard errors are given in parentheses; and (c) * indicate statistical significance at 10 per cent level, ** indicate significance at 5 per cent level, and *** indicate significance at 1 per cent level.

Table A5: Estimated Co-efficient of Decision Making Activity Index and its Constituents – MS, Non-MS and its Relative Difference

Selected Variables	Katihar		Kaimur		Muzaffarpur	
	MS	Non-MS	Relative Difference	MS	Non-MS	Relative Difference
<u>Decision Making Index</u>	0.841*** (0.013)	0.777*** (0.018)	0.0a82*** (0.03)	0.835*** (0.014)	0.777*** (0.013)	0.074*** (0.026)
C1. Income	0.890*** (0.016)	0.920*** (0.014)	-0.033 (0.023)	0.928*** (0.014)	0.889*** (0.015)	0.044* (0.023)
C2. Major HH Expenditure	0.855*** (0.017)	0.823*** (0.022)	0.039 (0.034)	0.850*** (0.018)	0.811*** (0.019)	0.048 (0.033)
C3. Minor HH Expenditure	0.866*** (0.016)	0.830*** (0.024)	0.043 (0.036)	0.856*** (0.019)	0.826*** (0.019)	0.037 (0.033)
C4. Labor Force Participation	0.845*** (0.017)	0.688*** (0.021)	0.227*** (0.044)	0.804*** (0.021)	0.724*** (0.022)	0.110** (0.044)
C5. Borrowed money (Debt)	0.876*** (0.016)	0.873*** (0.021)	0.003 (0.031)	0.868*** (0.02)	0.845*** (0.017)	0.028 (0.031)
C6. Health Decisions (Self)	0.840*** (0.017)	0.721*** (0.023)	0.165*** (0.044)	0.819*** (0.02)	0.736*** (0.021)	0.114*** (0.042)
C7. Visit family relatives	0.788*** (0.02)	0.708*** (0.025)	0.112** (0.047)	0.788*** (0.021)	0.676*** (0.023)	0.166*** (0.051)
				0.823*** (0.048)	0.785*** (0.024)	0.048 (0.068)

(contd.)

(Table A5 continued)

Selected Variables	Katihar			Kaimur			Muzaffarpur		
	MS	Non-MS	Relative Difference	MS	Non-MS	Relative Difference	MS	Non-MS	Relative Difference
C8. Mobility within village	0.834*** (0.017)	0.747*** (0.022)	0.116*** (0.04)	0.832*** (0.021)	0.783*** (0.019)	0.063* (0.038)	0.853*** (0.048)	0.789*** (0.027)	0.080 (0.07)
C9. Mobility outside village	0.768*** (0.02)	0.719*** (0.022)	0.068 (0.042)	0.769*** (0.022)	0.702*** (0.022)	0.095** (0.046)	0.838*** (0.047)	0.769*** (0.026)	0.089 (0.071)

Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: (a) The coefficients of MS and Non-MS were estimated by making use of the strategy discussed in sub-section 3.3 in Chapter 3; (b) Relative difference was calculated by subtracting the estimated co-efficient of Non-MS (control) from estimated co-efficient of MS (treated) and dividing it by estimated co-efficient of Non-MS (control); d. Standard errors are given in parentheses; and (c) * indicate statistical significance at 10 per cent level, ** indicate significance at 5 per cent level, and *** indicate significance at 1 per cent level.

Table A6: Estimated Co-efficient of Self-Efficacy Index and its Constituents – MS, Non-MS and its Relative Difference

Selected Variables	Katihar			Kaimur			Muzaffarpur		
	MS	Non-MS	Relative Difference	MS	Non-MS	Relative Difference	MS	Non-MS	Relative Difference
<u>Self Efficacy Index</u>	0.689*** (0.019)	0.675*** (0.022)	0.021 (0.043)	0.780*** (0.016)	0.708*** (0.018)	0.102*** (0.036)	0.813*** (0.036)	0.765*** (0.019)	0.063 (0.055)
C1. Solve difficult problems	0.676*** (0.023)	0.685*** (0.025)	-0.012 (0.05)	0.801*** (0.019)	0.734*** (0.021)	0.091** (0.04)	0.801*** (0.041)	0.782*** (0.02)	0.024 (0.058)
C2. Find means and ways to get what i want	0.699*** (0.022)	0.687*** (0.026)	0.017 (0.05)	0.813*** (0.02)	0.712*** (0.022)	0.143*** (0.045)	0.808*** (0.052)	0.763*** (0.022)	0.060 (0.075)
C3. Deal efficiently with unexpected events	0.667*** (0.023)	0.645*** (0.026)	0.035 (0.055)	0.735*** (0.022)	0.640*** (0.023)	0.148*** (0.054)	0.803*** (0.048)	0.738*** (0.023)	0.088 (0.074)
C4. Reliance on coping abilities	0.701*** (0.022)	0.700*** (0.023)	0.002 (0.046)	0.791*** (0.021)	0.708*** (0.022)	0.117*** (0.045)	0.848*** (0.029)	0.770*** (0.021)	0.101** (0.048)
C5. Handle whatever comes my way	0.703*** (0.023)	0.657*** (0.026)	0.069 (0.055)	0.759*** (0.022)	0.744*** (0.021)	0.020 (0.041)	0.790*** (0.056)	0.769*** (0.022)	0.027 (0.079)

Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: (a) The coefficients of MS and Non-MS were estimated by making use of the strategy discussed in sub-section 3.3 in Chapter 3; (b) Relative difference was calculated by subtracting the estimated co-efficient of Non-MS (control) from estimated co-efficient of MS (treated) and dividing it by estimated co-efficient of Non-MS (control); d. Standard errors are given in parentheses; and (c) * indicate statistical significance at 10 per cent level, ** indicate significance at 5 per cent level, and *** indicate significance at 1 per cent level.

Table A7: Estimated Co-efficient of Economic Activity Index and its Constituents – MS, Non-MS and its Relative Difference

Selected Variables	Katihar		Kaimur		Muzaffarpur	
	MS	Non-MS	Relative Difference	MS	Non-MS	Relative Difference
<u>Economic Activity Index</u>	0.637*** (0.018)	0.445*** (0.017)	0.433*** (0.066)	0.774*** (0.017)	0.439*** (0.022)	-0.140 (0.091)
C1. Savings (in the last 12 months)	0.670*** (0.023)	0.354*** (0.02)	0.894*** (0.128)	0.840*** (0.023)	0.478*** (0.03)	-0.270*** (0.096)
C2. Employed (in the last 12 months)	0.602*** (0.023)	0.550*** (0.024)	0.095 (0.063)	0.670*** (0.024)	0.419*** (0.054)	0.056 (0.156)

Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: (a) The coefficients of MS and Non-MS were estimated by making use of the strategy discussed in sub-section 3.3 in Chapter 3; (b) Relative difference was calculated by subtracting the estimated co-efficient of Non-MS (control) from estimated co-efficient of MS (treated) and dividing it by estimated co-efficient of Non-MS (control); d. Standard errors are given in parentheses; and (c) * indicate statistical significance at 10 per cent level, ** indicate significance at 5 per cent level, and *** indicate significance at 1 per cent level.

(Table A9 continued)

Selected Variables	Katihar			Kaimur			Muzaffarpur		
	MS	Non-MS	Relative Difference	MS	Non-MS	Relative Difference	MS	Non-MS	Relative Difference
C7. Suspicion of being Unfaithful	0.408*** (0.024)	0.317*** (0.022)	0.286** (0.116)	0.395*** (0.026)	0.274*** (0.022)	0.442*** (0.151)	0.379*** (0.059)	0.345*** (0.029)	0.100 (0.194)
C8. Disrespect towards In-Laws	0.438*** (0.024)	0.396*** (0.028)	0.104 (0.099)	0.392*** (0.026)	0.340*** (0.023)	0.153 (0.111)	0.528*** (0.048)	0.298*** (0.027)	0.770*** (0.228)

Source: Authors estimation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: (a) The coefficients of MS and Non-MS were estimated by making use of the strategy discussed in sub-section 3.3 in Chapter 3; (b) Relative difference was calculated by subtracting the estimated co-efficient of Non-MS (control) from estimated co-efficient of MS (treated) and dividing it by estimated co-efficient of Non-MS (control); d. Standard errors are given in parentheses; and (c) * indicate statistical significance at 10 per cent level, ** indicate significance at 5 per cent level, and *** indicate significance at 1 per cent level.

Annexure 3: Tables and Figures for Chapter 4

Table A10: Gender Parity Index in Bihar and India – 2006–07 and 2011–12

Selected Categories/ Years	Bihar			India		
	Elementary Education (6 to 14 years)	Secondary Education (15 to 18 years)	Total (6 to 18 years)	Elementary Education (6 to 14 years)	Secondary Education (15 to 18 years)	Total (6 to 18 years)
All Categories						
2006–07	0.76	0.61	0.76	0.93	0.82	0.91
2011–12	0.97	0.93	0.98	1.00	0.93	0.99
Level of Change	0.21	0.32	0.22	0.07	0.11	0.08
SC						
2006–07	0.71	0.49	0.70	0.86	0.76	0.85
2011–12	0.89	0.94	0.92	1.02	0.99	1.02
Level of Change	0.18	0.45	0.22	0.16	0.23	0.17
ST						
2006–07	0.72	0.54	0.71	0.91	0.71	0.89
2011–12	0.90	0.83	0.91	0.98	0.87	0.96
Level of Change	0.18	0.29	0.20	0.07	0.16	0.07

Source: School Education Statistics, Ministry of Human Resource Development, respective years.

Table A11: Number of Households in the Three different Sub-samples

By Study Sites	Number of Household			Percentage of HH in a particular sample to HHs in the Respondent Sample		
	MS	Non-MS	Total	MS	Non-MS	Total
Katihar						
Sample for Respondents [primary unit]	490	490	980			
Sample for Functional Literacy*	430	420	850	87.76	85.71	86.73

Sample for Current Enrolment**	394	357	751	80.41	72.86	76.63
Sample for Child Marriage***	464	436	900	94.69	88.98	91.84
Kaimur						
Sample for Respondents [primary unit]	463	509	972			
Sample for Functional Literacy*	449	451	900	96.98	88.61	92.59
Sample for Current Enrolment**	376	396	772	81.21	77.80	79.42
Sample for Child Marriage***	457	489	946	98.70	96.07	97.33
Muzaffarpur						
Sample for Respondents [primary unit]	419	488	907			
Sample for Functional Literacy*	413	432	845	98.57	88.52	93.16
Sample for Current Enrolment**	288	381	669	68.74	78.07	73.76
Sample for Child Marriage***	417	469	886	99.52	96.11	97.68

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - includes only children in the age group of 6 and above; ** - includes only children in the age group between 6 and 18; and *** - includes all children but only those who married after the MS programme was implemented in the study district.

Table A12: Distribution of the Functional Literacy Sample by Gender – Unweighted and Weighted

Details	Katihar			Kaimur			Muzaffarpur		
	MS	Non-MS	Total	MS	Non-MS	Total	MS	Non-MS	Total
<i>In the age group 6 and above</i>									
Total (N)	1434	1375	2809	1765	1561	3326	1512	1429	2941
Unweighted									
Male (N)	721	734	1455	937	826	1763	858	749	1607
Per cent of Total	50.28	53.38	51.80	53.09	52.91	53.01	56.75	52.41	54.64
Female (N)	713	641	1354	828	735	1563	654	680	1334
Per cent of Total	49.72	46.62	48.20	46.91	47.09	46.99	43.25	47.59	45.36

(contd.)

(Table A12 continued)

Details	Katihar			Kaimur			Muzaffarpur		
	MS	Non-MS	Total	MS	Non-MS	Total	MS	Non-MS	Total
Weighted									
Male (N)	702	702	1405	831	831	1663	735	735	1471
Per cent of Total	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00
Female (N)	702	702	1405	832	832	1663	735	735	1471
Per cent of Total	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Table A13: Distribution of the Current Enrolment Sample by Gender – Unweighted and Weighted

Details	Katihar			Kaimur			Muzaffarpur		
	MS	Non-MS	Total	MS	Non-MS	Total	MS	Non-MS	Total
<i>In the age group 6 to 18 years</i>									
Total (N)	1019	895	1914	1034	1035	2069	770	974	1744
Unweighted									
Male (N)	516	478	994	518	543	1061	424	521	945
Per cent of Total	50.64	53.41	51.93	50.10	52.46	51.28	55.06	53.49	54.19
Female (N)	503	417	920	516	492	1008	346	453	799
Per cent of Total	49.36	46.59	48.07	49.90	47.54	48.72	44.94	46.51	45.81
Weighted									
Male (N)	479	478	957	517	517	1035	436	436	872
Per cent of Total	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00
Female (N)	479	478	957	517	517	1035	436	436	872
Per cent of Total	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Table A14: Distribution of the Child Marriage Sample by Gender - Unweighted and Weighted

Details	Katihar			Kaimur			Muzaffarpur		
	MS	Non-MS	Total	MS	Non-MS	Total	MS	Non-MS	Total
<i>Only those who married after the MS programme was implemented</i>									
Total (N)	1593	1456	3049	1853	1818	3671	1571	1688	3259
Unweighted									
Male (N)	844	790	1634	992	955	1947	895	882	1777
Per cent of Total	52.98	54.26	53.59	53.53	52.53	53.04	56.97	52.25	54.53

Female (N)	749	666	1415	861	863	1724	676	806	1482
Per cent of Total	47.02	45.74	46.41	46.47	47.47	46.96	43.03	47.75	45.47
Weighted									
Male (N)	762	762	1525	918	918	1836	815	815	1630
Per cent of Total	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00
Female (N)	762	762	1525	918	918	1836	815	815	1630
Per cent of Total	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Table A15: Estimation Output of Current Enrolment for
Muzaffarpur Sub-sample

Selected Independent Variables	Muzaffarpur – Children of age 6 to 18 years old			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	0.358** [0.177]	0.360** [0.178]	0.358*** [0.131]	0.360*** [0.132]
Child's age (in years)	0.677*** [0.068]	0.691*** [0.070]	0.677*** [0.068]	0.691*** [0.069]
Square of child's Age	-0.034*** [0.003]	-0.034*** [0.003]	-0.034*** [0.003]	-0.034*** [0.003]
Female child [Reference = male child]	0.269*** [0.075]	0.275*** [0.076]	0.269*** [0.075]	0.275*** [0.075]
Respondent educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.310** [0.157]	0.294* [0.159]	0.310* [0.166]	0.294* [0.165]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.417*** [0.151]	0.410*** [0.150]	0.417*** [0.149]	0.410*** [0.148]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.194 [0.162]	0.176 [0.165]	0.194 [0.138]	0.176 [0.139]
Live in Semi-pucca / kaccha House [Reference = pucca house]	0.034 [0.083]	0.034 [0.084]	0.034 [0.096]	0.034 [0.096]
Dummy for OBC [Reference	0.105	0.098	0.105	0.098

(contd.)

(Table A15 continued)

Selected Independent Variables	Muzaffarpur – Children of age 6 to 18 years old			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
= General and others]	[0.173]	[0.177]	[0.135]	[0.137]
Dummy for SC and ST	0.018	0.004	0.018	0.004
[Reference = General and Others]	[0.176]	[0.181]	[0.143]	[0.145]
Number of members in the household	-0.013 [0.023]	-0.012 [0.023]	-0.013 [0.022]	-0.012 [0.022]
Constant	-2.413*** [0.621]	-2.413*** [0.627]	-2.413*** [0.605]	-2.413*** [0.612]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23
Observations	1,744	1,744	1,744	1,744

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A16: Estimation Output of Current Enrolment for Kaimur Sub-sample

Selected Independent Variables	Kaimur – Children of age 6 to 18 years old			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	0.199* [0.106]	0.202* [0.106]	0.199** [0.090]	0.202** [0.090]
Child's age (in years)	0.608*** [0.089]	0.611*** [0.089]	0.608*** [0.074]	0.611*** [0.074]
Square of child's age	-0.030*** [0.004]	-0.030*** [0.004]	-0.030*** [0.003]	-0.030*** [0.003]
Female child [Reference = male child]	-0.014 [0.069]	-0.018 [0.068]	-0.014 [0.073]	-0.018 [0.073]
Respondent educated upto upper primary [Reference = No Education]	-0.119 [0.256]	-0.126 [0.256]	-0.119 [0.228]	-0.126 [0.227]

Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.090 [0.138]	0.090 [0.137]	0.090 [0.131]	0.090 [0.132]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.368*** [0.101]	0.364*** [0.102]	0.368*** [0.111]	0.364*** [0.112]
Live in Semi-pucca / kaccha house [Reference = pucca House]	-0.178** [0.086]	-0.185** [0.085]	-0.178** [0.085]	-0.185** [0.085]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	-0.444* [0.233]	-0.437* [0.229]	-0.444** [0.206]	-0.437** [0.203]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	-0.544** [0.238]	-0.539** [0.233]	-0.544*** [0.210]	-0.539*** [0.207]
Number of members in the household	-0.026 [0.019]	-0.024 [0.019]	-0.026 [0.018]	-0.024 [0.018]
Constant	-1.035 [0.648]	-1.024 [0.648]	-1.035* [0.566]	-1.024* [0.569]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20
Observations	2,069	2,069	2,069	2,069

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A17: Estimation Output of Current Enrolment for Katihar Sub-sample

Selected Independent Variables	Katihar – Children of age 6 to 18 years old			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS	-0.035	-0.035	-0.035	-0.035
[Reference = non-MS]	[0.126]	[0.126]	[0.093]	[0.093]
Child's age (in years)	0.655*** [0.066]	0.656*** [0.066]	0.655*** [0.064]	0.656*** [0.064]

(contd.)

(Table A15 continued)

Selected Independent Variables	Katihar – Children of age 6 to 18 years old			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Square of child's age	-0.031*** [0.003]	-0.031*** [0.003]	-0.031*** [0.003]	-0.031*** [0.003]
Female child [Reference = male child]	-0.123* [0.068]	-0.120* [0.068]	-0.123* [0.069]	-0.120* [0.070]
Respondent educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	-0.048 [0.226]	-0.047 [0.225]	-0.048 [0.215]	-0.047 [0.213]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.405** [0.163]	0.410** [0.165]	0.405*** [0.157]	0.410*** [0.158]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.435** [0.174]	0.447** [0.175]	0.435*** [0.153]	0.447*** [0.154]
Live in Semi-pucca / kaccha house [Reference = pucca House]	0.115 [0.127]	0.122 [0.128]	0.115 [0.122]	0.122 [0.123]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	0.453*** [0.144]	0.450*** [0.142]	0.453*** [0.114]	0.450*** [0.114]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	0.120 [0.152]	0.120 [0.150]	0.120 [0.119]	0.120 [0.119]
Number of members in the household	-0.112*** [0.028]	-0.114*** [0.028]	-0.112*** [0.026]	-0.114*** [0.026]
Constant	-1.988*** [0.665]	-2.045*** [0.663]	-1.988*** [0.568]	-2.045*** [0.568]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.19
Observations	1,914	1,914	1,914	1,914

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A18: Estimation Output of Child's Ability to Speak in Hindi – Muzaffarpur

Selected Independent Variables	Muzaffarpur – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	0.391** [0.184]	0.383** [0.181]	0.391*** [0.117]	0.383*** [0.116]
Child's age (in years)	0.230*** [0.028]	0.236*** [0.029]	0.230*** [0.025]	0.236*** [0.026]
Square of child's age	-0.005*** [0.001]	-0.005*** [0.001]	-0.005*** [0.001]	-0.005*** [0.001]
Female child [Reference = male child]	-0.062 [0.055]	-0.061 [0.057]	-0.062 [0.053]	-0.061 [0.054]
Respondent age (in years)	-0.013** [0.006]	-0.012** [0.006]	-0.013** [0.006]	-0.012** [0.006]
Respondent educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	-0.095 [0.173]	-0.084 [0.168]	-0.095 [0.135]	-0.084 [0.132]
Respondent educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.360** [0.168]	0.339** [0.163]	0.360** [0.172]	0.339** [0.168]
Respondent educated upto secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.236 [0.225]	0.259 [0.224]	0.236 [0.232]	0.259 [0.231]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	0.240** [0.115]	0.262** [0.111]	0.240** [0.116]	0.262** [0.114]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.427*** [0.154]	0.438*** [0.146]	0.427*** [0.156]	0.438*** [0.152]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.599*** [0.125]	0.612*** [0.121]	0.599*** [0.136]	0.612*** [0.133]

(contd.)

(Table A18 continued)

Selected Independent Variables	Muzaffarpur – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Live in Semi-pucca / Kkaccha House [Reference = pucca House]	-0.351*** [0.083]	-0.335*** [0.084]	-0.351*** [0.082]	-0.335*** [0.081]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	-0.098 [0.216]	-0.095 [0.211]	-0.098 [0.115]	-0.095 [0.113]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	-0.096 [0.214]	-0.081 [0.209]	-0.096 [0.124]	-0.081 [0.121]
Number of members in the household	-0.013 [0.020]	-0.013 [0.019]	-0.013 [0.018]	-0.013 [0.018]
Constant	-2.113*** [0.651]	-2.235*** [0.639]	-2.113*** [0.432]	-2.235*** [0.428]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12
Observations	2,941	2,941	2,941	2,941

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A19: Estimation Output of Child's Ability to Speak in Hindi – Kaimur

Selected Independent Variables	Kaimur – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	0.464*** [0.111]	0.467*** [0.110]	0.464*** [0.082]	0.467*** [0.083]
Child's age (in years)	0.257*** [0.016]	0.256*** [0.017]	0.257*** [0.020]	0.256*** [0.020]
Square of child's age	-0.006*** [0.000]	-0.006*** [0.000]	-0.006*** [0.000]	-0.006*** [0.000]
Female child [Reference = male child]	-0.279*** [0.046]	-0.288*** [0.045]	-0.279*** [0.048]	-0.288*** [0.049]

Respondent age (in years)	0.008 [0.006]	0.008 [0.006]	0.008 [0.006]	0.008 [0.006]
Respondent educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	-0.291** [0.135]	-0.278** [0.139]	-0.291** [0.139]	-0.278* [0.143]
Respondent educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.229 [0.225]	0.199 [0.226]	0.229 [0.225]	0.199 [0.225]
Respondent educated upto secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.554*** [0.184]	0.540*** [0.184]	0.554*** [0.175]	0.540*** [0.173]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	-0.106 [0.137]	-0.113 [0.136]	-0.106 [0.140]	-0.113 [0.139]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.142 [0.143]	0.136 [0.145]	0.142 [0.139]	0.136 [0.138]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No Education]	0.325*** [0.093]	0.334*** [0.094]	0.325*** [0.099]	0.334*** [0.099]
Live in Semi- <i>pucca</i> / kaccha House [Reference = <i>pucca</i> House]	-0.224*** [0.083]	-0.236*** [0.083]	-0.224*** [0.077]	-0.236*** [0.077]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	-0.652*** [0.192]	-0.645*** [0.193]	-0.652*** [0.161]	-0.645*** [0.159]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	-0.729*** [0.204]	-0.751*** [0.204]	-0.729*** [0.166]	-0.751*** [0.165]
Number of members in the household	-0.044*** [0.016]	-0.043*** [0.016]	-0.044*** [0.017]	-0.043*** [0.016]
Constant	-3.599*** [0.504]	-3.540*** [0.498]	-3.599*** [0.437]	-3.540*** [0.438]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.19
Observations	3,326	3,326	3,326	3,326

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A20: Estimation Output of Child's Ability to Speak in Hindi – Katihar

Selected Independent Variables	Katihar – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	-0.182* [0.104]	-0.180* [0.104]	-0.182** [0.086]	-0.180** [0.086]
Child's age (in years)	0.272*** [0.027]	0.271*** [0.027]	0.272*** [0.027]	0.271*** [0.027]
Square of child's age	-0.006*** [0.001]	-0.006*** [0.001]	-0.006*** [0.001]	-0.006*** [0.001]
Female child [Reference = Male child]	-0.206*** [0.065]	-0.207*** [0.065]	-0.206*** [0.056]	-0.207*** [0.056]
Respondent age (in years)	0.006 [0.006]	0.007 [0.006]	0.006 [0.006]	0.007 [0.006]
Respondent educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	-0.012 [0.124]	-0.017 [0.126]	-0.012 [0.127]	-0.017 [0.128]
Respondent educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.285 [0.192]	0.285 [0.191]	0.285 [0.191]	0.285 [0.190]
Respondent educated upto secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.369* [0.192]	0.363* [0.193]	0.369* [0.189]	0.363* [0.190]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	0.191 [0.123]	0.207* [0.124]	0.191 [0.124]	0.207* [0.125]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.463** [0.188]	0.482** [0.188]	0.463*** [0.168]	0.482*** [0.168]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.543*** [0.129]	0.556*** [0.129]	0.543*** [0.124]	0.556*** [0.124]
Live in Semi-pucca / kaccha House [Reference = pucca house]	-0.061 [0.110]	-0.068 [0.109]	-0.061 [0.112]	-0.068 [0.112]

Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	0.335*** [0.124]	0.334*** [0.123]	0.335*** [0.110]	0.334*** [0.109]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	-0.087 [0.125]	-0.088 [0.126]	-0.087 [0.120]	-0.088 [0.120]
Number of members in the household	-0.087*** [0.026]	-0.086*** [0.026]	-0.087*** [0.024]	-0.086*** [0.024]
Constant	-2.771*** [0.515]	-2.794*** [0.515]	-2.771*** [0.489]	-2.794*** [0.487]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18
Observations	2,809	2,809	2,809	2,809

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A 21: Estimation Output of Child's Ability to Write in Hindi – Muzaffarpur

Selected Independent Variables	Muzaffarpur – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	0.336* [0.175]	0.327* [0.173]	0.336*** [0.116]	0.327*** [0.116]
Child's age (in years)	0.242*** [0.027]	0.247*** [0.030]	0.242*** [0.027]	0.247*** [0.029]
Square of child's age	-0.006*** [0.001]	-0.006*** [0.001]	-0.006*** [0.001]	-0.006*** [0.001]
Female child [Reference = Male Child]	-0.031 [0.053]	-0.025 [0.055]	-0.031 [0.053]	-0.025 [0.053]
Respondent age (in years)	-0.002 [0.006]	-0.001 [0.006]	-0.002 [0.006]	-0.001 [0.006]
Respondent educated upto primary [Reference = No Education]	-0.048 [0.172]	-0.038 [0.170]	-0.048 [0.128]	-0.038 [0.127]
Respondent educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.370** [0.167]	0.345** [0.166]	0.370** [0.168]	0.345** [0.166]

(contd.)

(Table A21 continued)

Selected Independent Variables	Muzaffarpur – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Respondent educated upto secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.447* [0.233]	0.435* [0.236]	0.447* [0.234]	0.435* [0.234]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	0.260** [0.103]	0.275*** [0.102]	0.260** [0.106]	0.275*** [0.107]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.658*** [0.147]	0.659*** [0.140]	0.658*** [0.147]	0.659*** [0.143]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.597*** [0.132]	0.607*** [0.129]	0.597*** [0.138]	0.607*** [0.137]
Live in Semi-pucca/ kaccha House [Reference = pucca House]	-0.262*** [0.093]	-0.239*** [0.091]	-0.262*** [0.082]	-0.239*** [0.082]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	0.015 [0.156]	0.007 [0.153]	0.015 [0.105]	0.007 [0.105]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	-0.082 [0.160]	-0.062 [0.157]	-0.082 [0.114]	-0.062 [0.114]
Number of members in the household	-0.028 [0.018]	-0.029* [0.018]	-0.028 [0.017]	-0.029* [0.017]
Constant	-2.700*** [0.546]	-2.801*** [0.551]	-2.700*** [0.432]	-2.801*** [0.444]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13
Observations	2,941	2,941	2,941	2,941

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A22: Estimation Output of Child's Ability to Write in Hindi – Kaimur

Selected Independent Variables	Kaimur – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	0.220** [0.112]	0.224** [0.111]	0.220*** [0.079]	0.224*** [0.080]
Child's age (in years)	0.257*** [0.019]	0.259*** [0.019]	0.257*** [0.020]	0.259*** [0.020]
Square of child's age	-0.006*** [0.000]	-0.006*** [0.000]	-0.006*** [0.001]	-0.006*** [0.000]
Female child [Reference = male child]	-0.227*** [0.047]	-0.235*** [0.048]	-0.227*** [0.049]	-0.235*** [0.050]
Respondent age (in years)	0.007 [0.006]	0.007 [0.006]	0.007 [0.006]	0.007 [0.006]
Respondent educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	-0.311*** [0.116]	-0.315*** [0.116]	-0.311*** [0.120]	-0.315*** [0.121]
Respondent educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.243 [0.208]	0.217 [0.207]	0.243 [0.228]	0.217 [0.230]
Respondent educated upto secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.537*** [0.158]	0.511*** [0.158]	0.537*** [0.159]	0.511*** [0.158]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	-0.171 [0.129]	-0.181 [0.128]	-0.171 [0.143]	-0.181 [0.141]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.131 [0.123]	0.127 [0.124]	0.131 [0.132]	0.127 [0.131]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.356*** [0.086]	0.364*** [0.087]	0.356*** [0.094]	0.364*** [0.094]
Live in Semi-Pucca / Kaccha House [Reference = Pucca House]	-0.212*** [0.082]	-0.220*** [0.084]	-0.212*** [0.075]	-0.220*** [0.075]

(contd.)

(Table A22 continued)

Selected Independent Variables	Kaimur – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	-0.433*** [0.157]	-0.438*** [0.155]	-0.433*** [0.150]	-0.438*** [0.146]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	-0.513*** [0.178]	-0.540*** [0.178]	-0.513*** [0.160]	-0.540*** [0.155]
Number of members in the household	-0.044** [0.018]	-0.043** [0.017]	-0.044** [0.018]	-0.043** [0.017]
Constant	-3.590*** [0.487]	-3.509*** [0.483]	-3.590*** [0.432]	-3.509*** [0.429]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16
Observations	3,326	3,326	3,326	3,326

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A23: Estimation Output of Child's Ability to Write in Hindi – Katihar

Selected Independent Variables	Katihar – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	-0.080 [0.101]	-0.077 [0.102]	-0.080 [0.086]	-0.077 [0.086]
Child's age (in years)	0.297*** [0.036]	0.297*** [0.036]	0.297*** [0.038]	0.297*** [0.037]
Square of child's age	-0.007*** [0.001]	-0.007*** [0.001]	-0.007*** [0.001]	-0.007*** [0.001]
Female child [Reference = male child]	-0.084 [0.057]	-0.085 [0.058]	-0.084 [0.056]	-0.085 [0.056]
Respondent age (in years)	-0.004 [0.005]	-0.004 [0.005]	-0.004 [0.006]	-0.004 [0.006]
Respondent educated upto	-0.035	-0.038	-0.035	-0.038

primary [Reference = No Education]	[0.127]	[0.127]	[0.125]	[0.126]
Respondent educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.287 [0.186]	0.285 [0.186]	0.287 [0.185]	0.285 [0.185]
Respondent educated upto secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.396** [0.186]	0.391** [0.186]	0.396** [0.182]	0.391** [0.183]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	0.197 [0.124]	0.203 [0.125]	0.197 [0.128]	0.203 [0.129]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.500*** [0.150]	0.514*** [0.150]	0.500*** [0.145]	0.514*** [0.144]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.544*** [0.131]	0.556*** [0.131]	0.544*** [0.124]	0.556*** [0.124]
Live in Semi-pucca / kaccha house [Reference = pucca house]	-0.106 [0.109]	-0.111 [0.108]	-0.106 [0.110]	-0.111 [0.110]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	0.432*** [0.133]	0.429*** [0.132]	0.432*** [0.109]	0.429*** [0.108]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	0.019 [0.144]	0.014 [0.144]	0.019 [0.122]	0.014 [0.122]
Number of members in the household	-0.072*** [0.024]	-0.072*** [0.024]	-0.072*** [0.024]	-0.072*** [0.024]
Constant	-3.379*** [0.535]	-3.385*** [0.530]	-3.379*** [0.533]	-3.385*** [0.530]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17
Observations	2,809	2,809	2,809	2,809

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A24: Estimation Output of Child's Ability to Speak in English – Muzaffarpur

Selected Independent Variables	Muzaffarpur – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	0.330 [0.224]	0.336 [0.218]	0.330 [0.226]	0.336 [0.223]
Child's age (in years)	0.240*** [0.059]	0.219*** [0.058]	0.240*** [0.062]	0.219*** [0.060]
Square of child's Age	-0.006*** [0.001]	-0.005*** [0.001]	-0.006*** [0.001]	-0.005*** [0.001]
Female child [Reference = male child]	-0.420*** [0.144]	-0.418*** [0.143]	-0.420*** [0.137]	-0.418*** [0.138]
Respondent age (in years)	-0.000 [0.012]	-0.002 [0.012]	-0.000 [0.011]	-0.002 [0.011]
Respondent educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	0.682*** [0.232]	0.672*** [0.220]	0.682*** [0.220]	0.672*** [0.209]
Respondent educated upto secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.510* [0.300]	0.461 [0.287]	0.510* [0.294]	0.461 [0.283]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	0.475** [0.191]	0.504*** [0.184]	0.475** [0.206]	0.504** [0.197]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.541** [0.269]	0.593** [0.258]	0.541* [0.282]	0.593** [0.270]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.829*** [0.233]	0.838*** [0.221]	0.829*** [0.217]	0.838*** [0.210]
Live in Semi- <i>pucca</i> / <i>kaccha</i> House [Reference = <i>pucca</i> House]	-0.304** [0.123]	-0.351*** [0.122]	-0.304** [0.149]	-0.351** [0.148]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	-0.058 [0.216]	-0.121 [0.212]	-0.058 [0.190]	-0.121 [0.187]

Dummy for SC and ST	-0.447*	-0.447*	-0.447**	-0.447**
[Reference = General and Others]	[0.243]	[0.236]	[0.221]	[0.218]
Number of members in the household	-0.047	-0.039	-0.047	-0.039
	[0.042]	[0.041]	[0.043]	[0.041]
Constant	-4.286***	-4.005***	-4.286***	-4.005***
	[1.068]	[1.007]	[1.070]	[1.013]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25
Observations	2,941	2,941	2,941	2,941

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A25: Estimation Output of Child's Ability to Speak in English – Kaimur

Selected Independent Variables	Kaimur – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	0.303* [0.158]	0.309* [0.158]	0.303** [0.141]	0.309** [0.139]
Child's age (in years)	0.222*** [0.046]	0.221*** [0.044]	0.222*** [0.046]	0.221*** [0.046]
Square of child's age	-0.004*** [0.001]	-0.004*** [0.001]	-0.004*** [0.001]	-0.004*** [0.001]
Female child [Reference = male child]	-0.545*** [0.102]	-0.549*** [0.100]	-0.545*** [0.126]	-0.549*** [0.125]
Respondent age (in years)	0.003 [0.011]	0.003 [0.010]	0.003 [0.011]	0.003 [0.011]
Respondent educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	-0.157 [0.250]	-0.147 [0.237]	-0.157 [0.214]	-0.147 [0.208]
Respondent educated upto secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.237 [0.339]	0.252 [0.319]	0.237 [0.233]	0.252 [0.225]

(contd.)

(Table A25 continued)

Selected Independent Variables	Kaimur – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	0.433** [0.204]	0.442** [0.207]	0.433** [0.196]	0.442** [0.198]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.573*** [0.202]	0.541*** [0.196]	0.573*** [0.218]	0.541** [0.216]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.726*** [0.144]	0.694*** [0.143]	0.726*** [0.175]	0.694*** [0.172]
Live in Semi-pucca / kaccha house [Reference = pucca house]	-0.074 [0.117]	-0.068 [0.112]	-0.074 [0.129]	-0.068 [0.127]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	-0.197 [0.224]	-0.241 [0.219]	-0.197 [0.230]	-0.241 [0.224]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	-0.507** [0.228]	-0.508** [0.218]	-0.507** [0.241]	-0.508** [0.234]
Number of members in the household	-0.095*** [0.031]	-0.088*** [0.030]	-0.095*** [0.031]	-0.088*** [0.030]
Constant	-4.807*** [0.812]	-4.762*** [0.798]	-4.807*** [0.741]	-4.762*** [0.728]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.22	0.22	0.22	0.22
Observations	3,326	3,326	3,326	3,326

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A26: Estimation Output of Child's Ability to Speak in English – Katihar

Selected Independent Variables	Katihar – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	-0.123 [0.222]	-0.121 [0.221]	-0.123 [0.226]	-0.121 [0.226]
Child's age (in years)	0.326*** [0.082]	0.332*** [0.083]	0.326*** [0.084]	0.332*** [0.085]
Square of child's age	-0.006*** [0.002]	-0.006*** [0.002]	-0.006*** [0.002]	-0.006*** [0.002]
Female child [Reference = male child]	-0.205 [0.159]	-0.208 [0.158]	-0.205 [0.157]	-0.208 [0.157]
Respondent age (in years)	-0.006 [0.015]	-0.006 [0.015]	-0.006 [0.014]	-0.006 [0.014]
Respondent educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	-0.440 [0.371]	-0.460 [0.377]	-0.440 [0.365]	-0.460 [0.370]
Respondent educated upto secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.740** [0.373]	0.735** [0.373]	0.740* [0.382]	0.735* [0.382]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	0.775*** [0.286]	0.787*** [0.288]	0.775*** [0.258]	0.787*** [0.259]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.359 [0.332]	0.371 [0.332]	0.359 [0.330]	0.371 [0.331]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.682** [0.304]	0.706** [0.305]	0.682** [0.293]	0.706** [0.292]
Live in Semi-pucca / kaccha House [Reference = pucca house]	-0.367 [0.252]	-0.357 [0.253]	-0.367 [0.228]	-0.357 [0.229]

(contd.)

(Table A26 continued)

Selected Independent Variables	Katihar – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	-0.132 [0.262]	-0.139 [0.264]	-0.132 [0.256]	-0.139 [0.257]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	-0.208 [0.312]	-0.207 [0.312]	-0.208 [0.300]	-0.207 [0.300]
Number of members in the household	-0.070 [0.057]	-0.073 [0.057]	-0.070 [0.053]	-0.073 [0.054]
Constant	-6.019*** [1.121]	-6.064*** [1.138]	-6.019*** [1.183]	-6.064*** [1.196]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36
Observations	2,809	2,809	2,809	2,809

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A27: Estimation Output of Child's Ability to Write in English – Muzaffarpur

Selected Independent Variables	Muzaffarpur – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	0.199 [0.178]	0.220 [0.172]	0.199 [0.150]	0.220 [0.150]
Child's age (in years)	0.361*** [0.037]	0.368*** [0.038]	0.361*** [0.038]	0.368*** [0.038]
Square of child's age	-0.008*** [0.001]	-0.008*** [0.001]	-0.008*** [0.001]	-0.008*** [0.001]
Female child [Reference = male child]	-0.251*** [0.096]	-0.272*** [0.094]	-0.251*** [0.073]	-0.272*** [0.072]
Respondent age (in years)	-0.015* [0.008]	-0.016** [0.008]	-0.015** [0.007]	-0.016** [0.007]

Respondent educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.511** [0.230]	0.502** [0.218]	0.511** [0.204]	0.502** [0.200]
Respondent educated upto secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.458** [0.220]	0.498** [0.225]	0.458* [0.276]	0.498* [0.268]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	0.264* [0.150]	0.304** [0.150]	0.264* [0.137]	0.304** [0.137]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.661*** [0.191]	0.704*** [0.187]	0.661*** [0.180]	0.704*** [0.180]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.851*** [0.207]	0.854*** [0.201]	0.851*** [0.184]	0.854*** [0.179]
Live in semi-pucca / kuaccha house [Reference = pucca House]	-0.279*** [0.103]	-0.272*** [0.105]	-0.279*** [0.102]	-0.272*** [0.101]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	0.064 [0.158]	0.048 [0.156]	0.064 [0.138]	0.048 [0.136]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	-0.086 [0.193]	-0.074 [0.189]	-0.086 [0.157]	-0.074 [0.155]
Number of members in the household	-0.009 [0.026]	-0.002 [0.025]	-0.009 [0.024]	-0.002 [0.024]
Constant	-4.020*** [0.535]	-4.032*** [0.540]	-4.020*** [0.590]	-4.032*** [0.591]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.21
Observations	2,941	2,941	2,941	2,941

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A28: Estimation Output of Child's Ability to Write in English – Kaimur

Selected Independent Variables	Kaimur – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	0.055 [0.117]	0.049 [0.117]	0.055 [0.092]	0.049 [0.092]
Child's age (in years)	0.282*** [0.025]	0.286*** [0.025]	0.282*** [0.029]	0.286*** [0.029]
Square of child's age	-0.006*** [0.001]	-0.006*** [0.001]	-0.006*** [0.001]	-0.006*** [0.001]
Female child [Reference = male child]	-0.397*** [0.066]	-0.385*** [0.066]	-0.397*** [0.064]	-0.385*** [0.064]
Respondent age (in years)	-0.004 [0.006]	-0.004 [0.006]	-0.004 [0.007]	-0.004 [0.007]
Respondent educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.303 [0.227]	0.270 [0.226]	0.303 [0.230]	0.270 [0.229]
Respondent educated upto secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.179 [0.255]	0.154 [0.240]	0.179 [0.197]	0.154 [0.195]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	0.277* [0.160]	0.255 [0.163]	0.277* [0.154]	0.255 [0.156]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.261* [0.148]	0.236 [0.148]	0.261 [0.158]	0.236 [0.159]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.706*** [0.098]	0.699*** [0.096]	0.706*** [0.113]	0.699*** [0.112]
Live in Semi-pucca / kaccha house [Reference = pucca House]	-0.268*** [0.091]	-0.263*** [0.093]	-0.268*** [0.087]	-0.263*** [0.087]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	-0.319** [0.150]	-0.323** [0.153]	-0.319** [0.151]	-0.323** [0.152]

Dummy for SC and ST	-0.307*	-0.324*	-0.307*	-0.324**
[Reference = General and Others]	[0.170]	[0.173]	[0.164]	[0.164]
Number of members in the household	-0.028	-0.026	-0.028	-0.026
	[0.019]	[0.018]	[0.018]	[0.018]
Constant	-3.956***	-3.943***	-3.956***	-3.943***
	[0.533]	[0.517]	[0.511]	[0.512]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17
Observations	3,326	3,326	3,326	3,326

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A29: Estimation Output of Child's Ability to Write in English – Katihar

Selected Independent Variables	Katihar – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	-0.118 [0.139]	-0.118 [0.140]	-0.118 [0.113]	-0.118 [0.114]
Child's ge (in years)	0.259*** [0.060]	0.261*** [0.060]	0.259*** [0.061]	0.261*** [0.060]
Square of child's age	-0.006*** [0.002]	-0.006*** [0.002]	-0.006*** [0.002]	-0.006*** [0.002]
Female child [Reference = male child]	-0.105 [0.074]	-0.104 [0.074]	-0.105 [0.093]	-0.104 [0.093]
Respondent age (in years)	0.003 [0.007]	0.003 [0.007]	0.003 [0.007]	0.003 [0.007]
Respondent educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.201 [0.218]	0.185 [0.218]	0.201 [0.235]	0.185 [0.234]
Respondent educated upto secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.368* [0.219]	0.379* [0.218]	0.368* [0.214]	0.379* [0.215]

(contd.)

(Table A29 continued)

Selected Independent Variables	Katihar – Children of age 6 years and above			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto primary [Reference = No education]	0.387** [0.152]	0.399*** [0.152]	0.387** [0.166]	0.399** [0.165]
Father (or other influential person) educated upto upper primary [Reference = No education]	0.572*** [0.169]	0.584*** [0.171]	0.572*** [0.172]	0.584*** [0.173]
Father (or other influential person) educated secondary and above [Reference = No education]	0.479*** [0.144]	0.487*** [0.144]	0.479*** [0.142]	0.487*** [0.142]
Live in Semi-Pucca / Kaccha House [Reference = Pucca House]	-0.120 [0.125]	-0.122 [0.126]	-0.120 [0.128]	-0.122 [0.128]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	0.036 [0.128]	0.026 [0.127]	0.036 [0.129]	0.026 [0.129]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	-0.278 [0.187]	-0.283 [0.187]	-0.278 [0.180]	-0.283 [0.180]
Number of members in the household	-0.092*** [0.028]	-0.095*** [0.028]	-0.092*** [0.029]	-0.095*** [0.029]
Constant	-3.521*** [0.833]	-3.530*** [0.832]	-3.521*** [0.745]	-3.530*** [0.745]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.19
Observations	2,809	2,809	2,809	2,809

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A30: Estimation Output of Child's Marriage – Muzaffarpur

Selected Independent Variables	Muzaffarpur			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	0.079 [0.191]	0.074 [0.191]	0.079 [0.185]	0.074 [0.185]
Children between 16 to 17 years of age [Reference = Under 15 years old]	1.715*** [0.189]	1.714*** [0.188]	1.715*** [0.158]	1.714*** [0.157]
Children between 18 to 20 years of age [Reference = Under 15 years old]	2.238*** [0.170]	2.237*** [0.170]	2.238*** [0.153]	2.237*** [0.153]
Children 21 years and above [Reference = Under 15 years old]	2.010*** [0.196]	2.006*** [0.197]	2.010*** [0.186]	2.006*** [0.186]
Children between 16 to 17 years of age in MS [Reference = non-MS and children under 15 years in MS]	-0.131 [0.226]	-0.146 [0.226]	-0.131 [0.208]	-0.146 [0.209]
Children between 18 to 20 years of age in MS [Reference = non-MS and children under 15 years in MS]	-0.109 [0.215]	-0.123 [0.215]	-0.109 [0.196]	-0.123 [0.196]
Children 21 years and above in MS [Reference = non-MS and children under 15 years in MS]	0.165 [0.259]	0.134 [0.260]	0.165 [0.249]	0.134 [0.252]
Dummy for female child [Reference = male child]	0.765*** [0.082]	0.767*** [0.083]	0.765*** [0.073]	0.767*** [0.074]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	0.436*** [0.152]	0.432*** [0.153]	0.436*** [0.141]	0.432*** [0.140]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	0.545*** [0.159]	0.528*** [0.161]	0.545*** [0.144]	0.528*** [0.144]
Constant	-6.567*** [0.412]	-6.498*** [0.415]	-6.567*** [0.473]	-6.498*** [0.469]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.51	0.51	0.51	0.51
Observations	3,259	3,259	3,259	3,259

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A31: Estimation Output of Child's Marriage – Kaimur

Selected Independent Variables	Kaimur			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	-0.226 [0.164]	-0.229 [0.166]	-0.226 [0.154]	-0.229 [0.154]
Children between 16 to 17 years of age [Reference = Under 15 years old]	1.394*** [0.137]	1.398*** [0.138]	1.394*** [0.128]	1.398*** [0.128]
Children between 18 to 20 years of age [Reference = Under 15 years old]	1.828*** [0.131]	1.828*** [0.130]	1.828*** [0.132]	1.828*** [0.132]
Children 21 years and above [Reference = Under 15 years old]	1.732*** [0.164]	1.724*** [0.164]	1.732*** [0.185]	1.724*** [0.186]
Children between 16 to 17 years of age in MS [Reference = non-MS and children under 15 years in MS]	-0.000 [0.185]	-0.003 [0.185]	-0.000 [0.193]	-0.003 [0.192]
Children between 18 to 20 years of age in MS [Reference = non-MS and children under 15 years in MS]	0.259 [0.198]	0.260 [0.201]	0.259 [0.180]	0.260 [0.181]
Children 21 years and above in MS [Reference = Non MS and children under 15 years in MS]	0.230 [0.234]	0.233 [0.238]	0.230 [0.234]	0.233 [0.235]
Dummy for female child [Reference = male child]	0.815*** [0.074]	0.814*** [0.073]	0.815*** [0.078]	0.814*** [0.078]
Dummy for OBC [Reference = General and others]	0.384*** [0.131]	0.405*** [0.133]	0.384** [0.160]	0.405** [0.163]
Dummy for SC and ST [Reference = General and Others]	0.431*** [0.144]	0.453*** [0.146]	0.431** [0.169]	0.453*** [0.173]
Constant	-6.131*** [0.517]	-6.121*** [0.515]	-6.131*** [0.476]	-6.121*** [0.478]

Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.47	0.47	0.47	0.47
Observations	3,671	3,671	3,671	3,671

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A32: Estimation Output of Child's Marriage – Katihar

Selected Independent Variables	Katihar			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for MS [Reference = non-MS]	-0.331* [0.176]	-0.320* [0.176]	-0.331* [0.184]	-0.320* [0.183]
Children between 16 to 17 years of age [Reference = Under 15 years old]	1.170*** [0.199]	1.181*** [0.197]	1.170*** [0.190]	1.181*** [0.189]
Children between 18 to 20 years of age [Reference = Under 15 years old]	1.894*** [0.157]	1.909*** [0.155]	1.894*** [0.167]	1.909*** [0.165]
Children 21 years and above [Reference = Under 15 years old]	2.005*** [0.207]	1.996*** [0.207]	2.005*** [0.205]	1.996*** [0.204]
Children between 16 to 17 years of age in MS [Reference = non-MS and children under 15 years in MS]	0.444* [0.247]	0.445* [0.247]	0.444* [0.251]	0.445* [0.251]
Children between 18 to 20 years of age in MS [Reference = non-MS and children under 15 years in MS]	0.339 [0.212]	0.333 [0.211]	0.339 [0.223]	0.333 [0.223]
Children 21 years and above in MS [Reference = non-MS and children under 15 years in MS]	0.169 [0.273]	0.158 [0.274]	0.169 [0.266]	0.158 [0.267]
Dummy for female child [Reference = Male Child]	1.063*** [0.131]	1.054*** [0.132]	1.063*** [0.112]	1.054*** [0.113]

(contd.)

(Table A32 continued)

Selected Independent Variables	Katihar			
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Dummy for OBC	-0.090	-0.067	-0.090	-0.067
[Reference = General and others]	[0.127]	[0.126]	[0.112]	[0.113]
Dummy for SC and ST	-0.021	-0.014	-0.021	-0.014
[Reference = General and Others]	[0.132]	[0.130]	[0.118]	[0.118]
Constant	-4.377***	-4.433***	-4.377***	-4.433***
	[0.569]	[0.559]	[0.534]	[0.526]
Weighting strategy	IPW	IPW and Gender FW	IPW	IPW and Gender FW
Standard errors clustered at	Village	Village	Household	Household
Pseudo R square	0.42	0.42	0.42	0.42
Observations	3,049	3,049	3,049	3,049

Source: Authors calculation based on primary survey undertaken by CBPS.

Note: * - Significant at 10 per cent, ** - Significant at 5 per cent, and *** - Significant at 1 per cent.. Standard errors clustered are given in the parentheses.

Table A33: Profile of Field-level Documents under Review

Districts	Blocks	SDMCs/ Villages	Mothers' Committees	Panchayat
Muzaffarpur	7	16	1	
Katihar	9	15	0	
Kaimur	9	23	2	1
Total	25	54	3	1

Source: Authors compilation.

Table A34: Sample Grid

District	Kaimur District					
	Block	Bhagwanpur	Bhagwanpur	Bhabua	Bhabua	
	MS/Non-MS village	MS Village	MS Village	non-MS	non-MS	
	Name of village	Kochari	Tori	Hasanpura	Miria	
Years covered		2012-2015	2012-15	2013-16	2012-2015	
Issues discussed in the SDMC/ Description of the committee (women's participation)		Majority women members, Male head teacher who writes the minutes	All women committee, Muslim, Upgraded Urdu School	Yes, all OBC, no SC in village. Female head teacher	Muslim woman Chair, all members women, male head teacher who writes minutes	
CHILDREN'S ENROLMENT, ATTENDANCE & LEARNING						
Enrolling all children		1	4			1
Retention of all children			1			
Ensure 100% attendance, take up issues related to low attendance		7	2	1		16
Children reach school on time		7	4	2		
Regular teaching happening in the school (Pathan / Paatan)			1	10		6
Long absence / low attendance of children due to work / employment / weather			2	7		3
Absenteeism of students after MDM						3
Assessment / tracking of children's learning to be done - timely / monthly / continuous			6	1		
Importance of games for overall development of children			1			

(contd.)

(Table A34 continued)

District	Kaimur District				
	Bhagwanpur	Bhagwanpur	Bhabua	Bhabua	
MS/Non-MS village	MS Village	MS Village	non-MS	non-MS	
Name of village	Kochari	Tori	Hasanpura	Miria	
Years covered	2012-2015	2012-15	2013-16	2012-2015	
Issues discussed in the SDMC/ Description of the committee (women's participation)	Majority women members, Male head teacher who writes the minutes	All women committee, Muslim, Upgraded Urdu School	Yes, all OBC, no SC in village. Female head teacher	Muslim woman Chair, all members women, male head teacher who writes minutes	
Importance of good behaviour and socialisation of children		1			
Discipline, order etc		3			3
Special classes for weaker children for 1 hour after school (Government order)					
Disciplining students for rowdy behaviour					4
Children should not hang around in school after school hours		1			
Children to come to school in uniform	7	3			1
Measurement of height and weight of children	1				
Formation of Children's Parliament in school (appreciate, support)					2

Source: Authors compilation.

Table A35: Listing of Sub-points under the SDMC Categories

Children's enrolment, attendance and learning	SDMC-related	Teacher, SCR/PTR- related
	Selection of new committee	Teacher appointed for admin work, teacher shortages
Enrolling all children	Selection of Secretary of SDMC	Appeal to teachers to enhance teaching quality, help in retention of children
Retention of all children	Bank account signatories – appointment/ change etc.	Adverse student teacher ratio
Ensure 100% attendance, take up issues related to low attendance	Stop misuse of school premises by villagers	Adverse student classroom ratio Demand more classrooms
Children reach school on time	Where to access funds for levelling playground and other improvements	
Ensuring Regular teaching happening in the school (Pathan / Paatan)	Grant for special education – utilisation	Appreciation conveyed to teachers and superiors
Long absence/low attendance of children due to work/employment/ weather		Pay more attention to learning outcomes of children
Absenteeism of students after Mid-day meal		Inform BEO about maternity leave of teacher, to get replacement
Assessment / tracking of children's learning to be done - timely / monthly / continuous		Inform BEO regarding teacher's absence without intimation
Importance of games for overall development of children		Teachers asked to come on time
Importance of good behaviour and socialisation of children		Teachers should visit homes of the drop out children
Discipline, order etc		

(contd.)

(Table A35 continued)

Children's enrolment, attendance and learning	SDMC-related	Teacher, SCR/PTR- related
Special classes for weaker children for 1 hour after school (Government order)		
Disciplining students for unruly behaviour		
Children should not hang around in school after school hours		
Children must come to school in uniform		
Measurement of height and weight of children		
Bring dropped out children back to school		
Children reach school on time	Where to access funds for levelling playground and other improvements	
Ensuring Regular teaching happening in the school (Pathan / Paatan)	Utilisation of Grant for special education	Appreciation conveyed to teachers and superiors
Long absence / low attendance of children due to work / employment / weather		Pay more attention to learning outcomes of children
Absenteeism of students after Mid-day meal		Inform BEO about maternity leave of teacher, to get replacement
Assessment / tracking of children's learning to be done – timely / monthly / continuous		Inform BEO regarding teacher's absence without intimation
Importance of games for overall development of children		Teachers asked to come on time
Importance of good behaviour and socialisation of children		Teachers should visit homes of the drop out children

(contd.)

(Table A35 continued)

Children's enrolment, attendance and learning	SDMC-related	Teacher, SCR/PTR- related
Discipline, order etc		
Special classes for weaker children for 1 hour after school (Government order)		
Disciplining students for unruly behaviour		
Children should not hang around in school after school hours		
Children must come to school in uniform		
Measurement of height and weight of children		
Bring dropped out children back to school		

Infrastructure/ maintenance	Library/ TLM Grant	Mid-day meal
Expenditure of school maintenance grant, repairs, purchase, boundary wall etc.	Expenditure of TLM grant (monitoring, accounts)	Appointing MDM cook, cook salary, age, caste, gender etc.
Power supply in school, expenditure on electric issues, write to officials	Purchase of library books	Salary payment to MDM
Purchase of chairs/benches and disposal of broken furniture	Purchase of etc. classroom supplies like books, paper	Screening, ratifying expenditure on MDM
Supervision of school room/floor construction related, addressing delays, quality		Supervising the MDM, hygiene, taste, following menu
Opening bank account for school SDMC		Construction / repair of kitchen shed, purchase of utensils
Damage to school property		Receipt / non-receipts of supplies
Disturbances to school functioning by outsiders		Supervising MDM quality (including consumption of cereals)

(contd.)

(Table A35 continued)

Infrastructure/ maintenance	Library/ TLM Grant	Mid-day meal
Shortage of school furniture		CM Grant for nutrition of girls, criteria for distribution, incl age group or students with > 75% attendance
Requisition for new toilet, building, classroom etc		Insist on hand wash before and after MDM
Auction of rubble and broken furniture and fixtures		Purchase of mats, plates, utensils related – shortages
		Training of cook and helper hand pump-related – dysfunctional, needs repair, cleanliness etc.
		Bring to notice of administration shortage and underweight of rice/dal supplied
Incentives, stipends, scholarships	School environment, cleanliness and overall functioning	Other issues discussed
Distribution of scholarships planning, appreciation and complaints – issues that frame	Tree plantation and school environment	Celebrations of Independence, Republic days, Bihar Diwas, Gandhi Jayanti, Lal Bahadur Shastri Birthday
Receipt and distribution of scholarships / stipends (SC, ST, Girls)	Concerned about overall school cleanliness and maintenance, remove rubble	Educational tour fund for children – Bihar Darshan Grant (planning and satisfaction)
Scholarship to Muslim children	Cleanliness around the toilet in the school	Compensation for girl child who died
Receipt and distribution of uniforms, receipt/utilisation of funds for uniforms	Children come to school clean/groomed	Saraswati Puja celebration
Distribution of textbooks including non-availability, delayed distribution	Cleanliness of children	Maintaining cleanliness in temple inside school complex

(contd.)

(Table A35 continued)

Incentives, stipends, scholarships	School environment, cleanliness and overall functioning	Other issues discussed
Children to submit income certificates for scholarships	Repair approach road to school	During holidays – special programme for quality improvement for children
Opening bank accounts of children – especially girls and BPL children	Water logging in school gate, approach road, play ground etc.	
Impact of delayed release of funds – on attendance	Slogan writing/wall writing	
	Hand pump to be installed near toilet	
	Child-friendly environment	
	School timings – change	
	Appreciation (attendance, sports, functions etc.)	
	Appreciation of cleanliness of school	
	Develop garden	
	Prevent outsiders from messing up school premises	

Source: Authors compilation.

Table A36: Priority SDMC Agendas across Kaimur, Muzzafarpur & Katihar³

Issue/District	Katihar	Kaimur	Muzaffarpur
Enrolling all children	√	√	√
Regular attendance of children		√	√
Regular teaching			√
Quality of teaching			√
Use of school maintenance grant on purchases, repairs	√	√	√

(contd.)

³ This priority has been inferred from the number of times over the years under review the issues came up.

(Table A36 continued)

Issue/District	Katihar	Kaimur	Muzaffarpur
Expenditure on TLM		√	
Appointment of cook for MDM	√	√	√
Delays in payment of salary to cook	√		
Screening and approving expenditure on MDM	√		√
Monitoring of MDM quality		√	√
Construction of kitchen shed and purchase of utensils		√	√
Planning distribution of scholarships to SC/ST girls	√	√	√
Monitoring receipt of scholarships to SC/ST girls	√	√	√
Utilisation of uniform fund/ receipt and distribution of uniforms		√	√
Use of education tour fund		√	
Celebrations of special days	√	√	√

Source: Authors compilation.

Table A37: Mothers' Committee Meeting Minutes

Name of District	Katihar	Kaimur	Muzzafarpur
Name of Block	Kudra	Mohaniya	Bochaha
Name of village/ MS/non-MS	Gajirhan) (MS of the MDM cook	Balodi	Chak Abdul Rahman (MS)
Years for which minutes available	2012–2015	2012–2015	2012–2015
Composition of Committee	4 women & 2 men (HM & teacher)	4 women and 2 men	All women committee (including a woman HM)
Agenda/ issues in meetings			
MDM			
Appointment of cook	3	1	3
Consumption of cereals and supplements	Ongoing	3	
Distribution of nutrition fund to students	3		

Payments for cook and helper	Ongoing	1	8
Purchase of utensils for MDM	1		3
Aprons for cooks		1	1
MDM distribution and quality		9	16
Grants/expenditure			
Opening of account		1	
School maintenance – expenditure of grant received	2	7	
Grant for buying mats, stationery, TLM	1	10	
Amount received and expenditure	1	5	
Utilisation of school grant	1	8	
Purchase of items from school grant fund	1	3	
Infrastructure/maintenance			
School cleanliness	1	2	
Damage to school hand pump – repair thereof	1		
Hand pump repair	1		
Materials for school repair	1	6	
Shortage of classrooms		4	
Enrolment/scholarships			
List children not enrolled in the school	1		
100% enrolment of children – drive	Ongoing	6	1
Distribution of textbooks to children	Ongoing		
Distribution of scholarships/uniform stipend	1	12	16
Attendance/quality of teaching			
Attendance of children		4	4
Quality of teaching/ learning activities		7	2
Educational Tour for children/expenses		4	
Others			
Celebration of Independence Day		1	3
Formation of Committee			1
Selection of Secretary			1
Change in school timing			2

Source: Authors compilation.

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