

BREAKING BARRIERS

THE STATUS OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS' EDUCATION IN MEWAT, HARYANA



BY

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CEQUIN

CENTRE FOR EQUITY AND INCLUSION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rural district of Mewat (now called Nuh) is an economically backward and politically marginal one, dependant on agriculture and allied work. Its demography is predominantly Muslim with nearly a quarter of its population being between 0 to 6 years as per the 2011 Census. The cumulative effect of its socio-economic backwardness takes its greatest toll on the women and girls of the region. The lack of literacy, public transport, inadequate health facilities and chronic shortage of potable water add immense difficulty to the lives of ordinary women. This converts the adolescent girls of Mewat into a tremendously vulnerable category with limited opportunities to complete their schooling and even to aspire for higher education.

1. MAPPING THE FORMAL SCHOOL SYSTEM IN MEWAT

90% of the schools in Mewat are run by the government and 82% of the students enrolled in the district go to them. The maximum number of government schools is at the primary level. The poor rates of enrolment and retention post upper primary schooling indicate larger institutional and systemic weaknesses which prevent both boys and girls from continuing their education.

Among the total number of students enrolled in private schools, 76.4% are boys (i.e. 27757). 53.8% are Muslim boys. In contrast, 23.6% of private school students are girls. Only 10.9% of these students are Muslim girls. This suggests that parents are more likely to invest in a private school education for their boys, rather than their girls.

In terms of numbers, the formal school system of the district is well developed in the blocks of Nuh and Punhana. The following are some block level trends which one notices.

- Nuh has the maximum number of government schools at the primary, upper primary, secondary and senior secondary levels, followed by Punhana. Nuh and Punhana also have the highest numbers of private schools at the upper primary levels. The numbers of single sex girls' schools are the highest at Punhana and Nuh. Punhana

has more girls' schools at the primary level, while Nuh overtakes all the other blocks at the upper primary levels. Punhana followed by Nuh also has the highest number of madrasas in the district. Only in the case of private secondary schools does Taoru come first.

- With respect to the enrolment of girls across the blocks, Punhana has the best numbers at the primary and upper primary levels, followed by Nuh. At the secondary level, Nuh edges past Punhana to post the highest enrolment of girls. In terms of enrolment, Taoru block shows the largest number of girls enrolled at the senior secondary level. In the case of Nuh block, there is the greatest gap between the enrolment of boys and girls in the government schools as compared to the private schools. In contrast, Taoru has the least difference in the rates of enrolment in government schools as compared to private schools.
- While Punhana has the largest number of madrasas, Nuh has the largest total enrolment in them. However, Punhana outpaces Nuh in terms of the largest number of girls enrolled in madrasas. Indeed, there are nearly three times the girls enrolled in Nuh or Nagina, in Punhana.
- Among all the blocks, it is Nagina block which shows the poorest performance in terms of number of schools and enrolment. The block has performed the worst in terms of enrolment at all levels and with respect to the enrolment of boys and girls. A very interesting fact which emerges is that though Nagina showed the lowest numbers in terms of girls enrolled, it has the highest percentage of Muslim girls enrolled when compared to the total number of girls at each level. Therefore, one way to interpret the poor educational presence of both boys and girls in Nagina block is to understand that there is a greater concentration of Muslim students here.

2. CHALLENGES FACED BY ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN ACCESSING FORMAL SCHOOLING

The socialization of girls in the Meo Muslim community, with a restriction of their aspirations, leads to poor educational outcomes. In the absence for support for their studies at home, the burden of domestic responsibilities such as fetching water, cooking, fetching firewood for fuel, sibling care and the time spent on religious education leave little time to

supplement their school work with further studies at home. This especially affects their performance in the higher classes. Girls also begin to develop a fatalistic attitude about their own potential and ability which begins to affect how they approach their studies. The situation is worse for girls who are out of school. A sad detail which emerged in the focus group discussion with the out-of-school adolescent girls in Ber Sika village of Nuh block was their inability to articulate what they expected from their future. The responses of the out-of-school girls must be contextualized in the light of the severe curtailment of their agency and decision making power in their community.

There are several layers to why the Mewati communities do not prioritize the education of adolescent girls. An important aspect to bear in mind regarding adolescent girls' education in Mewat is that poor literacy and the underdevelopment of the region have been barriers to the community gaining a deeper perspective on the value of education in general and girls' education in particular. Part of this has been because of the community's alienation from the mainstream of development, leading to a greater influence of conservative religious leadership.

Another concern of the community is the paucity of female teachers in the government schools. Consistent with the low Work Participation Rate in Mewat, there is a huge skew in the number of female teachers who are available. However, there is also a tremendous shortage of teachers at levels in Mewat, partly because of the poor numbers of local graduates who are able to clear the Haryana teacher eligibility test and partly because of the perception of the region as a difficult posting among those from other districts. Within the government system, there are several varieties of non- permanent or contract teachers, such as part time teachers, guest teachers, temporary teachers, para-teachers etc. The contractualization of the teaching staff also has had a long term deleterious effect on the quality of government schooling available in Mewat.

In the context of rural Mewat, where each village is surrounded by acres of fields, parents are afraid to send their girls out of the village due to issues of safety, especially due to the widespread incidence of sexual harassment.

There is a widespread practice of early marriage in the Meo community with girls being married off at an average age of 16 and 17 years and boys between 18 and 19 years. Major

reasons for this include poverty, community pressure and the fear of not finding a suitable groom later on. A recurrent aspect which came up in community discussions is the fear that girls who go to school might elope with some boy.

Health issues also play an important role in restricting access to school. In the context of drop out of adolescent girls, the lack of access to sanitary napkins is an important concern with the onset of puberty (apart from cultural reasons tied to the importance of protecting the chastity of girls). Early pregnancies, anaemia and mental health issues also add to the factors leading to the drop-out of adolescent girls.

Another important aspect which must be acknowledged in the discussions of a child's educational experience is how it tallies with their own perception of what constitutes good quality educational experience. When many children reject school itself as a place which does not attract them and which is oppressive and repressive, they are exercising their agency and making a strong statement about the poor quality of their educational experience. This includes not only the infrastructural aspects, but also the critical place of the quality of teaching that they have access to. The ideas of what constitutes a good school, when probed with the resident students of the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyaya, Nagina, hinged round 'padhai' or the teaching learning process in school. The girls also remarked on the need for a clean environment and emphasized the extra-curricular activities and the games that they enjoy. These are aspects which they lack at home. Both the younger cohort of girls (aged twelve to thirteen years) and the older cohort (aged fourteen to fifteen years) shared the professions of teaching, medicine (and nursing) and civil service in that order as being the focus of their aspirations. The younger group also had girls who mentioned unconventional careers like becoming a football player. In contrast, the older girls were more conservative in their career aspirations because of a greater recognition of the limitations of their circumstances. In villages where the girls are often the first generation learners or whose parents have not studied beyond class VIII, it is difficult to get the support to pursue Science subjects and Maths.

3. TYPES OF INTERVENTIONS

In order to create lasting impact in the lives of adolescent girls, the types of intervention by a select number of NGOs explored in the report include:

- targeting the retention of rural adolescent girls in school (i.e. improving the physical infrastructure, providing academic support , building leadership and life skills and gender sensitization projects with adolescent boys),
- bringing to the mainstream those girls who are out of school (i.e. efforts to independently identify and enrol out of school girls, overcoming issues of physical access and designing bridge courses to help drop outs move to the upper primary level of schooling)
- creating a culture of critical thinking regarding gender roles, both among the women and men of the community, in order to sustain interventions among adolescent girls in school and open new avenues for livelihood and independence among out of school girls.
- engaging the local community with sensitivity and integrity (building partnerships with other NGOs and leveraging each other's strengths, contextualizing interventions to incorporate aspects of interest to the community, creating pathways for open dialogue to prevent misunderstandings, strengthening formal institutional structures like the School Management Committee (SMC) which link the school and the community, the use of area-sensitive and contextually aware staff)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION- MEWAT AND ITS GIRLS

12 year old Mahbis is a bright young student of class VII in the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Nagina. She says *‘I want to be an IPS Officer. This is not my dream, it was my mother’s. She really wanted to keep going to school but her parents married her off. But my father allowed her to study after marriage and she studied till class X. Now I will fulfil her dream... I am not allowed to do anything else at home, but just study’.*

Mahbis is a Meoni girl from Nuh (Mewat) infamous for being the one of the most backward districts in well-developed Haryana. Despite the evident poverty, agricultural and developmental barrenness, unemployment, gender inequalities, malnutrition and high levels of illiteracy in the district, Mahbis’s story is one example of a resilient community’s desire for change and a better future through education.

Girls like Mahbis represent one of the most vulnerable population categories of India- adolescent girls. Numbering nearly 120 million, which is around 10% of India’s population, the challenges that adolescent girls face are often invisible at the level of policy and interventions because most of these target either children or women. The major question of the fraught transition of a girl to adulthood is the question of her identity. The predominantly patriarchal perspective of Indian society identifies adolescent girls as future wives, daughters-in-law and mothers. Particularly in the context of rural India, the consequence is that adolescent girls are prepared for their future by increasingly being confined to household work like cooking, cleaning and taking care of younger siblings. The demands of domestic work coupled with societal anxieties about ‘chastity’ and ‘safety’ lead to a withdrawal from formal schooling with the onset of adolescence in large parts of rural India. In fact, it is estimated that ‘for every 100 girls that enrol in a school in rural India, only 40 will reach grade four, 18 will reach grade eight and only one will make it to grade 12’. Therefore, unlike in the case of boys, the experience of adolescence for the majority of girls in India does not open avenues for ‘greater autonomy, mobility, opportunity and power’.

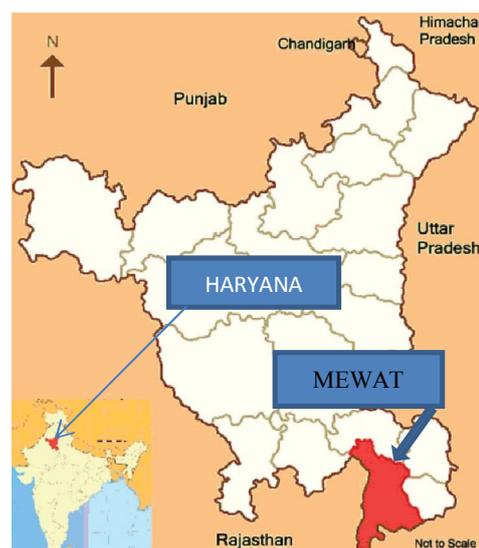
Rather, it leads to an exclusion from ‘public spaces and increasingly limited opportunities to acquire skills needed to build financial security or independence’ (DASRA, 2017, p. 7).

In this context, the question of how disadvantages and deprivation shape the life trajectory of an adolescent girl is a complex one. Caste, religion, geographical location, ethnicity, age and in some cases, disability can interplay as factors which can limit the access of girls to crucial resources like education, thus compounding their struggle to realize their potential. With this need to understand overlapping causes of disadvantage, this report explores the status of adolescent girls and their access to education in one of the most backward districts of the country- Mewat (Nuh).

1. MEWAT- A STUDY IN UNDER-DEVELOPMENT

The district of Mewat is just 45 kilometres from the glass and steel skyscrapers of Gurgaon. As a district, the region is relatively young, being carved from the Gurgaon and Faridabad districts of Haryana in 2005. Administratively, the district is now called Nuh. However the older usage Mewat is what remains popular at the ground level. In this report, the usage Mewat is retained in order to avoid confusion with references to the district headquarters and block Nuh. Despite Mewat being so close to the city of Gurgaon, its indices of development stand out in sharp contrast with those of the latter. Gurgaon is an industrially well developed district which makes it an engine of growth for Haryana state (Kaur, Minhas, Jain, Singh, & Dubey, 2008).

Figure 1: Location of Mewat District in Haryana



Source: <http://mesasnuh.org/about-mewat-3/map-of-mewat>

1.1. DISTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The administrative structure of the district has been recently revised. As of 2017, it is as follows.

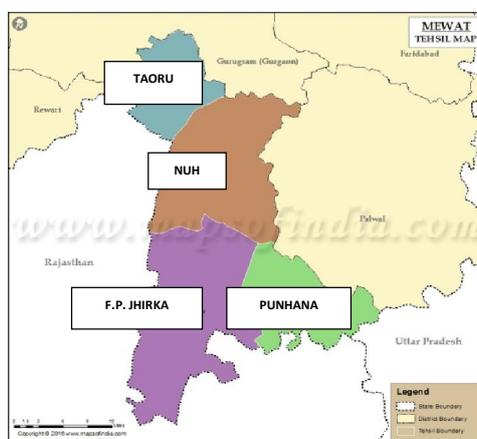
Table 1: Administrative Divisions of Nuh District as of 2017

DISTRICT	SUB- DIVISIONS	TEHSILS	SUB TEHSIL	BLOCKS
NUH	1. NUH	1. NUH	1. NAGINA	1. FEROZEPUR JHIRKA
		2. FEROZEPUR JHIRKA		2. NAGINA
	2. FEROZEPUR JHIRKA	3. PUNHANA		3. NUH
		4. TAORU		4. PUNHANA
	5. PUNHANA			5. TAORU
				6. INDRI
				7. PINGWAN

Source: Statistical Abstracts of Haryana, 2015-2016 (2017)

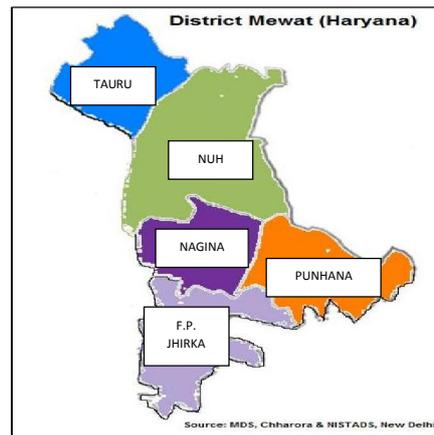
Mewat (Nuh) district is divided into three subdivisions (Nuh, Ferozepur Jhirka, Punhana) which come under the Faridabad division (which in turn is one of Haryana's six revenue divisions). The district has four tehsils (Nuh, Ferozepur Jhirka, Punhana and Taoru). The tehsil is the district classification followed by the Department of Land Records and Revenue. The Socio-economic caste census (2011), which has been used extensively in this study, uses the tehsil as the basic unit for data collection. The district has seven Community Development (CD) blocks as of 20th February, 2017 with Indri and Pingwan joining the five older blocks of Nuh, Punhana, Taoru, Ferozepur Jhirka and Nagina.

Figure 2: Tehsil Map of Nuh (Mewat) District



Source: Maps of India

Figure 3: 5 block division of Mewat District



Source: Maps of India.com and Mewat Development Society

All government data released till 2017 uses the five blocks of Nuh, Punhana, Taoru, Ferozpur Jhirka and Nagina. Therefore, this study also uses these 5 blocks for analysis of trends.

1.2. MEWAT AS A CULTURAL REGION

While the district is only around twelve years old, Mewat has a long and distinctive historical and political identity. It is a cultural region encompassing parts of Haryana, Rajasthan and some pockets of Uttar Pradesh (Bhabha & Gopi, 2016, p. 109).

The District Census Handbook of Mewat (2011) describes the history of the region beginning from around the seventh century (AD) when it was under the sway of the empire of Harshvardhana and its subsequent fluctuating relationships with the various rulers of Delhi over the centuries, including the British. A region of fierce warriors, the Mewatis were notorious for their raiding and their aggressive resilience in protecting their independence and identity. In fact, there is a perspective that ‘various claimants to political power in Delhi took refuge in and sought help from the chieftains of Mewat’ (District Census Handbook, Mewat, 2011, p. 8). What is notable in the historical trajectory described is the remarkable resilience of the people of Mewat in fighting for their political independence and cultural identity. For example in the revolt of 1857 against the British, the Mewatis supported Bahadur Shah, the last Mughal emperor. The region paid severely at the hands of the British

for its rebellious acts with countless lives, the destruction of whole villages and confiscation of property.

The predominant ethnic group of the region are Meo Muslims. They are believed to have converted to Islam in the 14th century and are believed to trace their ancestry to the Rajputs or the Yaduvanshis. However, even after their conversion, they retained several features of their earlier Hindu beliefs and practices, including the kinship structure of gotras and the observance of several Hindu festivals. Post-independence, there has been a gradual attempt to induce conformity to a more orthodox interpretation of Islam among the community, through the efforts of pietist movements like the Tablighi Jamaat (Ahmed, 2016).

To understand the backwardness of the district of Mewat, we must see how there is a coming together of various factors which reinforce each other and which trap the region in a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment.

1.3. TOPOGRAPHY

Mewat lies to the west of the river Yamuna and is on the Aravalli range of mountains. The topography of the district is inconsistent, with patches of land with hills and hillocks on one hand and plains of the other. The upper hills of the Aravallis are mostly barren, with almost no tree cover and the soil of the region is a mixture of sandy, sandy loam and clay loam, i.e. light in texture. Only very small pockets have canal irrigation facilities; otherwise the entire agriculture is rain fed'. This is a chronically drought prone region. What makes the situation worse is that two thirds of the area has brackish water, which is not suitable for irrigation (Gaiha, 2003). Fresh water is available only in around a tenth of the villages. This too has been reducing rapidly due to the constant depletion of ground water as well as the ecological destruction of the Aravalli range. These aspects shape the livelihoods, agro economy and ecology and the socio-cultural features of the region, especially gender roles.

1.4. DEMOGRAPHY

In the 2011 Census, Mewat had a total population of 10.9 lakh (1.09 million) individuals. With a sex ratio of 907 (i.e. the number of females per 1000 males), Mewat stands ahead of the state ratio of 879.

A notable feature of the population of Mewat is that ‘almost a quarter of the total population lies in the age group of 0 to 6 years. A relatively higher proportion of young age group in Mewat indicates greater pressure on the region to be resource rich to ensure that a major chunk of the population is adequately nurtured in their formative years’ (Mehta, P et al, 2015).

Table 2: Percentage Of Under 6 Population In Mewat District

% Population Between 0 And 6 Years Of Age	22.78%
% Males Between 0-6 To The Total Male Population	11.95%
% Females Between 0-6 To The Total Population	10.83%

Source: Census of India, 2011

The child sex ratio at 906 is also the best in the state against Haryana’s aggregate sex ratio of 829. A major reason for this is the religious belief among the Meos that children are God’s blessings and therefore, family planning and pre-birth sex determination are very rare in the region. Therefore, the practice of foeticide and female infanticide are also not so prevalent (Mehta, P et al, 2015). This is also reflected in the decadal population growth in the district when the data of the 2001 and 2011 censuses are compared. There was a population growth of 38.65% in the district as compared to the statewide growth of 19.90%.

In terms of residence, only 11.39% of the population live in urban centres, as compared to Haryana’s larger statistic of 34.88% of the population being urban. This is another indicator of the lack of development in the district as the ‘majority of the population relies on the rural economy with limited growth of the urban centres’ (Sharma, 2014).

With regard to religion, Mewat has the largest concentration of Muslims in the state of Haryana, with their numbers comprising 79.2% of the population. The Meo Muslims are now classified as Backward Classes- B (BC-B) according to the Haryana Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes Department. Of the remainder of the population, 20.37% are Hindu, followed a miniscule percentage of Jains (0.13%), Christians (0.11%), Sikhs (0.05%) and

Buddhists (0.05%). Among the five blocks of Mewat, this demographic profile is only different in Taoru. The town of Taoru has a population of 87.93% Hindus (Census, 2011).

6.91% of the total population belong to the Scheduled castes (SC). This is the lowest SC population in the state. There are no scheduled tribes (ST) in this region.

1.5. LITERACY

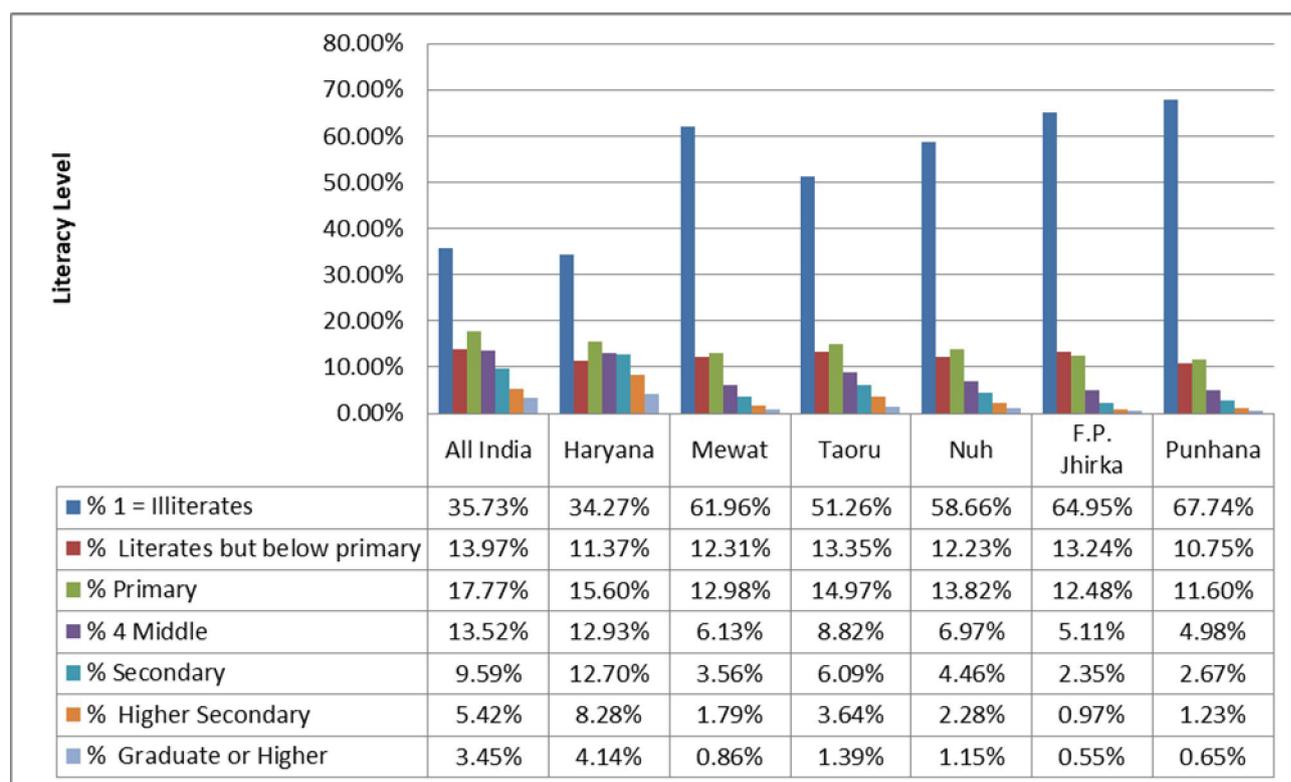
The district has the lowest literate population in the state at 54.08% as compared to the 75.55% which is the state average. The starkness of the situation is more evident when one learns that only 36.6% of the women in Mewat district are literate (as opposed to the state average of 65.9%). The situation of men's literacy is better at 69.9% but even this figure is considerably lower than the Haryana figure of 84.06%.

Only 11.39% of Mewat's population of nearly 1.1 million people live in urban locations. The Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011 also breaks down the patterns of literacy by highlighting the state of rural India and its various districts. The starkness of the situation is evident in the fact that the rate of illiteracy in rural Mewat is nearly double that of the rest of rural Haryana and India. The numbers (which are an aggregate of men's and women's literacy) highlight the miniscule population which has had more than five years of schooling. This has tremendous implications for the premium which is placed on education in general and particularly that of girls.

In terms of a tehsil level break up, Taoru, followed by Nuh, has the relatively best performance of education indicators, with the least number of illiterates and the highest number of graduates. Punhana has the worst situation in terms of education attainment, lagging behind the others in terms of illiteracy, school and higher educational attainment.

Comparing the total number of students who appeared for the senior secondary examination in class XII in the years 2014, 2015 and 2016 (Table 3), the majority of students in class XII in the district tended to opt for the Arts Stream (8456), followed by the Science stream (5859) and then Commerce (2157). If we break up the statistics year-wise, one notes the poor pass percentages in all three streams. Since there are wide variations in the stream-wise pass percentage each year, a better indicator is the average pass percentage, which is 47.9% for the arts stream, 50% for science and 52.9% for commerce.

Figure 4: Educational Attainment in Rural Mewat



Source: Socioeconomic and Caste Census, 2011

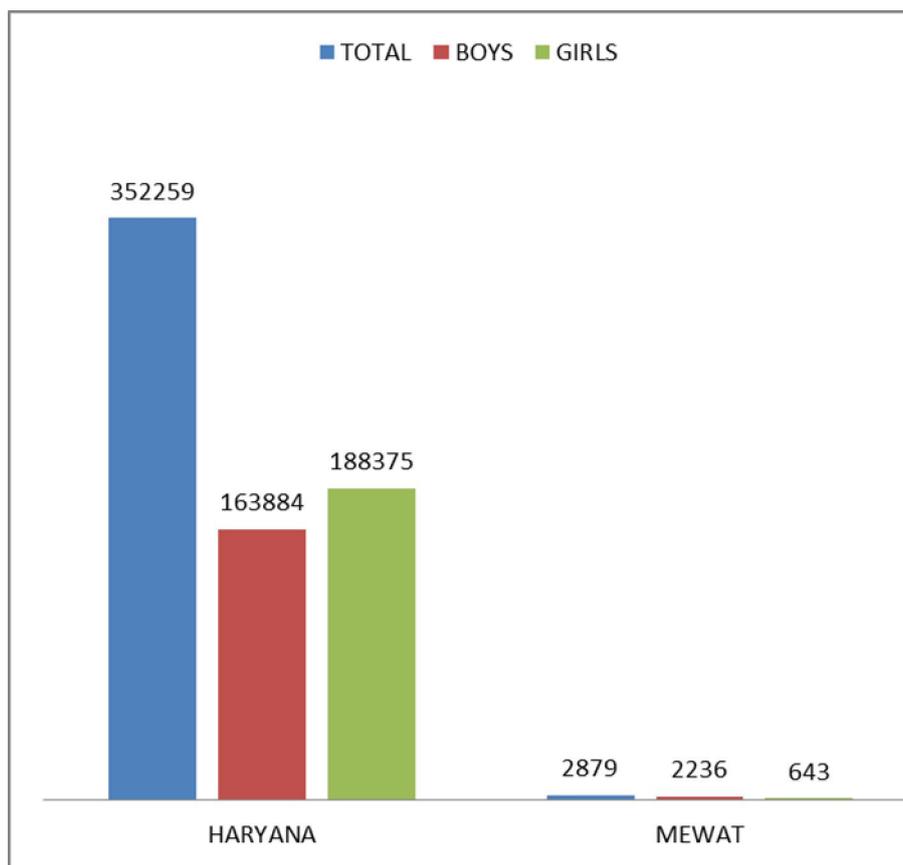
Table 3: The stream-wise distribution of appeared and passed students in class XII examination in Mewat (2014-2016)

Stream	2014		2015		2016	
	Appeared	Passed	Appeared	Passed	Appeared	Passed
Arts	2574	730 (28.3%)	3251	2051 (63.1%)	2631	1377 (52.3%)
Commerce	820	238 (29%)	859	627 (72.9%)	478	271 (56.7%)
Science	2200	1582 (71.9%)	1826	402 (22%)	1833	1030 (56.2%)

Source: RTI Query

It is also important to note the very poor outcomes in terms of graduate studies in Mewat. The district accounts for only 0.8% of the total number of students studying in arts, science and home science subjects at the college level in Haryana. Even within this dismal figure, 99.8% of these students from Mewat are boys.

Figure 5: A comparison of the number of Students in Recognized Colleges for General Education (Arts, Commerce and Science) in Haryana and Mewat



Source: Statistical Abstracts of Haryana, 2015-2016

The situation of professional education in the district may be gauged from the statistics of engineering education in the district, given below. With regard to the intake capacity for engineering students in Haryana, Mewat constitutes only 0.9% of the total figure.

Table 4: Intake Capacity in Engineering

	Civil	Mechanical	Electrical	Electronics and Communication	Computer	Other	Total
Haryana	9420	13950	3978	11646	11494	7646	58134
Mewat	120	120	60	60	120	60	540

Source: Statistical Abstracts, 2015-16

1.6. LIVELIHOOD, EMPLOYMENT, INCOME

Agriculture and allied agro based activities are the predominant means of livelihood in Mewat. 35.95% of the population are cultivators and 19.06% identify themselves as

agricultural labourers (Census 2011). The landholding pattern in the district reveals that small and marginal farmers predominate. 77% farmers in the district possess a cultivable area of less than 3 hectares.

'The cropping seasons are kharif (June– September) and rabi (October–March). No crops are cultivated during the summer season (April– May). The principal crops grown during kharif and rabi seasons are pearl millet/sorghum and wheat/mustard, respectively' (Kaur, Minhas, Jain, Singh, & Dubey, 2008).

Despite being a drought prone area, very small pockets in the district have access to canal irrigation. Nearly 88% of farmers depend on tube wells to irrigate their farms. However, apart from questions of sustainability due to the grave depletion of ground water, the water itself is brackish and unsuitable for drinking and agriculture (except in villages along the foot of the Aravallis). Fragmented land holdings, traditional farming practices on a hostile topography, the absence of irrigation canals in the majority of the district and the dependence on rain imply that agriculture does not tend to be very remunerative. In addition, selling crop produce is rendered difficult by the fact that Mewat has the least number of markets per villages and a much lesser coverage of metalled roads than the state average (51 per 100 sq km as against 64 per 100 sq km in the rest of Haryana). Therefore, subsistence farming is predominant (Mehta et al, 2015).

There have been attempts undertaken by various government and non-government agencies to address some of these agricultural problems such as the need for soil and water conservation programmes and the supply of better quality inputs and improved harvest management practices. In the case of ambitious watershed development programmes undertaken by the Mewat Area Development Programme (MADP) with support from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), success was limited by the absence of a master watershed development plan, the poor choice of beneficiaries to those who were well above the poverty line, the lack of community engagement in conceptualization and implementation and the limited involvement of local Panchayats. Gains from such programmes have been limited to the prevention of heavy run-off of water, with less impact on cropping practices and increasing yields. (Gaiha, 2003).

The case of animal husbandary which is the secondary source of income is not much better. The average of three livestock animals per household indicates a dependence on livestock for earning income apart from meeting the local demand for milk and meat products. However, the health and productivity of livestock is hampered by the lack of capital as well as the availability of veterinary services and this adds to the burden of the rearing household (Ishtiaque & Hurera, 2014; Mehta et al, 2015).

Table 5 captures the main sources of household income. Ferozpur Jhirka has the maximum number of individuals who trace their income to agriculture, followed by Nuh. The situation of Taoru tehsil is notable for a greater diversity of sources of income.

With respect to employment (described in the table 6), apart from the Taoru block, the number of individuals engaged in government and private jobs is very less (Mehta et al, 2015). Taoru tehsil has the largest number of individuals with a salaried job, especially in the private, government and public sectors in the descending order. The tehsil of Ferozpur Jhirka has the least number of individuals in salaried jobs.

The Junior Basic Training (JBT) programme, which prepares graduates of class XII to become teachers (upto the primary level) was repeatedly cited by informants as an aspirational career option. Studies also suggest that there is considerable agnosticism among Mewatis about spending some twenty years in education and whether this would reap dividends in terms of employment, considering that the poor quality of education in government schools did not prepare them to compete for jobs. This mindset also seems to lead to a greater promotion of madrasa (Islamic school) education and related jobs. With the largest number of madrasas per square kilometre in the country, Mewat is famous for producing Islamic scholars (maulvis, imams and hafiz). The graduates of Mewat's madrasas are employed in mosques and madrasas not only in the district but also in different parts of India and even abroad (Ishtiaque & Hurera, 2014).

The economic profile of the inhabitants of various tehsils captured in Table 7 suggests that Taoru, which is not as dependent on only agricultural income, has greater income security. Punhana brings up the rear as the tehsil has the largest number of households with an income less than 5000 rupees a month.

Table 5: Main Source Of Household Income (Rural Mewat And Its Tehsils)

MAIN SOURCE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (RURAL)	ALL INDIA	HARYANA	MEWAT	TAORU	NUH	F.P. JHIRKA	PUNHANA
% Cultivation	30.10%	33.08%	23.85%	19.85%	25.85%	29.34%	17.39%
% Manual Casual Labour	51.18%	42.70%	50.48%	53.04%	52.06%	51.53%	46.17%
% Part-time or Full-Time Domestic Service	2.50%	5.01%	4.63%	5.86%	6.57%	3.63%	3.16%
% Foraging/Rag Picking	0.23%	0.17%	0.30%	0.10%	0.31%	0.40%	0.26%
% Non-agricultural Own Account Enterprise	1.61%	2.77%	3.47%	4.56%	1.96%	1.96%	6.24%
% Begging/Charity/Alms collection	0.37%	0.32%	0.41%	0.29%	0.27%	0.18%	0.89%
% Others	13.97%	15.87%	16.84%	16.29%	12.92%	12.95%	25.88%

Source: Socio Economic and Caste Census (2011)

Table 6: Employment Statistics, Rural Mewat And Its Tehsils

EMPLOYMENT	RURAL INDIA	RURAL HARYANA	MEWAT	TEHSILS			
				Taoru	Nuh	Ferozpur Jhirka	Punhana
% of Households with Salaried Job	9.65%	15.29%	6.69%	14.45%	8.03%	3.46%	4.90%
% Government Sector	5.00%	8.94%	2.91%	3.74%	3.70%	2.01%	2.74%
% Public Sector	1.12%	0.84%	0.66%	0.82%	0.52%	0.40%	1.01%
% Private Sector	3.57%	5.53%	3.12%	9.89%	3.81%	1.06%	1.15%

Source: Socioeconomic Caste Census, 2011

Table 7: Income Statistics, Rural Mewat And Its Tehsils

INCOME	RURAL INDIA	RURAL HARYANA	RURAL MEWAT	TEHSILS			
				Taoru	Nuh	Ferozepur Jhirka	Punhana
% of Households having Monthly income of highest earning household member as less than Rs. 5,000	74.52%	58.96%	69.57%	61.50%	67.10%	71.58%	74.19%
% of Households having Monthly income of highest earning household member between Rs. 5,000 and Rs 10,000	17.18%	24.68%	22.19%	26.09%	24.24%	21.46%	18.80%
% of Households having Monthly income of highest earning household member % Rs. 10,000 or more	8.25%	16.28%	8.22%	12.40%	8.62%	6.95%	7.01%

Source: Socio-Economic and Caste Census, 2011

1.7. HEALTH

India has a unique three tier rural health system designed to promote ‘both preventive and curative care, with special emphasis on maternal and child health’ (Mehta, P et al, 2015). The Sub-centre, the first unit of health care in rural areas, is meant to serve a population of 5,000, but, in case of Mewat, it serves the average population of more than 10,000. This is much higher than the state average of 7585 persons. Similarly, in the case of Primary Health Centre (PHC), the population served is twice above the norm of 30,000 as each Primary Health Centres (P.H.C.) serves about 64,000 population. It is again higher than the state average of 41,500. Even regarding the Community Health Centre (CHC), Mewat on an average serves 263,275 people which is also more than the double the national norm of 120,000 and state’s average of 167,422 persons (Sharma, 2014). Therefore, Mewat has the poor distinction of being the district with the least amount of registered medical institutions (hospitals, PHCs, dispensaries, CHCs etc) per lakh of population in the state of Haryana. The situation is as grim as one hospital per five lakh individuals (Mehta, P et al, 2015).

Additionally, these facilities, both in terms of manpower and physical condition, show acute shortage. Even in case of the availability of equipment or medicines, Mewat lags behind the state average (Sharma, 2014).

Unsurprisingly, the greatest price of these is paid at the level of reproductive and child health care. Reproductive health is 'considered to be the most important aspect in assessing the health status of a society, as it is considered to be an essential component of young people's ability to become well adjusted, responsible and productive members of society' (Mehta, P et al, 2015). In addition, reproductive health is a key indicator of status of women in society. The mean age of marriage in Mewat is 19.4 years and around 5 percent of total births occur between 15 to 19 years. Less than half the sampled population receive antenatal care (regular medical and nursing care recommended for women during pregnancy for the growth of the foetus and elimination of risks to the mother). Only 51% of mothers underwent an institutional delivery. This greatly increases the risk of maternal and infant mortality. The lack of access to vaccination further magnifies health risks among new born babies and infants. Only a quarter of the total children in the sample had received full vaccination (District Health and Facility Survey IV, cited in Mehta et al, 2015).

1.8. ADMINISTRATIVE APATHY

The underdevelopment of Mewat is not a new story. As far back as 1980, it was recognized that the region required special administrative attention for its social and economic development. Therefore, a Mewat Development Board (MDB) was set up, headed by the Chief Minister of the state, the secretaries of important sectors (Finance, Power, Irrigation, Industries, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Cooperation and Development), Members of Parliament and the Legislative Assembly from Mewat and other notables from the region. Its executing agency at the field level was called the Mewat Development Agency (MDA). The MDA was to plan, coordinate, administer, monitor and review various schemes and projects implemented by the MDB.

However, today, i.e. thirty seven years, after the setting up of this apex institution, the ground reality is not greatly different. In the roll out of the major schemes of the MDA, key decisions are taken by senior civil servants, with the Development Board functioning as an extension of the Haryana Government. In this context, an important reason behind the

neglect of the district is that it is not relevant politically, with the Mewatis representing a miniscule percent (around 3 percent) of Haryana's population and thereby, not counting much in terms of votes. The attitude of apathy (and often, antipathy) on the part of the political leadership to the region's requirements tends to percolate to the district administration. This tends to translate into high rates of absenteeism among government employees and the perception of Mewat as a punishment posting (Maheswari, 2003).

This affects the implementation of schemes. Consider the case of the most ambitious development project which was helmed by the MDA in collaboration with the International Fund for Agriculture (IFAD) in 1995. The MDB Implementation Committee believed that funds from outside agencies would speed the developmental processes in the region (Mehra & Aggarwal, 2016). The collaboration was called the Mewat Area Development Project (MADP- IFAD). 'The major downside was that project implementation suffered from frequently changing CEOs. Ten CEOs changed over the project period. High staff turnover in the line departments was a major impediment (Mehra & Aggarwal, 2016). An additional distressing aspect was the need to prioritize and accommodate the demands due to 'the political clout of local politicians', rather than the local needs and priorities in the implementation of the MADP. In his paper for the Expert Group Meeting for Social Funds and Poverty Reduction at the Department of Social and Economic Affairs, United Nations Organization, Gaiha (2003) gives examples. For instance, a political rally in support of the Chief Minister was classified as 'Development Support Communications'. Another serious example was how funding for a wasteland management scheme prepared by the Agon panchayat for the reclamation of 400 acres of lands ultimately became diverted to a Jat area under the influence of a prominent Jat MLA, rather benefit the Meo Community. Such examples give credence to the suggestion that the MDA disbursed project funds in an 'ad hoc and piecemeal fashion' leading to the expenditure of a mere 36% of the outlay in the first five years of the project, which had a seven year span (Gaiha, 2003).

This is not to say that the entire scheme was a washout. There were aspects of the intervention which had position outcomes. For example, the MADP was the first project in the region to focus on both social and economic development. The patriarchal culture of Mewat prevents women, especially Meoni women, from earning and gaining control over resources. An important element of the intervention was the initiation of Self Help Groups

for women, in order to involve them in income generation activities and gain a place in decision making bodies. At the time of the completion of the project, the SHG approach had introduced 'subtle changes in the dynamics of the traditional Meo Society'. However, through the SHG mobilization and the establishment of milk cooperatives, a sustained change with respect to the participation of women in the higher councils of society could not be achieved. The lack of sustained political will and bureaucratic support also weakens such initiatives.

2. LARGER IMPLICATIONS OF MEWAT'S BACKWARDNESS FOR EDUCATION AND GENDER RELATIONS

This demographic and socio-economic character of Mewat- as a rural district, dependant on agriculture and allied work, predominantly Muslim, politically marginal and with nearly a quarter of the population being between 0 to 6 years as of the 2011 Census has several implications for education. Table 8 sums a few pertinent statistics from the Ministry of Human Resource Development's SRI- IMRB National Sample Survey for the Estimation of Out of School Children. The population groups with high percentage of the estimated out of school children in the country are:

- in rural areas
- tend to be female
- belong to the age group 11 to 13 years and
- are either members of the Scheduled Tribes, Muslim community, Scheduled Castes or the Backward Classes.

Except with respect to the presence of Scheduled Tribes, Mewat ticks all the boxes for the presence of those segments of the population whose children are most vulnerable to be out of school. The situation of girls in all these segments tends to be hard. The brief profile of Mewat district sketched in the sections before throw light on the great burdens which women and girls bear due to the cumulative effect of the region's backwardness. The lack of literacy, public transport, inadequate health infrastructure and water infrastructure add immense difficulty to the lives of ordinary women. For instance, the fact that less than 23%

of Mewat's households have a water source within their premises places the onus of trudging long distances to collect water on women.

Table 8: Percentage of Out of School Children among various Population Groups

POPULATION CATEGORY	Rural	Urban	Total
All India	3.13	2.54	2.97
Male	2.94	2.3	2.77
Female	3.36	2.86	3.23
Age Group 6-10 years	2.91	2.37	2.77
Age Group 11-13 years	3.45	2.78	3.28
SC	3.43	2.6	3.24
ST	4.8	1.75	4.2
OBC	3.03	3.16	3.07
Hindu	2.97	1.95	2.73
Muslim	4.34	4.58	4.43
Christian	1.77	1.06	1.52
Other religions	1.33	1.06	1.26

Source: SRI-IMRB National Sample Survey of Estimation of Out-of-School Children in the Age 6-13 in India (2014)

Or consider Table 9. Within the very low Work Participation Rate (WPR) of Mewat district, i.e. 26.6 per cent (i.e. the number of people who are either employed or actively looking for work), more women than men tend to be involved in cultivation, agricultural labour and household industry. In areas other than these, the proportion of male workers is nearly twice the number of women (see Table 1). Such under-representation of women in the work force also has grave economic implications. Better opportunities for women are seen to spur greater economic development in a region (Mehta, P et al, 2015).

Table 9: Male and Female Workers

CATEGORY OF WORKERS	MEN (Percentage)	WOMEN (Percentage)
Cultivators	34.29	41.67
Agricultural Labourers	16.14	29.11
Workers in Household Industry	1.71	3.34
Other Workers	47.86	25.88

Source: Socioeconomic and Caste Census, 2011

The implications of such socio-cultural and economic practices have long term impact on the lives of adolescent girls. Since every one in ten Indians is an adolescent girl, their transition

to adulthood will affect the demography, politics, health status, socio-economic and cultural development of the country. For example, estimates suggest that India loses more than 56 billion US Dollars annually in potential earnings 'because of early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, high secondary school dropout rates and joblessness among young women' (World Economic Forum, 2009).

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1. THE GENESIS OF THIS STUDY: CEQUIN IN MEWAT

The Centre for Equity and Inclusion (CEQUIN) is a non-profit organization working towards the empowerment of women and girls since 2009. Five thematic areas form the core concern of the organization's engagement with marginalized and excluded populations- violence against women and girls, leadership through sports, health and well-being, economic empowerment and education.

Based on its work among the urban, Muslim and economically backward community in Jamia Nagar, New Delhi, CEQUIN began working in the rural context of Mewat from 2013 onwards. The organization's initial interventions in Mewat were focused on understanding the issues of the region and building linkages with the community, especially women. Towards that end, in 2014, a Gender Audit was done in 10 villages across the 3 blocks of Ferozpur Jhirka, Nuh and Nagina. CEQUIN's initial engagement with the women of Mewat took the form of creating spaces (Nari Choupals) where they could share their issues. Women were also helped in mobilizing and forming collectives such as Self Help Groups and Health Groups. Support was also given to the women in starting small businesses which could be run from home such as sewing, knitting, and embroidery. In these endeavours, the aim was to encourage their participation and to develop their leadership capacity in all spheres of public life

In 2014, CEQUIN also commissioned a baseline report using the perspectives of 900 young (15-25 years) and adult (26 and above) men and women residing in the villages of Ferozpur Jhirka, Nagina and Nuh to understand the level of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, social norms, practices and behaviour related to women's issues in Mewat such as reproductive health, gender, violence, abuse, rights, education and livelihood. This baseline covering 600

females and 300 males shaped the organization's decision to work with adolescent boys and girls as the youth were seen to be much more open to change and forward thinking, while the adults were more embedded in their traditional and communal practices.

At present, CEQUIN works with adolescents who are in school and out of school. Funded by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), CEQUIN has been organizing 'Agents of Change' leadership workshop for girls (12-17 years) and boys (14-17 years). CEQUIN has partnered with the five Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) in the blocks of Nuh, Nagina, Ferozpur Jhirka, Punhana and Taoru to run sports camps through four sports camps per school through the year. Over a period of five days, daily technical football sessions are conducted along with thematic sessions, covering topics such as gender, health and wellbeing, leadership, livelihoods etc. CEQUIN also works with adolescent girls between the age group of 10 to 17 who are out of school through organizing summer camps, community awareness programmes and meetings. Another prong of CEQUIN's work with youth (15 to 25 years) is supported by the United Nations Development Programme and is aimed at deconstructing ideas of gender and livelihood through the organization of career counselling workshops (DISHA-Chat) in school and in the community.

This current research study to map the status of adolescent girls' education in the district with a focus on 'in school' and 'out of school' girls is part of CEQUIN's strategy to meaningfully shape further interventions for girls between 10 and 17 years of age. It is hoped that policy makers and practitioners on the field may find this report an up to date research resource for working with adolescent girls in the region. It is funded by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

3.2. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND KEY ASSUMPTIONS

Two key questions lie at the heart of this study:

1. What are the factors which lead to the drop-out of adolescent girls from formal education in the Mewat district of Haryana?
2. What are the strategies that can lead to the retention of adolescent girls in government schools in the district?

These questions were formulated and the research study designed with the following assumptions.

Firstly, the study examines government, private and madrasa schools under the ambit of formal education. However, since the government school system caters to 82.1% of the student population (UDISE, 2016-17), it has been the main focus of exploration. This is so especially in the second question which has been explored primarily through the kinds of interventions which are required in and will be effective for government schools.

Secondly, there are several reasons why a child might not be in school. Three criteria which officially define an out of school child (OOSC) are: a) The child has never been enrolled in a formal school b) The child has been formally enrolled but has not attended the school c) The child was enrolled and was attending the school, but in past stopped doing so or else was continuously absent for a period of 45 days. In this case, the child considered to have 'dropped out' of school (Bhatty, Saraf, & Gupta, 2016). This study has been biased to the exploration of the third criterion, i.e. children who have attended school for some time and have dropped out.

Thirdly, there has been a greater attention paid to understanding the socio-cultural context and aspirations of girls from the Meo Muslim community.

3.3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research problem was broken down into the following objectives in this study

- To undertake a review of literature of studies on Mewat, its physical, economic and cultural dimensions
- To identify and compile government data on the enrolment, attendance and transition of girls from classes I to XII in Mewat government schools
- To understand the diverse perspectives of select district officials, teachers, parents and girls (10-17 years) of Mewat regarding the benefits and challenges of adolescent girls education
- To identify and understand interventions (Government and Non-governmental) which address the drop out of adolescent girls from formal schooling

3.4. SOURCES OF DATA

This study hoped to gain an overview of the status of girls' education in Mewat and therefore, an important aspect of the research was to accomplish a review of literature of existing studies done by scholars as well as documentation of the interventions of various NGOs active on the ground.

This was supplemented by secondary data which was available from the government. The following data sets were analysed for this study.

1. U-DISE 2016-2017
2. DISE District report cards on Mewat (2006-07 to 2015-16)
3. Statistics on government primary, upper primary, secondary and senior secondary schools provided by the Haryana School Information Management System
4. Statistics on private (aided and unaided) primary, upper primary, secondary and senior secondary schools provided by the Haryana School Information Management System
5. District Health and Household Survey (2012-2013) for health statistics of children (10-19 years)- This is the latest one conducted.
6. District Census Handbook of Mewat (2011)
7. Socio-economic and caste census (2011)
8. SRI- IMRB National Sample Survey on the estimation of out of school children

Two requests for information under the Right to Information Act (RTI Act, 2005) were made to the Board of School Examinations, Haryana and to the Department of Labour, Haryana.

The primary data was collected for this study through field visits in Mewat in April and May 2017. The main objective during this process was to triangulate the data which emerged through the literature review and analysis of government data. Therefore, the creation of these samples was purposive and convenience based. Primary data collection included:

- Interview with the principal of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), Nagina
- Interview with the Government Elementary Teachers Training Institute (GETTI) principal, who also holds the position of the Block Education Officer (BEO) of Nuh

- Interview with four government school teachers (two men, two women)
- Focus Group Discussions with 8 adolescent girls (10 to 13 years) at KGBV, Nagina
- Focus Group Discussions with 8 adolescent girls (14 to 15 years) at KGBV, Nagina
- Focus Group Discussions with 4 men at Ber Sika Village, Nuh
- Focus Group Discussions with 8 women at Ber Sika Village, Nuh
- Focus Group Discussions with 5 adolescent girls who dropped out of school in Ber Sika Village and 2 girls who were still in school
- Interview with the maulana of Qasimul Uloom Niazia, Nuh
- Interviews with representatives of 4 NGOs working in Mewat

In the case of the interviews and focus group discussions, a semi-structured interview format was adopted. This allowed the exploration of leads within conversations as well as clarification of issues which arose in the secondary data.

4. STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

The rest of this report is structured as follows. Chapter Two describes what it means for a Mewati girl to be in school. It examines the schooling system of Mewat and patterns of enrolment with respect to the government, private and madrasa systems. Chapter Three explores the category of 'out-of-school' girls in Mewat and highlights the major struggles that girls face in their attempts to access formal schooling. Chapter Four presents models of intervention for in-school girls, out of school girls and for engaging the community in the context of adolescent education in Mewat.

CHAPTER TWO

BEING 'IN- SCHOOL' IN MEWAT

Around 2 lakh children of Mewat between the ages of 6 and 17 attend the formal schooling system. A total of 167701 students (i.e. 82.8%) were enrolled in government schools from class I to XII and 36343 students in private, bringing the total number of school enrolled students in 2016-17 to 2,04,044 students (UDISE, 2016-2017). Before we go into a deeper exploration of the trends of enrolment, let us first understand the institutions which cater to the requirements of these students.

In its proviso that a child is considered 'in school' if he or she was not absent for more than 45 working days at a stretch, the following types of schools are recognized by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in its 2014 National Survey on estimating out of school children (SRI-IMRB Survey, 2014).

- A school was defined as a government school if it is provided funding from the central govt. or state govt. or municipality. Also included under this category were schools funded by the defense, railways or autonomous bodies like Kendriya Vidyalaya / Navodaya Vidyalaya.
- All schools other than Government schools which are run by private individuals /organizations are considered for the category 'Private school'. This included both recognized and unrecognized schools.
- Other types of institutions which are also recognized by the state include madrasas and maktabas, sanskrit pathshalas, nurseries or kindergartens not attached to a primary schools and schools under EGS/ Bridge Course/ Alternative Schools. Of these, it is the institution of madrasas which make the most contribution to schooling after government and private schools in Mewat.

According to the UDISE records which give the enrolment figures as of 6 October 2016, a total of 167701 students were enrolled in government schools from class I to XII and 36343

students in private, bringing the total number of school enrolled students to 2,04,044 students. In other words, 82% of the students are enrolled in government schools.

Of these, 41.57% students are girls, with 76,244 girls in the state government school system and 8586 in the private or non-government. In other words, 89% of the female students of Mewat attend government schools.

1. GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

In terms of the state government schools, there are 492 primary schools (as per the UDISE records, <http://hryedumis.gov.in/statistics>). The official standard is that there should be one primary school (with classes I to V) within every village, i.e. every child should have a primary school within a radius of 1 km from his or her residence. At the upper primary level (classes V to VIII), the norm is that there should be one within 3 km of the habitation. In practice, this works out to be one middle or upper primary school every two villages. The presence of secondary schools approximates to one for every ten villages and one senior secondary school for sixteen to twenty villages. The number of upper primary schools in Mewat is nearly half that of the primary schools at 263. There are a total of 44 and 43 secondary and senior secondary schools in the district respectively.

1.1. BLOCK-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOLS

The following figure 6 compares the distribution of government schools across the five blocks of the district. We see that Nuh block has the maximum number of schools at all four levels. Punhana block follows at second place to Nuh in all categories, except at the secondary level, where it is overtaken by Taoru block. Nagina block has the least number of schools in total and this is evident at the secondary and senior secondary levels.

The majority of the government schools are co-educational. While there are girls' schools at the primary and middle school level, there are only 5 single sex schools for boys (3 secondary schools and 2 senior secondary schools in Nuh block). The following table and graph depicts the blockwise distribution of the 99 government girls' schools in Mewat. It is to be noted that the maximum number of girls' schools tends to be at the upper primary level and then there is a sharp fall in numbers at the Secondary and Senior Secondary level. The numbers of girls' schools in the five blocks is presented in the figure7. Both Nuh and

Punhana have 25 girls' schools, which is the highest in terms of number. At the primary level, Punhana, followed by Taoru have the maximum number. At the Upper Primary Level, Nuh overtakes the other blocks with 19 schools, followed by Ferozpur Jhirka and then Punhana. At the secondary and senior secondary level, the number of girls' schools per block is very less, ranging between one and two. While only Taoru has two girls' schools at the secondary level, both Punhana and Nuh have two girls' schools each at the senior secondary level.

Figure 6: A Comparison of the distribution of government schools across the five blocks of Mewat

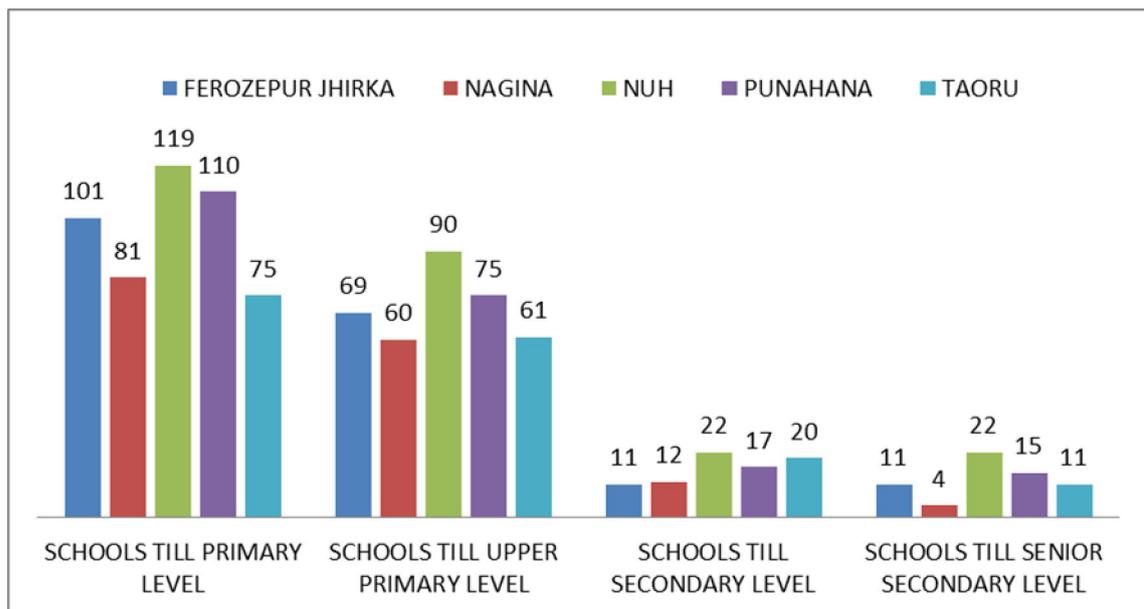
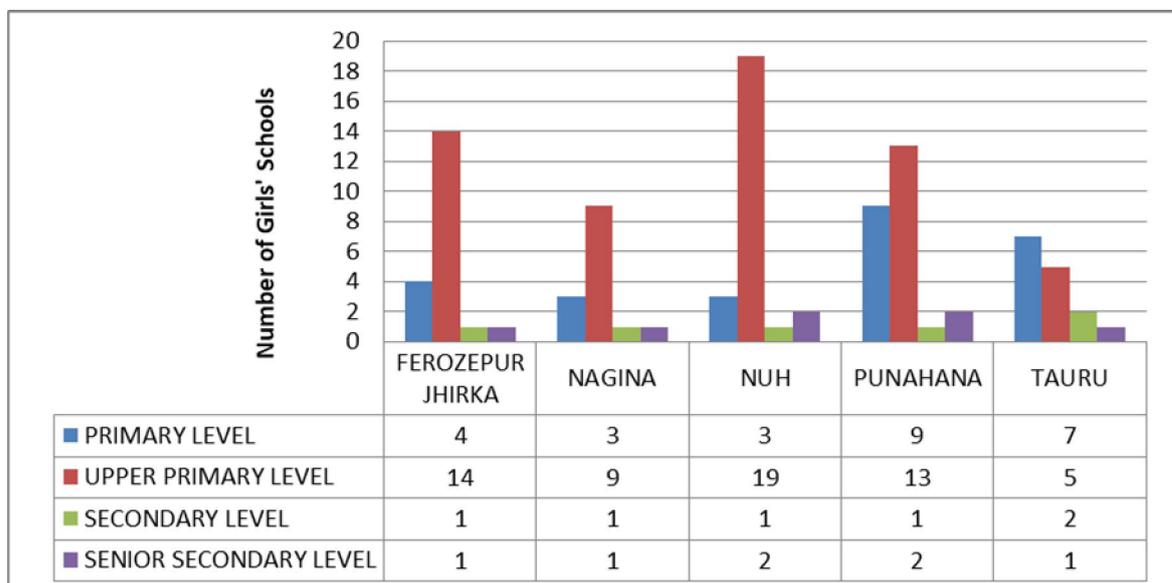


Figure 7: Block-wise distribution of Girls' schools

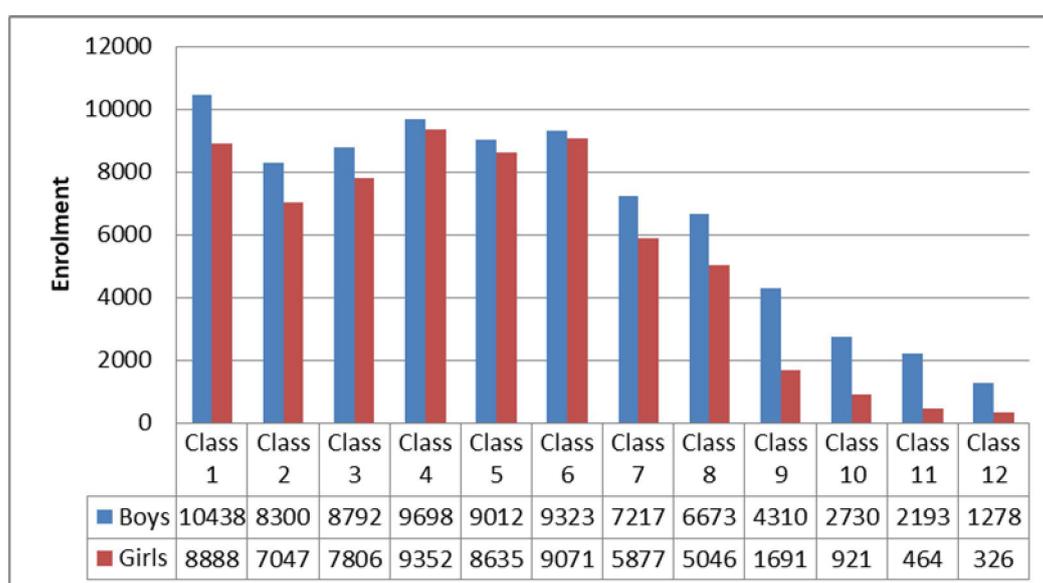


Source: Calculated from statistics provided by the School Management Information System, Govt. of Haryana, accessed on 23 May 2017

1.2. GOVERNMENT SCHOOL ENROLMENT

54.5% of the total number of students enrolled are boys. While the number of boys enrolled in each class is greater than the number of girls, after class VI, the difference in the number of boys and girls enrolled widens by a large margin. For both boys and girls, there is a continuous drop in the numbers who go on to class VII and above.

Figure 8: Total Enrolment in State Government Schools, 2016-2017



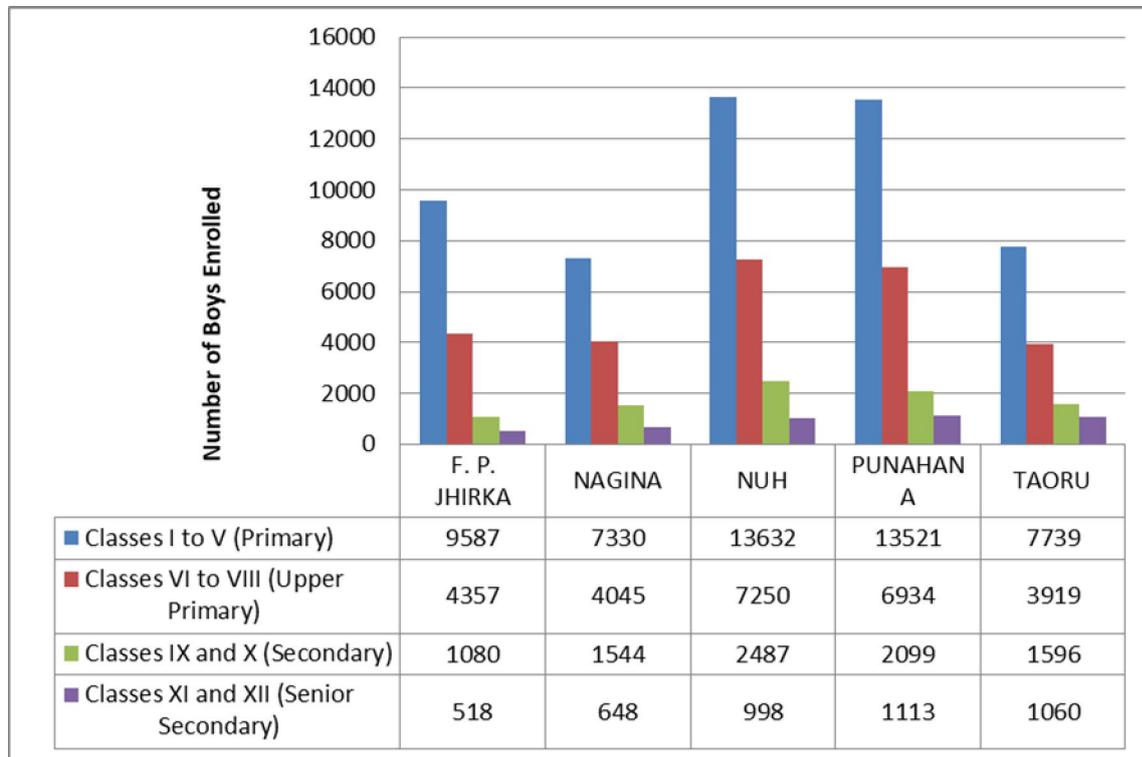
Source: U- DISE, Section E. Enrolment (As on 6 October, 2016), <http://hrvedumis.gov.in/statistics>

The block-wise enrolment of boys in the various classes is also interesting. Among the various blocks of Mewat, Nuh and Punhana stand first in terms of the enrolment of boys in all classes. At the senior secondary level, the enrolment rates at Punhana slightly edge over the numbers of students enrolled in Nuh. Nagina block has performed the worst in terms of enrolment at all levels.

With respect to the enrolment of girls across the blocks (Figure 9), Punhana has the best numbers at the primary and upper primary levels, followed by Nuh. At the secondary level, Nuh edges past Punhana to post the highest enrolment of girls. Taoru block shows the

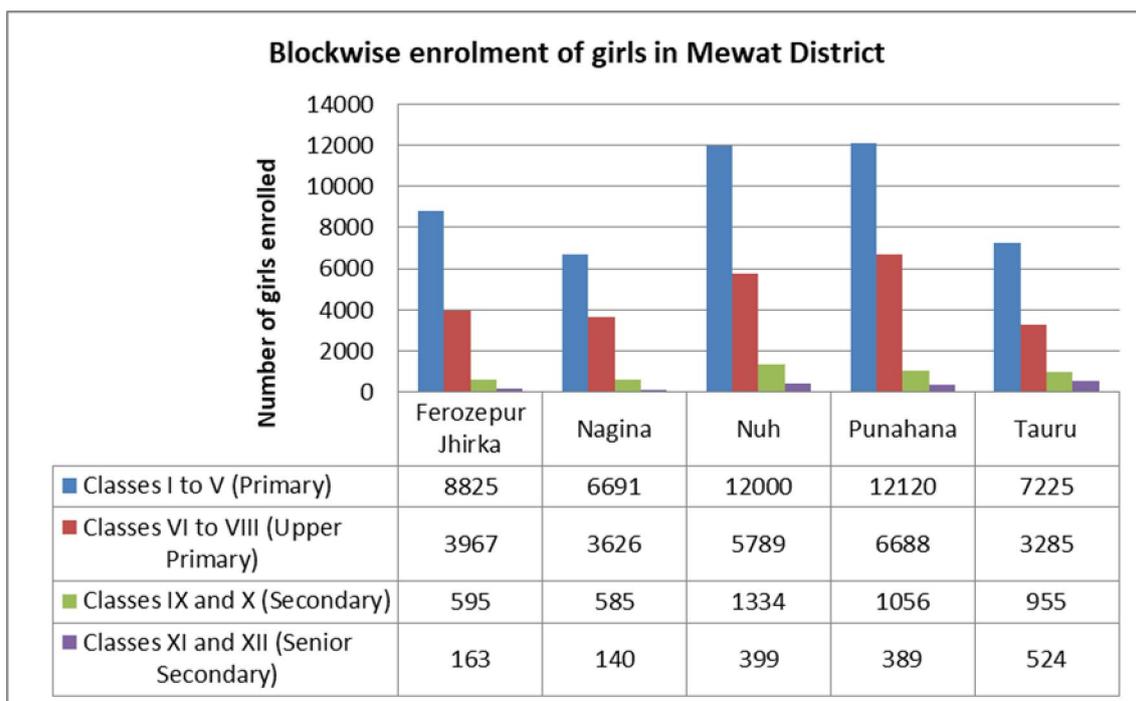
largest number of girls enrolled at the senior secondary level. Similar to the case of boys' enrolment, Nagina brings up the rear with the least number of girls enrolled at all levels.

Figure 9: Enrolment of Boys in Government Schools



Source: U- DISE, Section E. Enrolment (As on 6 October, 2016), <http://hryedumis.gov.in/statistics>

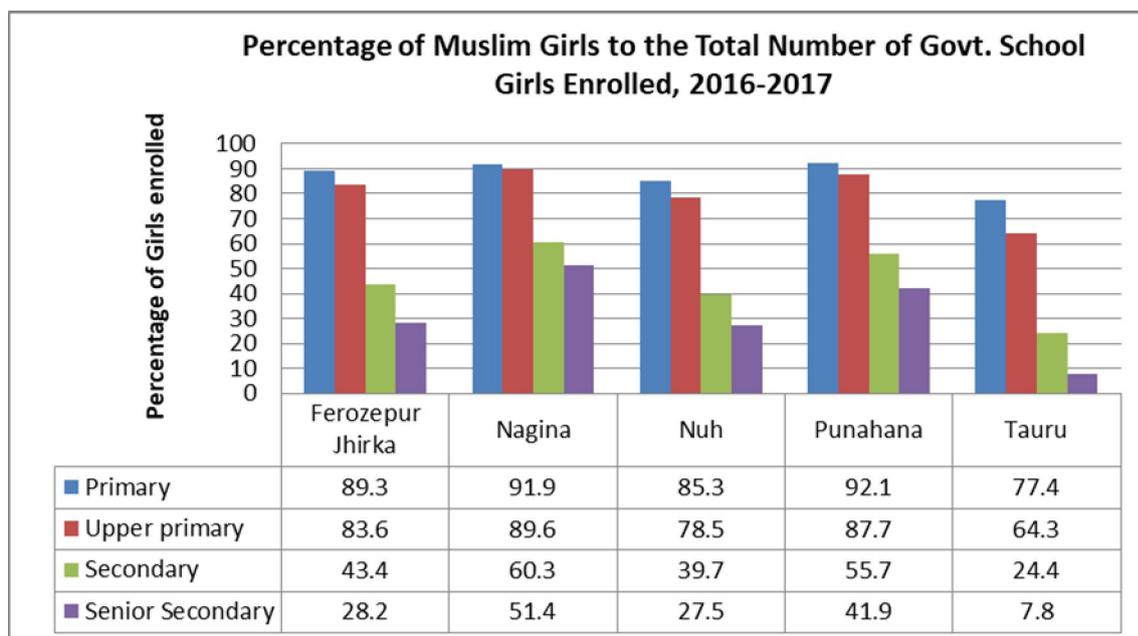
Figure 10: Blockwise Enrolment of girls in Mewat District Government Schools



Source: U- DISE, Section E. Enrolment (As on 6 October, 2016), <http://hryedumis.gov.in/statistics>

It is possible to contextualize this data even further by examining the proportion of Muslim girls in the figures of enrolment (Figure 14). A very interesting fact which emerges is that though Nagina showed the lowest numbers in terms of girls enrolled, it has the highest percentage of Muslim girls enrolled when compared to the total number of girls at each level. Therefore, one way to interpret the poor educational presence of both boys and girls in Nagina block is to understand that there is a greater concentration of Muslim students here.

Figure 11: Block-wise Percentage of Muslim Girls Enrolled to the Total number of Girls Enrolled



Source: Calculated from U- DISE, Section E. Enrolment (As on 6 October, 2016), <http://hryedumis.gov.in/statistics>

1.3. SPECIAL GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Apart from the regular government schools under the Department of School Education, Haryana, the following have been established under various schemes. The schools under these various schemes target children based on location and population category.

In terms of target population, the Navodaya Vidyalaya and the KGBVs are the most particular. In the case of the Navodaya Vidyalaya, it is the talented rural student and for the KGBV, it is the girl student from SC/ST/ BPL/ Minority background. The Navodaya Vidyalayas cater to rural children who are academically talented.

Table 10: List Of Special Government Schools

Scheme	Description	Type	Management	Grades	Location
Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya Scheme	The primary objective of this scheme is to provide good quality modern education to academically talented children predominantly from the rural areas, without regard to their family's socio-economic condition. At present, it has 589 functional residential schools. Admission in Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas is made on the basis of selection test which is designed to ensure that talented children from rural areas are able to compete without facing any disadvantage. There is 1 Navodaya	Co-ed	Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, under the Ministry of Human Resource Development	Classes VI to XII	Nuh

	Vidyalaya in Mewat				
Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas	This scheme was introduced by the <u>Government of India</u> in August 2004, then integrated in the <u>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan</u> program, to provide educational facilities for girls belonging to <u>Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes</u> , minority communities and families below the <u>poverty line</u> in Educationally Backward Blocks. There are 5 KGBVs in Mewat.	Girls	Nuh Model Education Society and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan	Classes VI to X	Ferozepur Jhirka, Nagina, Nuh, Punhana, Taoru
Mewat Model Schools	These are 7(5 senior secondary and 2 secondary) schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education, intended to set a standard for quality education in the district	Co-ed	Mewat Model School Society, under Mewat Development Agency	Classes I to XII in 5 schools, classes I to X in 2 schools	Ferozepur Jhirka, Nagina, Nuh, Punhana, Taoru; the 2 secondary schools are in Madhi, Nagina and Khanpur Ghatti, Pinangwan
Aarohi Schools	These are 5 schools on the template of the Kendriya Vidyalaya Central Schools which are established in blocks which have been designated as Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs)	Co-ed	Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan	Classes VI to XII	Hasanpur Bilonda (Ferozepur Jhirka), Mohammadpur Nagar (Nagina), Rewason (Nuh), Mundhete (Punhana), Bawala (Taoru)

In the case of the Mewat Model Schools, KGBVs, and Aarohi Schools, the reason for their establishment is the backwardness of Mewat as a district. In the first case, it is the all-round developmental backwardness of the region which lead to the establishment of the model schools of the Mewat Model School Society, itself under the banner of the Mewat Development Agency.

In the case of the KGBVs and Aarohi schools, it is the educational backwardness of the various blocks of the district. The blocks of Mewat fit the requisite criteria of the typical

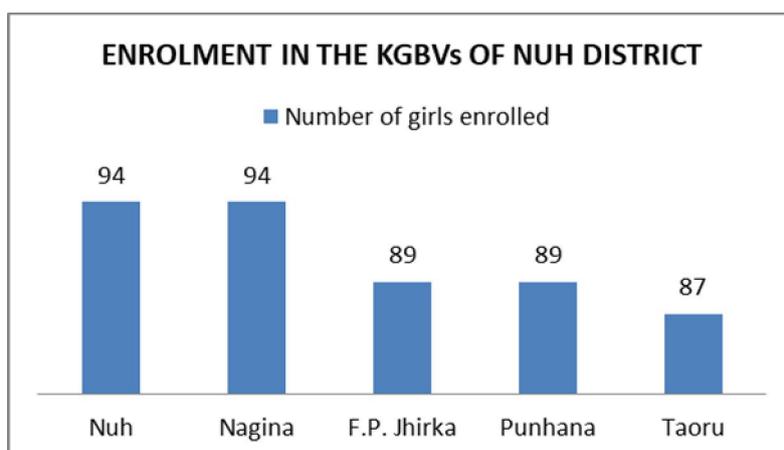
educational backward block (EBB) where the female rural literacy is below the national average and gender gap in literacy is above the national average.

THE KASTURBA GANDHI BALIKA VIDYALAYAS

With respect to this study's exploration of the status of adolescent girls, the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas demand our closer attention. The objective of the KGBV scheme is to ensure access and quality education to the girls of disadvantaged groups of society by setting up residential schools at upper primary level' (NITI Aayog , 2015). The KGBV has been merged with the SSA programme as a separate component of that programme during the XIth Five Year Plan since 1st April, 2007. All the five KGBVs in Mewat are being managed by Nuh Model Education Society.

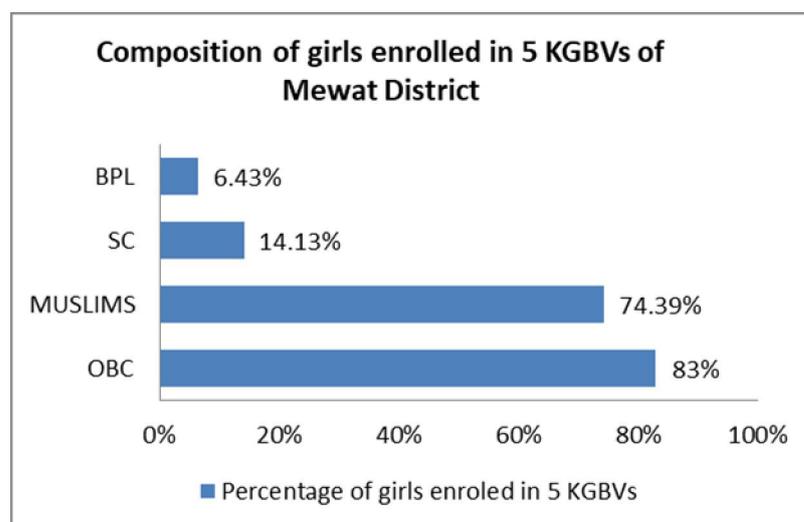
The scheme provides for a minimum reservation of 75% of the seats for girls belonging to SC, ST, OBC or minority communities and priority for the remaining 25%, is accorded to girls from families below the poverty line (BPL). 3 KGBVs were opened in Nuh-Mewat in the academic year 2006-07 and 3 started functioning in the year 2007-08. After Palwal district was created, Hathin block which was earlier part of Nuh-Mewat was transferred to it. Therefore, at present, there are five KGBVs. According to the District Education Office, there is also a plan for a new KGBV in the Gandhi Gram Ghasera village, whose population is more than 90% muslim (SSA records). The distribution of girls in the KGBVs block-wise is also noteworthy. Taoru block, having a less number of Muslims, has the least Muslim enrolment in the KGBV, but the highest number of Scheduled Caste girls. Firozpur Jhirka has the highest Muslim enrolment and the highest OBC enrolment. Nagina has the highest enrolment of BPL girls.

Figure 12: Enrolment of girls in the various KGBVs of Mewat District



Source: SSA Annual Work Plan and Budget, 2017-18 (Unpublished)

Figure 13: Composition of girls enrolled in the various KGBVs of Mewat District



Source: SSA Annual Work Plan and Budget, 2017-18 (Unpublished)

Table 11: Disaggregated Composition of Girls in the KGBVs according to Blocks

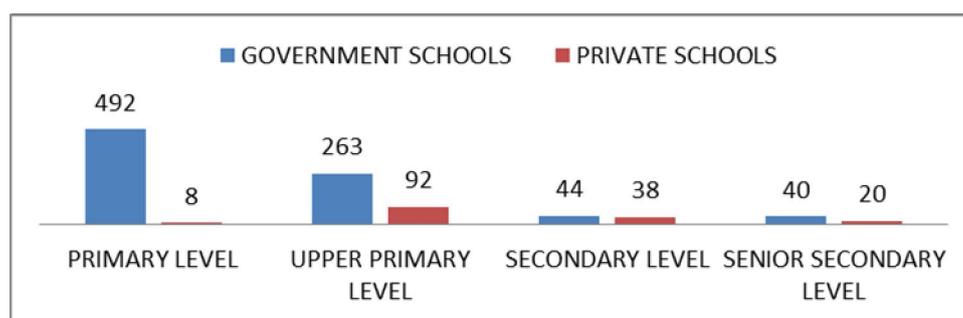
KGBV	SC	OBC	BPL	Muslims
Nuh	14.8%	85.1%	0%	79.79%
Nagina	10.63%	81.91%	13.83%	68.09%
F.P. Jhirka	6.38%	91.01%	0	98.89%
Punhana	15.73%	84.3%	5.6%	62.92%
Taoru	21.28%	72.4%	12.64%	62.07%

Source: SSA Annual Work Plan and Budget, 2017-18 (Unpublished)

2. PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Private schools comprise 10% of the total number of schools in Mewat district. There are very few private schools which run only up till the primary level, just 8 according to one estimate (UDISE records, <http://hryedumis.gov.in/statistics>). However, more private schools tend to run up till class VIII and there are 92 such schools in the district. At the secondary level, their number falls short of but still comes close to the government numbers at 38. There are only 20 senior secondary schools, nearly half the government tally.

Figure 14: Comparing the numbers of Government and Private Schools in Mewat District



Source: Calculated from the statistics provided by the School Management Information System, Govt. of Haryana, accessed on 23 May 2017

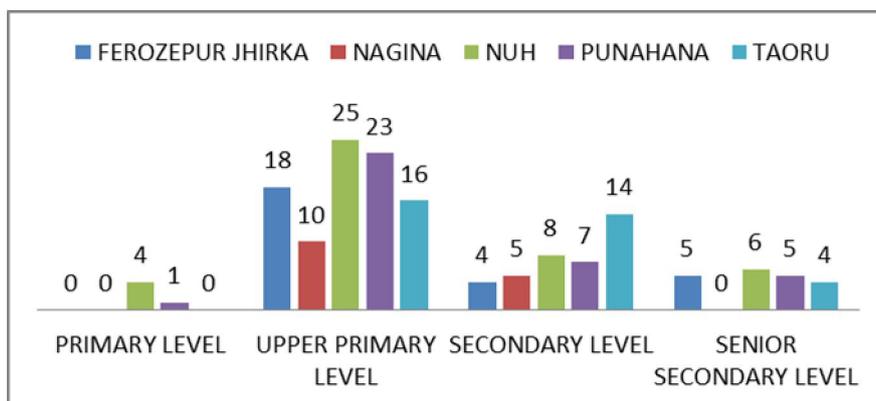
Apart from the fact that Mewat is a poor district with parents finding it difficult to pay for their children's education, the low graduation and literacy levels also make it difficult to find local graduates who can serve as teachers in these. This is one reason which accounts for the low numbers of private schools in the district. It must also be mentioned here that these numbers correspond to recognized private schools. What has not been estimated are the numbers of unrecognized private schools, which are often little more than 'shops' or small rooms where students gather to register their presence and teachers are present as a tokenism.

2.1. BLOCK-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS

If we consider the concentration of private schools across the blocks (Figure 15), Nuh and Punhana have the maximum numbers at the upper primary level. When we move to private schools till the secondary level, Taoru has the highest number. At the senior secondary level, barring Nagina, there is not much of a difference in the number of schools, ranging from 4

to 6 in each block. Nagina has the least number of private schools among all the blocks, though at the secondary level, Ferozpur Jhirka with one school lesser scrapes the bottom.

Figure 15: Distribution of Private Schools across blocks



Source: The primary level private school data is calculated from UDISE date 2015-2016 as the current private school data from the UDISE MIS does not give the blockwise breakup for Mewat. The rest of the private school data for three levels has been calculated from the statistics provided by the School Management Information System, Govt. of Haryana, accessed on 23 May 2017

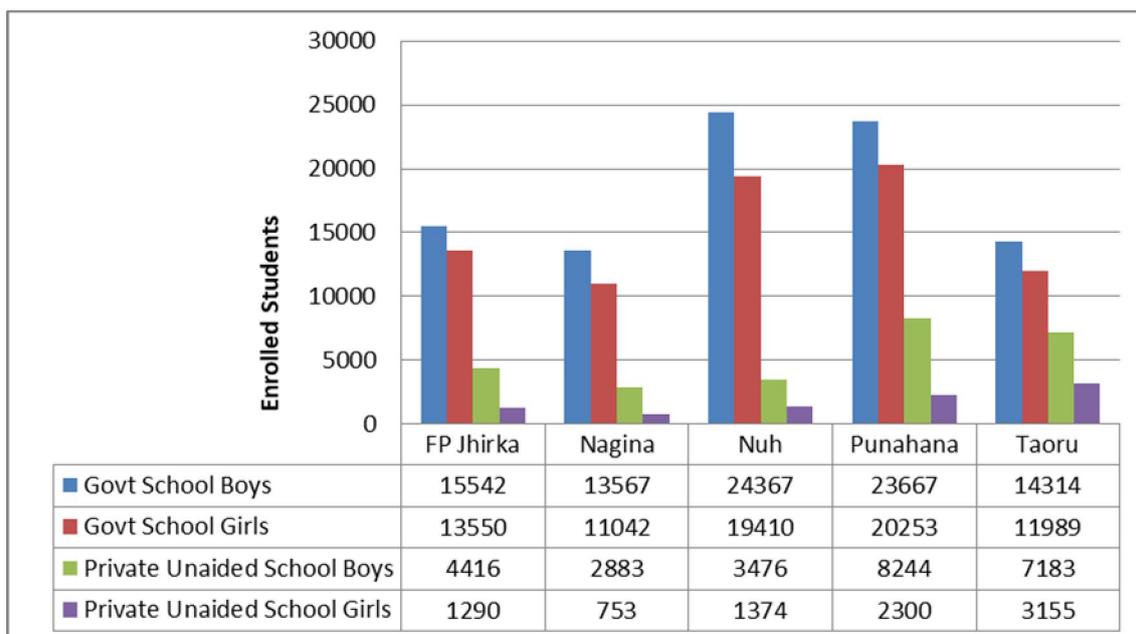
2.2. PRIVATE SCHOOL ENROLMENT

34569 students were enrolled in non government unaided schools and 1774 in non government aided schools, thereby bringing the total of students enrolled in private schools to 36343.

Figure 13 compares the enrolment of boys and girls across the blocks under both school management categories. In the case of Nuh block, there is the greatest gap between the enrolment of boys and girls in the government schools as compared to the private schools. In contrast, Taoru has the least difference in the rates of enrolment in government schools as compared to private schools.

Among the total number of students enrolled in private schools, 76.4% are boys (i.e. 27757). 53.8% are Muslim boys. In contrast, 23.6% of private school students are girls. Only 10.9% of these students are Muslim girls. This suggests that parents are more likely to invest in a private school education for their boys, rather than their girls.

Figure 16: Block-wise distribution of enrolled students according to school management and gender



Source: Calculated from U- DISE, Section E. Enrolment (As on 6 October, 2016), <http://hryedumis.gov.in/statistics>

Table 12: Enrolment in Private (Non Government Aided and Unaided) Schools, 2016-2017

GRADE	TOTAL	Boys	Muslim Boys	Girls	Muslim Girls
I	3073	2194	1500	879	456
II	3981	2839	2022	1142	635
III	3709	2731	1939	978	475
IV	3415	2525	1763	890	459
V	3381	2538	1770	843	368
VI	3509	2706	1894	803	366
VII	3380	2639	1787	741	280
VIII	3240	2563	1735	677	246
IX	3233	2568	1834	665	280
X	3427	2840	2084	587	252
XI	934	718	538	216	77
XII	1061	896	670	165	52
TOTAL	36343	27757	19536	8586	3946

Source: Calculated from U- DISE, Section E. Enrolment (As on 6 October, 2016), <http://hryedumis.gov.in/statistics>

3. MADRASAS

Madrasas are centres for the Islamic teaching and learning. They are established and maintained by Muslims either privately or through trusts and registered societies. They are

usually run on charitable funds generated within a particular community. Several states in India have a State Minority Board of Education or a State Madrasa Board. In addition to religious education, children in these madrasas are also taught mathematics, environmental science (EVS) and a language according to the state curriculum. There is also a second type of Madrasa which, while not being recognized by the above mentioned boards, might receive support from the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in teaching other subjects apart from religious ones. This might include training of qualified maulavis and janabs. The enrolment of children in such madrasas is counted in official databases like the DISE. For example, under DISE 2015- 2016, 2 Madrasas at the primary level and 3 at the upper primary level are counted as ‘schools’.

However, this grossly underestimates the number of such institutions in Mewat. Madrasa education in Mewat has a rich history, dating back as early as 1332, when the Madarsa Islamia Arabia Dargah Hazrat Shaikh Musa Rahmatullah was established ‘along the foothills of Arawalli in Nuh Tehsil’ (Ishtiaque & Hurera, 2014, p. 78). The construction of madrasas gained a new momentum in the course of the twentieth century. In a study which is one of its kind, Ishtiaque and Hurera undertook a field survey of the number of Madrasas in Mewat between 2009 and 2010. They were able to identify the decadal picture of the growth of madrasas in Mewat, demonstrating the considerable antiquity of a number of them.

Table 13: Decadal Growth of Madrasas in Mewat

PERIOD	NUMBER OF MADRASAS
1332	1
1900-1925	6
1925-1950	6
1950-1975	6
1975-2000	22
2000-2010	39
TOTAL	77

Source: Field Survey conducted in 2009-2010 cited in Ishtiaque & Hurera, 2014, p. 78

Children in the Meo Muslim communities are sent to the nearby madarsa on a daily basis to obtain ‘*Deen-e- Talim*’, which consists of primarily learning Urdu and becoming conversant with the reading of the Quran and Islamic teaching. (Ranganathan, 2014). Learning Arabic is also given importance as this language seen to be part of the Muslim cultural identity. Those students who wish to pursue a religious career, pursue the Mauliviat (the equivalent of secondary education). ‘Besides religious teaching, there were a few (eight) madarsas in

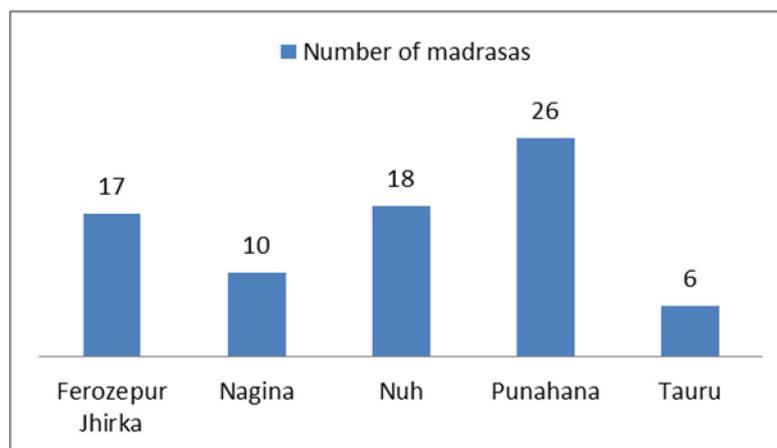
which vocational training was imparted while almost all madarasas were teaching modern courses including Urdu, Hindi, Elementary Maths and English up to the primary level' (Ishtiaque & Hurera, 2014, p. 83)

Apart from their madarsa education, boys may be sent to regular schools for formal education. But girls rarely have this prerogative. While their education may be largely confined to what they learn in the madarsa, it is considered as sufficient as women are perceived as transmitting the community's cultural and moral values in the domestic roles (wives, mothers) that they play. A head teacher at Government Senior Secondary School, Kanwarsika, described this preference as being that of 'dhaarmik shiksha' (moral education) over secular education.

3.1. BLOCK-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF MADRASAS

Punhana has the highest number of madrasas at 26, followed by Nuh and Ferozpur Jhirka at 18 and 17 respectively. Not surprisingly, the Hindu community predominant block of Tauru has the least number of madrasas.

Figure 17: Block-wise distribution of Madrasas in Mewat, 2009-2010



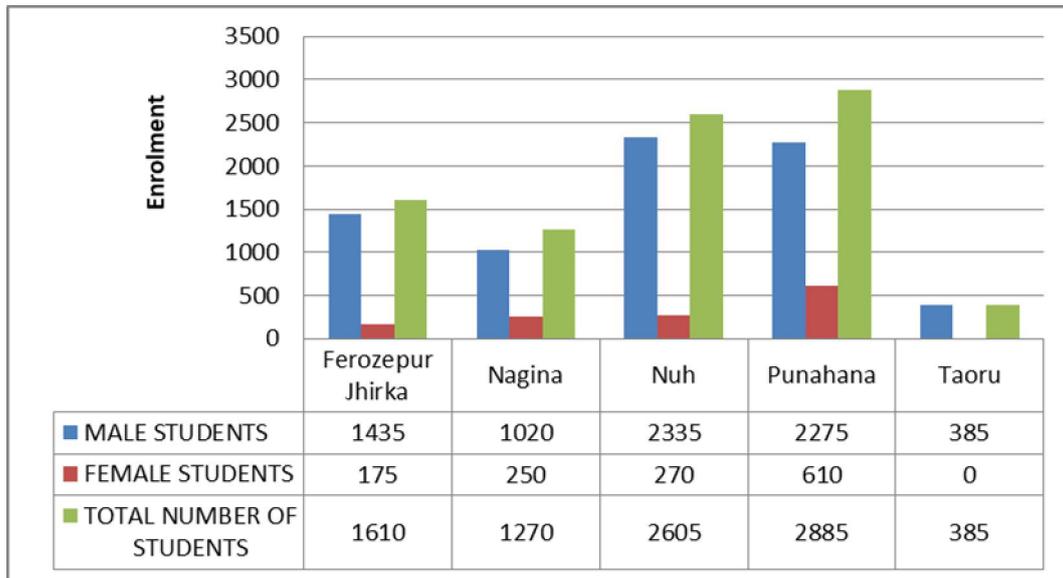
Source: Based on Ishtiaque and Hurera (2014)

3.2. MADRASA ENROLMENT

Of the 77 madrasas identified by Ishtiaque and Hurera, 18 are co-educational and 5 are meant exclusively for girls. The enrolment patterns in the madrasas are also noteworthy. While Punhana has the largest number of madrasas, Nuh has the largest total enrolment. However, Punhana outpaces Nuh in terms of the largest number of girls enrolled. Indeed,

there are nearly three times the girls enrolled in Nuh or Nagina in Punhana. No girls were found to be enrolled in Taoru at the time of the survey.

Figure 18: Madrasa enrolment in Mewat (2009-2010)



Source: Field Survey conducted in 2009-2010 cited in Ishtiaque & Hurera, 2014, p. 78

As part of the field visits, the maulana of Qasimul Uloom Niazia, Nuh, was interviewed. This madrasa is relatively large with 200 students. There are no girls who study here. Apart from Islamic education, Hindi, English and Maths are taught. The students begin their day early, spending time from 5am to 8am studying religious texts and then from 8 am to 1pm on regular schoolwork. The madarsa has around 18 teachers. It runs on donations from parents and other well wishers. There was some attempt to teach the boys some vocational skills related to electrical work and sewing. However, there was not a good response to these endeavours because the boys were more interested in preparing themselves for the maulviyat. After graduating from the madarsa, they go to centres of higher Islamic learning like Deoband.



A picture of the Qasimul Uloom Niazia

4. CONCLUSION

The mapping of the schooling system across the various blocks of Mewat reveals the following trends.

- 90% of the schools in Mewat are government schools and 82% of the students enrolled in the district go to them, therefore, it is within this system that we must seek to understand the challenges that students face.
- The maximum number of government schools are at the primary level. The maximum number of private schools is at the upper primary level.
- The rates of enrolment and the drop in them post upper primary schooling demonstrate that there is a systemic problem which prevents both boys and girls from continuing their education.
- Secondly, in the case of both formal as well as religious education, there is a premium which is laid by the community on the education of boys. Therefore, they are more likely to survive the system than girls.
- In terms of numbers, the formal school system is well developed in the blocks of Nuh and Punhana. Nuh has the maximum number of government schools at the primary, upper primary, secondary and senior secondary levels, followed by Punhana. Nuh and Punhana also have the highest numbers of private schools at the upper primary levels. The numbers of single sex girls schools are the highest at Punhana and Nuh. Punhana has more girls' schools at the primary level, while Nuh overtakes all the other blocks at the upper primary levels. Punhana followed by Nuh also has the

highest number of madrasas in the district. Only in the case of private secondary schools does Taoru come first.

- With respect to the enrolment of girls across the blocks, Punhana has the best numbers at the primary and upper primary levels, followed by Nuh. At the secondary level, Nuh edges past Punhana to post the highest enrolment of girls. In terms of enrolment, Taoru block shows the largest number of girls enrolled at the senior secondary level.
- Among the KGBVs, Taoru block, having a less number of Muslims, has the least Muslim enrolment in the KGBV, but the highest number of Scheduled Caste girls. Ferozpur Jhirka has the highest Muslim enrolment and the highest OBC enrolment. Nagina has the highest enrolment of BPL girls.
- In the case of Nuh block, there is the greatest gap between the enrolment of boys and girls in the government schools as compared to the private schools. In contrast, Taoru has the least difference in the rates of enrolment in government schools as compared to private schools.
- While Punhana has the largest number of madrasas, Nuh has the largest total enrolment in them. However, Punhana outpaces Nuh in terms of the largest number of girls enrolled. Indeed, there are nearly three times the girls enrolled in Nuh or Nagina, in Punhana. No girls were found to be enrolled in Taoru as of 2009.
- Among all the blocks, it is Nagina block which shows the poorest performance in terms of number of schools and enrolment. The block has performed the worst in terms of enrolment at all levels and with respect to the enrolment of boys and girls. A very interesting fact which emerges is that though Nagina showed the lowest numbers in terms of girls enrolled, it has the highest percentage of Muslim girls enrolled when compared to the total number of girls at each level. Therefore, one way to interpret the poor educational presence of both boys and girls in Nagina block is to understand that there is a greater concentration of Muslim students here.

CHAPTER THREE

BEING 'OUT OF SCHOOL' IN MEWAT

The administrative definition of who is considered an 'Out of School Child' (OOSC), as touched upon previously in Chapter One, usually hinges on three criteria.

- Firstly a child is classified as a '**Drop-out**' if he or she has discontinued studies in the past or was absent for more than 45 working days at a stretch.
- The second type of classification '**Enrolled but Never Attended**' is that of children who are enrolled in a school (or institution recognized as a formal school) but who have never attended the same.
- The third category includes the '**Never Enrolled**' children.

However, these categorizations are not so simple when transposed to ground level realities. Consider the category of the drop-out. Estimates for dropped out children are based on calculating the difference in enrolment from one year to the next. This calculation includes children whose names are struck off the rolls on account of continuous absence for a period of time, the length of which defers from state to state. Thus a child, if absent for 7 days continuously would qualify as a dropped out child in Karnataka, and his/her name struck off the rolls, but only if continuously absent for 90 days in Gujarat (Bhatty, Saraf, & Gupta, 2016). Sporadic absence or irregular attendance is not captured in the methodology used for calculations made for this indicator. In other words, a child might be absent for 90 days over the period of the whole year, distributed in spurts (not continuous), but would not be considered a drop out. Additionally if we consider the learning levels of children with irregular or sporadic attendance, we add a further layer of complexity to the question of what it means to be 'out of school'.

The second category of 'Enrolled but Never Attended' is also prone to 'discrepancies and inefficiencies in the overall system of collecting and collating data'. Bhatty et al (2016) highlight the difference that the formulation of the question makes when OOSC are surveyed. For example, the Ministry of Human Resource Development's survey of OOSC

(SRI-IMRB, 2014) asked the question ‘How many children are not enrolled?’ and the estimate which they received was around 6 million. In contrast, for the same year, the National Sample Survey reported an estimate of 20 million based on the question ‘Are the children currently attending school?’

The third ‘Never Enrolled’ figure too has its share of problems. It is ‘a derivation – based on total child population in the relevant age group and the number of children shown as enrolled in school registers. However, due to poor birth registration records, the former is not reliably available’ (Bhatty, Saraf, & Gupta, 2016).

1. OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN IN MEWAT

Under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the government collects data on out of school children, based on whether a child has been enrolled or not. Consider the figures of out of school children for the age group 6 to 14 years in Mewat over the past one decade. It is important to note that Mewat as a district was formed in 2005 and therefore, it is indeed very probable that there has been a concerted effort on the part of the district authorities to enrol more children. However the wide variations in figures between 2010-22 and 2011-12 as well as between 2015-16 and 2017-18 suggest that there needs to be greater transparency in how these values are obtained.

Figure 19: Out of School Children in Mewat, SSA Estimates

Year	OOSC (6-14 years)
2006-07	81849
2010-11	30961
2011-12	20267
2012-13	25132
2013-14	20181
2015-16	23013
2016-17	12867
2017-18	26604

Source: SSA Annual Work Plan and Budget, 2017-2018 (Unpublished)

However, NGOs who work with out of school children suggest that these numbers are conservative estimates and that the actual numbers of children out of school might be larger. For example, in 2011, the White Lotus Trust in partnership with the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) did a Social Audit in 25 panchayats (34 villages) in 5 blocks of the district from March 2011 to June 2011. The report identified 4000 children out of school in the surveyed areas. The criterion for measurement was the number of children who were enrolled in but not attending school.

2. DROP- OUT RATES IN MEWAT

The drop- out rate provides an indicator of the sensitive stages at which children tend to drop out. Consider the estimates for 2016-2017.

Table 14: Drop-out Rate in percentage

Grade	Grade-wise Dropout Rate (2016-2017)		
	Boys	Girls	Overall
1	1.17	0	0.09
2	3.59	8.24	5.7
3	6.63	12.36	9.38
4	7.24	12.15	9.36
5	13.24	20.72	16.82
6	7.72	13.43	10.19
7	10.53	15.84	12.75
8	18.55	40.37	12.87

Source: SSA Annual Work Plan and Budget, 2017 (Unpublished)

For both boys as well as girls, the end of the primary level, i.e. class V is a stage at which there is a sudden spurt of drop-out. The next spurt of drop-outs is at the end of the upper primary level. But what is significant is that the rate of drop out for girls is double that at the primary level, whereas it is not so stark in the case of boys. This finding has been attested by several studies, including the CEQUIN Baseline of Mewat (2014). The Baseline also reported that the mean age for discontinuing school for girls emerged as 11.81 years, while for boys it is 13.69 years.

The CEQUIN Baseline (2014) surveyed 900 respondents for the reasons why boys and girls stop attending school. From the reasons given by the respondents for boys not attending school, it came out very strongly that there are no middle and high schools in the vicinity.

About a quarter of the respondents reported inadequacy of teachers in school. Boys starting work at an early age (14%), not taking interest in studies (12.3%) and preference for Madrasa education (9.7%) were some other reasons. Lack of Infrastructural facilities like toilets (8.2%) lack of drinking water facility (7%) and absence of school in the village (6.3%) was also pointed out by the respondents other than financial condition of the families. In the case of girls, more than half of the respondents reported that the lack of a middle or high school nearby and the social practice of not allowing girls to study are the main reasons why girls do not attend school in their area. Around 16 per cent said that they prefer to send the girls to the Madrasas. Further, there were complaints about the lack of female teachers (13.9%), the absence of a separate toilet for girls (7.6%) and the need for separate girls' schools from others. The problems related to school infrastructure like lack of drinking water facilities (7.2%), the absence of a school itself (6.8%) and the lack of proper buildings (1.7%) were also pointed out by some. Therefore, one can conclude that the lack of upper primary and secondary schools nearby pose an important challenge both for boys as well as girls in accessing formal schooling.

According to Mr. Abdul Majeed, the principal of the Government Elementary Teachers' Training Institute (GETTI) at Ferozpur Namak and who also bears the charge of the Block Education Officer (Nuh), the drop out of girls from the system follows a pattern. '25% of girls drop out from primary to upper primary. 50% of the remaining girls drop out from upper primary to secondary. 75% of the rest drop out from secondary to senior secondary'. A main cause of this according to him is the lack of a suitable number of schools above the primary level and in particular, girls' schools accessible to villages.

3. CHALLENGES FACED BY MEWATI ADOLESCENT GIRLS

The following section explores in depth the reasons for the drop-out of girls in particular which were raised by CEQUIN's baseline report.

3.1. THE QUALITY OF THE EDUCATIONAL TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE

An important aspect through we may understand the drop out of adolescent students is through ideas of what constitutes good quality educational experience. When many children reject school itself as a place which does not attract them and which is oppressive and

repressive, they are exercising their agency and making a strong statement about the poor quality of their educational experience There are several dimensions to this issue of ‘quality’.

i. INFRASTRUCTURE

The first is infrastructural. The school needs to be a space where a child is physically comfortable to learn. Under the Right to Education Act, norms and standards are laid down related to school quality which every school up to the elementary level has to comply with. This include pupil-teacher ratios, the accessibility of the school by road, quality of classrooms, playground, the presence of a boundary wall, separate toilets for girls and boys, drinking water facility and a clean and healthy mid day meal. The presence of electricity, computers and access for disabled students in each school are also tracked under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan. Norms are also laid down with regard to the number of school working days, working hours of teachers and so on. Consider the following table which provides a summary of school infrastructure in Mewat government schools.

Table 15: Quality of School Infrastructure

School Infrastructure Quality	Percentage
Schools Approachable By All Weather Road	94.7
Schools With Playground Facility	64.7
Schools With Boundary Wall	86.4
Schools With Girls’ Toilet	91.9
Schools With Boys’ Toilet	96.2
Schools With Drinking Water	98.4
Schools With Mid-day Meal	97.8
Schools With Electricity	80.6
Schools With Computer	27.9

Source: DISE 2015-2016

Field visits to three government schools revealed that there is a greater improvement of these infrastructural aspects over the past few years in Mewat, especially due to the pressure which several NGOs have brought to bear on the government. Under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, there has also been greater funding and emphasis on the construction of toilets and ensuring the availability of drinking water. In Mewat, which is a water scarce district with ground water in most of the region being undrinkable, provision of drinking water facilities in schools has been a challenge. Several NGOs like S M Sehgal Foundation or corporates as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (like Canon) have developed means to address this issue like the installation of environmentally sustainable water filters and so on. There is also a greater push on the ground to install solar panels for the generation of electricity in schools. In schools which have been adopted by the SRF Foundation, they have provided smart class rooms which have projector facilities.

The situation regarding the presence of girls' toilets is more complex. For instance, the availability of toilets does not automatically indicate that they are in a condition to be used. The damage of drainage systems, faulty doors which need repairs, non availability of regular water and a lack of a sweeper (safai karamchari) often leads to the toilets being kept closed on working days (CRRID, 2015).

ii. TEACHERS IN MEWAT

Apart from the infrastructural aspects, the quality of teaching is a critical element in determining the nature of a child's educational experience.

Some of the key concerns regarding the teachers of government schools in Mewat include the following:

- There is a tremendous shortage of teachers at levels in Mewat. According to Mehta et al (2015), Mewat has the lowest availability of teachers in Haryana post the primary level. DISE 2015 estimates that the average pupil teacher ratio is 42. But field visits and conversations with NGOs on the ground suggest that this figure is considerably lower than the actual

numbers. The CRRID study of 2015 puts the number as varying between 50 :1 and 80:1. According to one estimate, 3715 teachers were bearing the workload meant to be borne by a total of teachers in 6681 posts in the government schools of Mewat, i.e. in other words, there was a shortage of around 3000 teachers (The Tribune Newspaper, 2015). An important implication of this that the work of existing teachers is not fixed but interchangeable depending on requirements. 'Up to the elementary level, teachers were teaching all kinds of subjects on requirements on the availability of teachers' In effect, the lack of teachers in middle schools has resulted in children being dependent on primary teachers, who are not qualified to teach at higher levels. Another implication is that teachers have to take two or more classes simultaneously, leading to a diminishing quality of teaching available for students (Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), 2015, p. 135)

- Consistent with the low Work Participation Rate in Mewat, there is a huge skew in the number of female teachers who are available. According to the DISE 2015, only 19.8% of the teachers in the district are female. One reason for this includes the difficulty of accessing schools in remote areas. Most of the women teachers in the district come from surrounding areas like Palwal, Gurgaon etc. For example, the female teachers of the Government Girls Senior Secondary School, Kanwarsika, who were coming in from Gurgaon had arranged a van along with other female teachers in nearby schools to reach Mewat. Another reason is the absence of infrastructural facilities like toilets and drinking water which made accessing school difficult for girls also apply to female teachers. According to the CRRID study of 2015, each school should have separate toilet facilities for boys and girls as well as staff. On the ground, most female teachers have to share the toilet facilities, where they exist, with girl students. These aspects tend to make female teachers posted to this district consider it as a punishment posting.

- Within the government system, the shortage of teachers is met through several varieties of non- permanent or contract teachers, such as part time teachers, guest teachers, temporary teachers, para-teachers etc. The nomenclature depends on the type of scheme under which they were hired. The contractualization of the teaching staff has a long term deleterious effect on them as well as the schooling experience of the students. For example, contract teachers do not have access to professional development opportunities such as attending in-service training or workshops which are mandatory for permanent teachers. The psychological impact of contractualization is the fear and anxiety about job security which dogs these teachers, an aspect which affects their teaching motivation (Bakshi, 2013).

The principal of the Government Elementary Teachers Training Institute (GETTI) highlighted the important aspect of the role that teachers play within the classroom in retaining the students. 'Teachers ko mehnat karna pedenge' (Teachers have to work hard). In his analysis of the role that teachers have to play, he denigrated a culture of taking shortcuts which has plagued teacher education in the region. The Junior Basic Training (JBT) is a diploma which students earn at institutions like the GETTI. To gain admission into the programme, a certain cut off of mark is required at class XII. The prevalence of wide spread cheating is an 'open secret', with the government trying several means to curb it. But for those who clear the examination without a good understanding of fundamentals, they further display a casual attitude towards attending classes held at the teacher training institute. The cumulative effect of these attitudes is that very few of the students who finish their JBT from the Mewat region are able to clear the recruitment examination of the Haryana Government for permanent faculty in the government schools. Therefore, the principal argued for the need for good quality teaching in classrooms as a fundamental aspect of school quality.

- The situation of teacher education in the district is also dismal. The training of elementary school teachers (both pre-service and in-service) is

supposed to be carried out in each district of the country by the District Institute for Education Training (DIET). The Diploma in Education (D.Ed) is a full time elementary teacher education course of two years which is provided by the DIETs. In the case of Mewat, the Government Elementary Teacher Training Institute (GETTI) at Ferozpur Namak, Nuh, plays the function of a DIET, though it has not been upgraded to one even after twelve years of the district's formation. This is seen as yet another instance of administrative apathy towards Mewat (Chugh, 2012).

iii. PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS ON SCHOOL QUALITY

These discussions on school quality are not merely academic. The student needs to be seen not as a passive recipient of initiatives made on his or her behalf, but as a conscious agent who responds to the ethos of the school. This aspect emerged very clearly in the Focus Group Discussions with the students of classes VII to X in the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Nagina. The girls had a very good understanding of what constituted the 'quality' of their education. The following are excerpts from some of their responses when they were asked to write what they liked about their school and what they would change if possible.



- *“This school should be till class XII. We should have a separate bus service Our surroundings should be neat and clean (‘saaf aur swachh’)”- Anjali, 13 years*
- *“I like the teachers in this school. Every Saturday, we have activities and I like them very much. I really like the fact that there is a provision for hostel here... and that of*

the bus... In the games period, we play carom and kabbadi..This is what I like best. All girls should get hostel facility in this school.”- Nahida Bano, 15 years

- *“What I like best in our school is the park. I like the trees and plants. In our school, we also have water. That is what I like best.”- Antsaar, 13 years*
- *“In my school, I like that I can study along with having food and activities (Hamare school mai mujhe padne likne ke saat khilane aur activities bahut achi hoti hai) and I wish that my school can continue upto class XII.”- Mahbis Khan, 13 years*
- *“In my school, I like the studies (padhai likhai) very much. I like the activities and games (khel khilone) very much”- Rizwana Bano, 13 years*
- *“There is very good teaching (‘padhai’) in this school. The environment is very neat and clean (‘saaf aur swachh’). There are different types of activities. [But] our school should be till the XII standard. There should be a science lab here. There should be one more teacher for maths.”-Priya, 15 years old*

These responses highlight that what constitutes a ‘good quality’ schooling according to them. There is a recurring emphasis on ‘padhai’ or the teaching learning process in school. When I questioned the students why this was so, some of the girls contrasted their experience in the KGBV with that of their primary school, where the teachers would either be absent or a source of terror to the children. The girls also remark on their clean environment, the extra-curricular activities and the games that they enjoy- perhaps aspects and possibilities which they lack at home. These aspects come together to facilitate their hopes for their future. In this one of the primary merits of the KGBV scheme is evident. The scheme is targeted towards girls who would otherwise be dropouts if they did not have the chance to stay in a hostel. In this context, this hostel based education must make inroads with children whose ‘social settings are riddled with disadvantages’ (Kumar and Gupta, 2008, p. 23). While the situation in the schools and hostels vary from KGBV to KGBV, the positive response of the girls of KGBV Nagina bears out the point that Kumar and Gupta (2008, p.19) make in their analysis of the KGBV scheme. ‘[Rather than the physical presence of girls within the boundary of the school.,, what matters is the range and rigour of learning experiences and forms of knowledge made available to girls in the process of schooling, so that they develop the confidence and the skills to shape their destiny and participate in the governance of society. This is the toughest challenge in the context of girls’ education’.

3.2. ATTITUDES TOWARDS GIRLS' EDUCATION

Another important aspect to bear in mind regarding adolescent girls' education in Mewat is that poor literacy outcomes and the underdevelopment of the region have been barriers in the community gaining a deeper perspective on the value of education in general and girls' education in particular. Part of this has been because of the community's alienation from the mainstream of development, leading to a greater influence of conservative religious leadership.

i. RELIGIOUS CONSERVATISM

Maheshwari (2003) has highlighted some of these aspects. Politically this region has not been of much relevance post- Independence. As discussed in chapter one, this leads to a non-responsive district administration and high rates of absenteeism by employees. In addition, because of the low number of graduates from the region, most of the education officials and teachers are not from the district. One implication of this administrative apathy has been the opening up of a space for leadership which is filled in by other sources. For example, religious leadership has gained a lot of ground, especially after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. There is a greater rise of religious fundamentalism, whose impact is felt more on the youth who are organizing themselves into religious bodies (Maheshwari, 2003). This religious leadership not only has no formal basis, but it can be ideologically retrogressive, especially on issues such as girls' education.

In the course of this study, as stated in chapter Two, a maulana from the Qasimil Uloom Niazia Masjid was interviewed. Regarding girls' education , he made the following points. The most important aspect he highlighted was 'sahi intizaam', i.e . a conducive environment for girls' education. This was understood to be a combination of a curriculum which prioritized 'Islami shiksha' over 'duniyavi shiksha', gender segregation (no co-education), the presence of female teachers, proximity of the school to the home and a lack of preference for girls' hostels (he was not aware of the residential Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas).

Two key aspects stood out in his discourse, of which he may be considered as representative of the predominantly Muslim rural communities of Mewat. The first is the emphasis on the chastity and virtue of girls' bodies as repositories of the community's honor. This is the basis

of the restrictions of the mobility of adolescent girls, who now begin to increasingly perceived as future wives and mothers.

A consequence of a pervasive anxiety among the Meo community about the encroachment of their religious identity is that they are deeply suspicious of NGO interventions, which are feared as being driven by vested foreign interests who seek conversion to other religions.

The NGO CARE, for example, faced considerable resistance in the set-up of their residential bridge courses to mainstream girls from this perspective. This was also an aspect which came up in CEQUIN's baseline and gender audit. Therefore, if there is a question between supporting girls' education or protecting community identity, efforts towards the latter are given more endorsement.

ii. PERSPECTIVES ON CAREERS AND GIRLS' FUTURES

Another significant aspect with respect to girls' education was the mismatch between girls' aspirations and the institutional support required to actualize their dreams. A portion of the Focus Group Discussions with the girls of class VII to X at the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (Nagina) attempted to understand their aspirations for their future. The girls were asked to think about, share and then draw what they saw themselves as being ten years down the line.

Table 16: Career Aspirations of Adolescent Girls, KGBV Nagina

PROFESSION	NUMBER OF GIRLS FROM CLASS VII AND VIII	NUMBER OF GIRLS FROM CLASS IX AND X
Teacher	3	5
Doctor	2	2
Civil Servant	1 (Indian Police Service)	1 (Indian Administrative Service)
Footballer	2	0

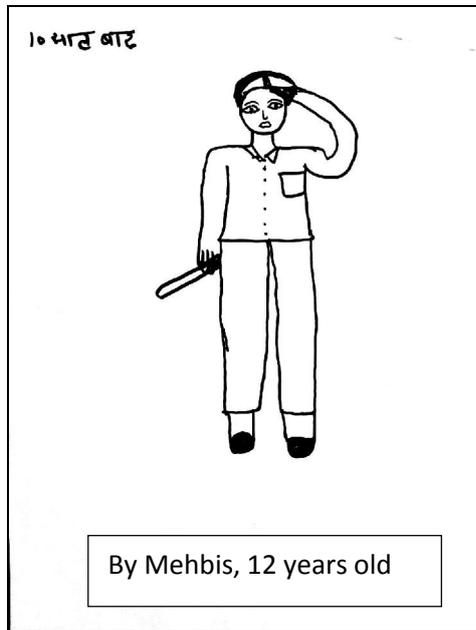
Source: Focus group discussion, KGBV Nagina

Firstly, the younger cohort of girls mentions a larger diversity of professions, including an unconventional one like becoming a football player¹. The lesser diversity of professions cited

¹ The specific reference to football is also because the girls had been exposed to the Football Camps which were being run in the KGBVs by CEQUIN.

by the older girls might also be because of a greater personal assessment of strengths, weaknesses and perceived opportunities. The following are some of their sketches.

Figure 20: Aspirations 10 years down the line, sketched by KGBV students

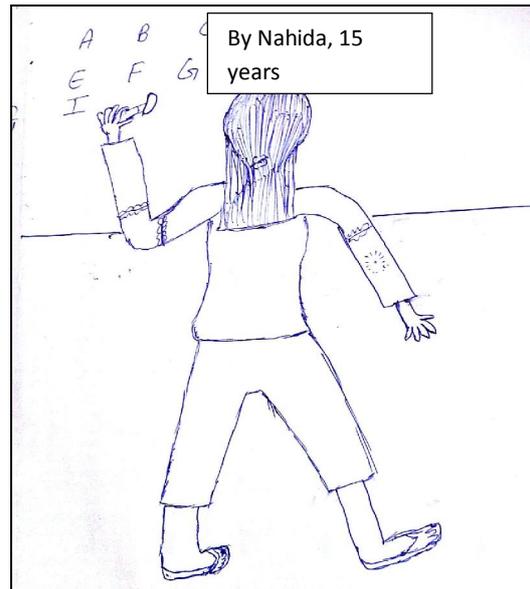
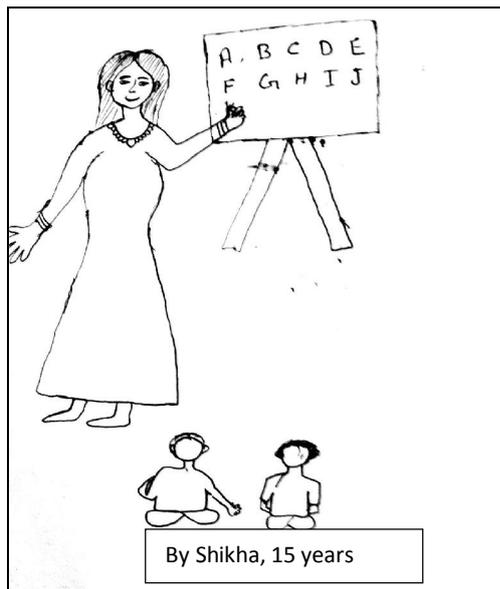
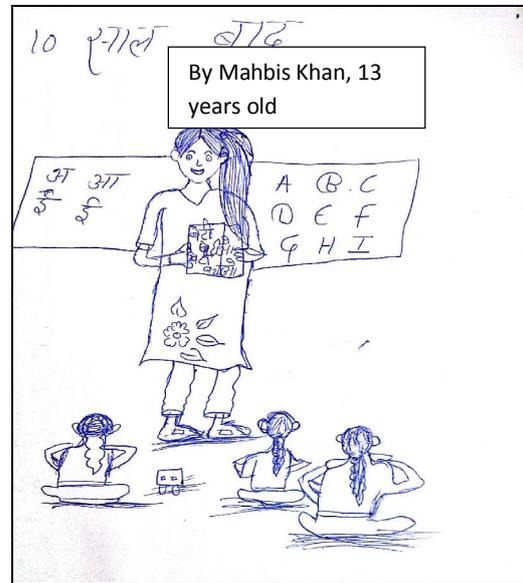
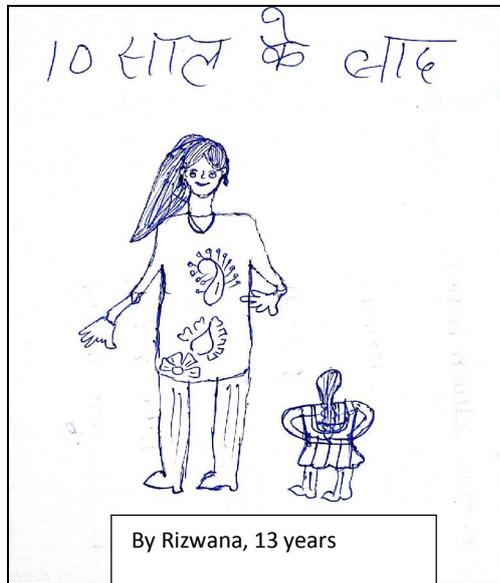


In the picture above by 15 year old Priya, the patient who comes to the doctor complains of headache and body pain. The female doctor assures her 'I will make you completely alright' (bilkul theek). An interesting observation is that the patient is dressed in fancy clothing. In the situation of rural Mewat with such an immense shortage of medical facilities, it would

not be a stretch to say the sketch captures the idea that medical treatment is usually for those who are well off.

Also consider the range of depictions of the kinds of teachers they want to be.

Figure 21: Depictions of the kinds of Teachers they want to be 10 years later by KGBV students



What is striking is that the teacher is represented as a symbol of modernity, primarily indicated in her ability to convey the knowledge of English (rather than say Hindi alone or Urdu). In Nahida's picture, the teacher is wearing pants. What is common in all these pictures is the teacher as a fashionable figure. The one picture of a teacher without a

blackboard and a child who standing, as opposed to sitting, seems to capture the idea of teaching as a relationship. In the pictures drawn by the Muslim girls, the teachers do not wear any head covering. This was interesting since all the girls themselves had their heads covered.

Against these nuanced aspirations of the girls, consider the reality of their schooling experience. Although the KGBV girls aspire to get admission in the Mewat Model School (MMS) for class XI and XII, classes in the KGBVs are in the Hindi medium and those in the latter are in the English medium. This makes it difficult for the KGBV girls to get admission in the MMS.

In addition, when the KGBV girls go to class XI in the Mewat Model School, they only have the option of taking the Arts (Humanities) stream. In villages where the girls are often the first generation learners or whose parents have not studied beyond class VIII, it is difficult to get the support to pursue Science subjects and Maths. In community discussions, a point which was emphasized is the absence of coaching facilities in Mewat. Therefore, the girls who wish to be doctors or even attempt the Civil service examinations immediately face an institutional handicap because of the lack of science and maths subjects. They are also inadvertently disqualified even from attempting competitive scholarships which can finance a college degree in science, medicine and engineering like the National Talent Search Examination or the Department of Science and Technology's Kishore Vigyanik Protsahan Yojana or the INSPIRE.

In this context, according to the principal of KGBV Nagina, the option of Arts Subjects becomes attractive as 'the girls can at least read and prepare for them on their own, without extra help'. The situation is not helped by the fact that the lack of institutional support for rural girls to pursue science subjects is also additionally tied to gendered perceptions about what subjects are suitable for girls.

Table 17: Percentage of Girls who appeared for Class XII Examinations

	2014	2015	2016
ARTS STREAM	31.4	29.1	32.8
COMMERCE STREAM	24.2	23.9	21.3

SCIENCE STREAM	7	7.7	7.2
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Source: RTI response from Board of Secondary Education, Haryana

This concerns and practices are evident in the numbers of girls who appear for the Senior Secondary examinations in Mewat. There is a huge skew in terms of the numbers of girls who appear for the exam, in comparison to boys, i.e. 32.8% girls who appeared for Arts subjects in 2016 is the highest percentage of girls across the streams. The numbers also indicate the extent of preference for girls for Arts, followed by Commerce and then Science.

iii. FATALISM AND DISCOURAGEMENT IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND FAMILIES

An aspect which emerged in the interviews with the teachers of the Kanwarsika Government Senior Secondary Schools was how the socialization of girls in the community, with a restriction of their aspirations, leads to poor educational outcomes. In the absence for support for their studies at home, the burden of domestic responsibilities such as fetching water, cooking, fetching firewood for fuel, sibling care and the time spent on religious education leave little time to supplement their school work with further studies at home. This especially affects their performance in the higher classes. Girls also begin to develop a fatalistic attitude about their own potential and ability which begins to affect how they approach their studies. Even when they attempt to aspire differently, they must struggle with marriage and the requisite proficiency in household chores being held up as ideals held up by their families. For example, at a parents' meeting organized by CEQUIN, a father of four daughters, who educated them up till the post-graduate level, bemoaned how the demand for dowry rises with the educational level of girls. The disheartened man said, 'What is the benefit of higher education?'

The situation is worse for girls who are out of school. A sad detail which emerged in the focus group discussion with the out-of-school adolescent girls in Ber Sika village was their inability to articulate what they expected from their future. When asked to describe what kinds of skill they would like to develop, if they had access to training, none of the girls were able to give a response. When prompted about skills like tailoring or beautician courses, they were only aware of tailoring. Some tepid interest was evidenced toward it. When asked about their leisure, one of the mothers who was observing the FGD interjected to say that

the girls don't have time to do anything else after their domestic responsibilities. This was another aspect which had emerged during the Gender Audit conducted by CEQUIN in 2014 as well.

The responses of the out-of-school girls must be contextualized in the light of the severe curtailment of their agency in their community. The CEQUIN Baseline of 2014 noted that pervasive acceptance of gender roles such as the belief that taking care of household chores is women's work, while earning for the family is men's work. Additionally, the majority of household decisions are taken by male members, including aspects like day to day household expenses, the outdoor activities of girls and women in the family, the political participation of women etc. While there did seem to be evidence of joint decision making in the areas of children's education, contraception and health care, there was no area where the decisions were solely taken by the women. Therefore, it is not entirely surprising that girls who are out of school are unable to visualize a future, separate from the constraints of their day to day life.

According to the CEQUIN Baseline, older women (26 years and above) seem to be better able to articulate their aspirations better. For example, there were women who mentioned that they wanted to search for new jobs, start new businesses or work as skilled labour to enhance their income. Quite a few specified exactly what they wanted to do such as embroidery, weaving, opening beauty parlour, making papad at home, and taking up a driver's job.

3.3. CHALLENGES OF ACCESSING SCHOOL ABOVE THE PRIMARY LEVEL

In the context of rural Mewat, where each village is surrounded by acres of fields, parents are afraid to send their girls out of the village due to issues of safety.

In Ber Sika Village of Nuh Block, where focus group discussions were held with the community and its leaders, the first point which the villagers raised was that of access. There is a village school till class VIII. Parents are willing to send their children there till that level. After that they need to travel to the next village of Malab. In the absence of a bus or other transport, concerns for the safety of girls trumps other aspects. On being asked if the distribution of cycles would help the girls, the husband of the sarpanch drew attention to

the fact that the girls would still need to travel unprotected through the empty fields on them.

This perspective is also borne out by the principal of KGBV Nagina. The KGBV is residential from class VI to VIII. She argued that 90% of the girls of class IX and X who come from the surrounding villages would have dropped out, had it not been for an arrangement with the Mewat Model School on whose campus the KGBV is located. The Mewat Model School sends one of its buses to pick up the girls from the villages.

The issue of girls' safety points to the widespread incidence of sexual harassment. This has been documented by the CEQUIN Gender Audit as well as the NGO White Lotus Trust, one of whose interventions is the provisions of buses for girls. A critical need is the acknowledgement by the community of the role that boys play in making travel perilous for girls.

'Boys generally keep standing around the area where girls walk or board the Blossom Bus. Boys may not say anything to the girls but the fact that there is no reason for their presence creates a feeling of fear and discomfort in the girls. It should also be noted that this behaviour is happening in broad daylight and intensifies the lack of security which girls feel when passing through uninhabited areas such as fields. It is also very common for boys to hang around near schools and even sit on the boundary walls. If a girl feels obliged to respond verbally and simply out of good manners, a boy might use that push a girl further... In general girls feel that they cannot complain to their parents or the villagers as the harassment is non verbal... Having faced this kind of behaviour daily [gives it a normative character]... and misbehaviour will always be blamed on the girls, even when boys are the perpetrators' (Fawcett & Kumar, 2017, p. 27)

In the interactions with the parents in Ber Sika village as part of the field visit for this study, everyone agreed that the education of girls was important, but there was a general apathy when it came to finding solutions using their own resources, such pooling together in an auto-rickshaw for instance. Fawcett and Kumar also highlight this point. '[Despite the offer] to pay for fuel for their tractors, to help set up committees and a roster to share the drop off and pick up of girls... parents always have many reasons such as the lack of a vehicle or a lack of time. [The dominant perspective seems to be] that getting their girls safely to school

is not their responsibility and [they] will send their girls to school or college only when an organization or the government provides transport. However, the negative attitude towards girls' education also means that even if such means were provided, there is no guarantee that girls would avail themselves of it. Mr. Suraj Kumar of White Lotus Trust argued that just giving bicycles to the girls did not guarantee that they would use them. Either their fathers or brothers would use them to transport firewood or some other purpose in this region where public transport was so little developed.

3.4. EARLY MARRIAGE AND PREGNANCY

During the focus group discussions with girls in school and out of school as well as with the women of Ber Sika village, the question of early marriage as a factor leading to drop out was met with politically correct answers, i.e. girls get married after 18 and boys after 21. However it was later known that the village has had two instances in the recent past where the groom's family had to return back from the marriage ceremony because of the young age of the girls in question. The awareness that early marriage is a crime is also possibly responsible for the responses given to official sample surveys like the District Health and Facility Survey.

Table 18: Marriage and Pregnancy

Mean age of marriage for girls	19.7
Mean age of marriage for boys	21.7
% of currently married women below 18 years	10.6%
% of married men below 21 years	37.2%
Births to women aged 15 to 19 of total births	5.0%
Women aged 20-24 years with a birth order of 2 or more children	47.2%

Source: District Health and Facility Survey, 2012-2013

However, in the CEQUIN Baseline report, majority of the respondents were married and the average age of their marriage was recorded at a low of 16.66 years for girls and 18.53 years for boys. A major reason for this is the community pressure and the fear of not finding a suitable groom later on. A recurrent aspect which came up in community discussions is the

fear that girls who go to school might elope with some boy. As the Baseline report points out, love marriages are very rare in the community with several taboos and reprisals which may even result in honor killings.

According to the principal of KGBV Nagina, it is poverty which drives families to marry off their girls at such a young age. She recounted the practice of arranging the marriage of the eldest girl and printing the card in her name, with the guests discovering at the event that her younger sisters were also to be married off. Very often the girls would all be married into the same family, though they might depart for their husband's home once they come of age. What compounds such decisions is the pressure to pay high dowries as well. According to the CEQUIN Baseline, the average dowry in the region is around 3 lakhs rupees.

A senior teacher at the Kanwarsika Government Senior Secondary School shared her experience of how the number of early marriages in the surrounding villages decreased as the school was upgraded from upper primary to secondary and secondary to senior secondary. She admitted that the teachers encouraged parents to at least send their children to school till the secondary level, even if the children did not demonstrate academic proficiency. 'At least, it will keep them from being married young', was her take on the situation.

Discussions of marriage also need to acknowledge the practice of molki present in the region. Molki or paro are terms used to refer to women who are purchased through bride trafficking. A major factor which contributes to bride trafficking includes the need for cheap labour on farms as well as for the purposes of collecting water. These girls are trafficked from other states in the garb of marriage and kept as bonded labourers. Another contributing factor for the practice of molki is that boys also tend to marry early. According to a report carried in the Hindustan Times in March 2014, the local Mewati families do not tend to give their daughters to men who are older than the early twenties, handicapped or widowed. Men who belong to these categories tend to buy a bride (Raza, 2014). In discussions with a young Meo man as part of the field research for this study, he refused to consider this practice as trafficking, because such women are shielded under the label of marriage.

Indeed the label of 'marriage' does normalize this kind of sexual exploitation. The difficulty of poor families in states like Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar to get their

daughters married due to high dowries tend to make parents acquiesce to this practice. If girls are sent to Haryana, they don't have to give any dowry plus they get money in return. (Raza, 2014).

According to the DHFS Survey tabled above, 5% of the women between 15 and 19 had given birth and 47.2% of the women between 20 and 24 had two or more children. Confirming this data, the results of the CEQUIN Baseline 2014 also raise the issue of pregnancy in relation to early marriage. The respondents had demonstrated a lack of knowledge regarding the optimum age of pregnancy and spacing between children. A key point was that knowledge regarding family planning methods revolved around female sterilization and contraceptive pills. More men knew about these methods than women. Only 40% of the respondents were able to articulate aspects related to ante natal care during pregnancy including having a balanced diet, avoiding heavy work, the need for rest etc. and post natal care such as breastfeeding requirements, suitable diet and rest after delivery. Here again, it was men who were more knowledgeable about these aspects than women.

3.5. OTHER HEALTH ISSUES

i. MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

An important aspect which also needs to be highlighted in the context of drop out of adolescent girls is their lack of access to sanitary napkins. According to the CEQUIN Gender Audit of 2014, adolescent girls use sanitary napkins which are made available to them from either through schools, and Asha Workers (occasionally and to very few girls). In case of girls who attend schools without toilets or which are not in a usable condition or which are kept locked for the use of teachers, taking leave during their menstrual cycle is a necessity. For those who do not attend school, they are compelled to manage as best as they can as it is also a common practice not to use anything at all during menstruation.

According to Seema Rajput of CARE India, interventions with regarding to generating awareness about menstrual hygiene are met with deep suspicion by the community members. In many cases, women have not even seen sanitary napkins before and don't know how to use them.

ii. NUTRITIONAL PROBLEMS

Mewat is chronically affected by the occurrence of anemia. Consider the following statistics released by the District Health and Facility Survey, 2012-2013

Table 19: Incidence of Anaemia

INCIDENCE OF ANAEMIA	PERCENTAGE
% of females between 6-9 years with anaemia	66.7
% of females between 6-9 years with severe anaemia	11.3
% of females between 10-19 years with anaemia	70.2
% of females between 10-19 years with anaemia	16.9
% of persons 20 years and above with anaemia	67.2
% of persons 20 years and above with anaemia	14.9

Source: District Health and Facility Survey, 2012-2013

As is evident from the table above, the chronic incidence of anaemia indicates the poor nutritional intake of children and adults. Iron and Folic Acid tablets are distributed to students in school as well as through ASHA workers. However there is deep suspicion among the Meo community about such interventions. For example, in March 2017, there was a scare among several pockets of Mewat that the iron and folic acid tablets were being distributed as an attempt to sterilize the population and this led to many parents withdrawing their children from school.

Apart from general nutritional issues which affect both girls and boys, there are also specific deficiencies which girls incur as a result of discrimination between boys and girls. It is important to address the health of rural girls not just as a factor of their food intake or their physical environment, but also as the product of a larger socio-cultural and economic deprivation.

During the focus group discussion with the class VII and VIII students of the KGBV Nagina, the girls were asked if any of them had experienced discrimination by virtue of their sex. Only one girl, Sanju, who comes from a BPL household, gave an example. 'When my mother brings out the milk, she does not give it to me or my sisters, only to my brother'. This is borne out also in the CEQUIN Baseline Report which notes that while 92.3% of 900 respondents

said that the quantity of food that men and women were served was the same, 23.7% felt that males had the choice of eating first.

iii. MENTAL HEALTH

Adolescence is in general a period when children experience emotional disturbances, depression, low self esteem, anxieties over inadequate or excessive secondary sexual development etc. In addition to these normal psychological issues, interviews with teachers in a government school suggest that girls who study at the secondary and senior secondary level often tend to have a defeatist attitude regarding their future as well as endeavours due to the lack of encouragement for girls' schooling, which prevents them from performing at their best level.

'Many of the health problems occurring in adolescents need only friendly, personal and confidential advice and reassurance from medical personnel, clear insight into the problem and little medical intervention. So adolescent friendly medical services are the need of hour where they discuss their so called "private" health concerns without embarrassment' (Dubey, 2012).

4. CONCLUSION

This chapter makes the case for understanding the complexities of an adolescent girl's life which drive her to be out of school in a context like Mewat. On the face of it, the numbers of children who are out of school are immense, but there are substantial differences between estimates depending on how this data has been collected. There has been a considerable effort expended to enrolling children in school, but there is little data collected on their patterns of attendance. While the drop out of both girls and boys from the formal school system are high, the following aspects which present a greater challenge for girls were touched upon in this chapter. These include:

- A. Inferior quality of education experience because of inadequate infrastructure and poor teaching

- B. Patriarchal attitudes towards the higher education of girls, driven by religious conservatism, illiteracy and poor education of mothers, a perception of girls' futures as being tied to the domestic sphere alone and the lack of curricular avenues for girls in particular to explore and realize their potential, especially in subjects like science.
- C. Challenges of accessing school in the absence of adequate numbers of upper primary and secondary schools in villages, concerns of safety due to sexual harassment of girls and the apathy of the community towards finding solutions to overcome these
- D. The continuing practice of early marriage and pregnancies
- E. Health issues including lack of awareness about menstrual hygiene and reproductive health, nutritional problems such as chronic anaemia and mental health problems

CHAPTER FOUR

TO SCHOOL AND BEYOND- MODELS OF INTERVENTIONS

The previous three chapters have explored the complexity involved in the struggles which adolescent girls in Mewat face in order to access formal school education. This chapter moves from problems to solutions or at least, points of critical engagement, which are necessary to empower adolescent girls to take control of their future. Kumar and Gupta (2008, p. 23) capture the scale of the problem as follows:

'An educational opportunity cannot be limited to bringing girls to a school and keeping them there. The aim of education in a democracy is to enable all children to realise their right to participate in governance as sensitive and responsible citizens who are also capable of shaping their personal destiny. This is a difficult aim to achieve for all children who come from dalit, tribal, minority and other groups among the poor. For girls belonging to these groups, every battle is twofold. They not only have to face the community's general deprivation, they also have to fight the negative and suppressive forces which every girl faces in our society. Any serious effort to empower girls from oppressed rural backgrounds must enable them to fight both these battles effectively'.

The list of interventions by NGOs covered here is by far from exhaustive and does not even include major players like the Sehgal Foundation or SMART, which runs Radio Mewat. The main reason for including these NGOs alone in this analysis is their focus on education and gender issues which have a bearing on how the pressing needs of adolescent girls might be met.

1. SRF FOUNDATION

The Sriram Foundation, Gurgaon (SRF), does a number of interventions in Mewat under its umbrella Mewat Rural Education Programme. Some of these are described below.

1.1. IMPROVING SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, an important aspect of retaining children in school is the quality of the physical infrastructure of the school. While this does not impact adolescent girls alone in particular, it is important to realize that the school needs to be a welcoming and safe space for learners. This is so especially in the case of first generation learners for whom the school is a new institution. As has been demonstrated previously, the absence of drinking water, toilets, suitable teaching-learning materials, classrooms etc. hampers the attendance of enrolled students.

In this context, one of SRF Foundation's key strategies is to use its ground presence as a conduit to help other NGOs as well as the social responsibility initiatives of corporates (CSR). For instance, with the support of Coco Cola India, SRF has adopted 40 government schools in the Nuh block of Mewat. The primary thrust of intervention in these forty schools is to develop their infrastructure. These schools were selected from a list of 100 schools provided by the district authorities. There is a focus on making sure there are girls' and boys' toilets, drinking water, playgrounds, games equipment and libraries in these schools. In these 40 schools, SRF has also layered the CSR initiative of IBM computers, through which computers have been supplied to the school as well as help given in the set-up of a digital classroom.

1.2. ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Supported by IBM, SRF is working in all 22 districts of Haryana to boost science education. This intervention is supplemented by their Avishkar programme (funded by IBM) which seeks to provide an exposure of science to the middle school children through their mobile science van and through building up the science labs in the forty schools which SRF has adopted. There is a full time science teacher attached with this programme, who guides students in these activities. In additions, teachers in the schools are also given specific training at the level of pedagogy. Curricular support is also provided, through the help of the SCERT. Again, while this is not a direct intervention for adolescent girls, the paucity of science and maths teachers at the secondary level along with social norms about suitable subjects for girls (Arts, Humanities etc.) makes curricular interventions for science learning highly significant. The importance of 'stimulating classroom pedagogy applied in the context of knowledge spread across science, mathematics and social sciences' cannot be

overestimated in truly 'empowering' rural Mewati adolescent girls navigate the disadvantages of their context (Kumar & Gupta, 2008).

1.3. LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMES

There is a greater recognition nowadays about the importance of empowerment strategies like building communicative capacity, team work participation and negotiation and leadership skills in interventions targeting girls and women. Very often these are packaged under the heading of 'life skills'.

SRF's Swach Vidyalaya clubs in the schools under its purview are an example of this. Their aim is to sensitise students about five areas- attendance, cleanliness, discipline, utilizing resources, academic improvement and health-hygiene. A notable feature is the great interest and response of girls' students to this programme in terms of their participation and presentations.

One type of activity under this intervention was the improvement of the school assembly. Each of the forty schools was given a public announcement system. Girls gained confidence in holding a microphone and addressing their peers. A parallel benefit was that the sound of the assembly carried over to the rest of the village, letting the community know that the school was in session and that the common excuse of kids, '*aaj school bandh hai*' ('school was closed today') was invalid.

2. WHITE LOTUS TRUST

This report has already discussed the difficulties of estimating the numbers of children who are out of school. A key contribution which NGOs can undertake in this regard is to conduct independent assessments of the same and help enrol the identified children. This has been an important aspect of the intervention of the Delhi based White Lotus Trust in Mewat.

2.1. IDENTIFYING AND ENROLING OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, White Lotus was involved in the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights' (NCPCR) Social Audit of 10 states as the state representative for Haryana. The study conducted in 25 panchayats (34 villages) of 5 blocks

of Mewat district in 2011 revealed that approximately 4000 children were out of school. These children were enrolled in schools but not attending them.

Subsequently a campaign called Dastak-E-Taleem was designed by the Directorate of Elementary Education, Haryana in collaboration with the Trust with a focus on bringing the identified out-of-school-children in the age group 6 to 14 back to school. 100% enrolment was achieved in the 34 villages where the audit was done as a result of the various activities conducted during the campaign. These included meetings with the school management committee, the community and parents, enrolment rallies, meetings with mothers of girl students and sports events.

Mr. Suraj Kumar of White Lotus Trust shared an interesting strategy that he uses when he visits to schools to identify the actual number of students attending. After checking the school register, he visits the school kitchen to find out for how many children the mid meal is cooked. This provides a counterpoint to check the assertions of the school principal and the records in the register.

2.2. IMPROVING ACCESS TO SCHOOL

The difficulties that girls face in accessing upper primary and secondary schools which may be at a distance of more than two kilometres from their village have been previously raised in this report. In the absence of reliable public transport and the safety concerns of parents in girls risking harassment while walking through empty fields, White Lotus Trust has also been running a program called Blossom Bus for the past six years. The Trust began this intervention in Hathin block when it was part of the Mewat district.

White Lotus Trust has been running a program called Blossom Bus in Mewat for the past six years. It provides transport to 315 girls (as of 2016-2017) in order for them to reach their high schools located between 2 to 10 kilometres from their home villages in the absence of reliable transport in the villages and due to the incidence of harassment of girls who walk or cycle.. The Trust began this intervention in the Hathin block which was part of Mewat district until 2008 and then was shifted to the newly created district of Palwal.

‘Initially the Trust started free transport for 100 girls from four villages studying at one high school in March 2010 for the 2010-11 academic year. By April 2013, the number had

increased to 300 girls from 16 villages, served by three high schools, including 50 girls from Meo villages in Rajasthan. ... Many of the 300 girls reached grade 10, being the first in their villages to achieve this distinction. As of 2016, 275 girls were attending high school and senior secondary schools and 40 girls were attending college in Palwal. As the girls graduated from the Blossom Bus, the Trust extended the programme to provide transport to their college. At present, there are 40 girls on the Blossom to College Bus, who are first generation college goers and 20 of these will complete college education in 2017' (Fawcett & Kumar, 2017).

The Trust is now attempting to work with the District Education Office in the Haryana Government's scheme of distributing bicycles for girls. A major problem with the issue of bicycles is that there is no guarantee that the girls will be allowed to use it even if it is bought in their name. However, the Trust plans to begin an intervention in Taoru block of Mewat called Lotus Pedals to facilitate this process of bringing girls to school on bicycles.

2.3. STRENGTHENING SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Another strategy which is used to strengthen the relationship between the community and the school is White Lotus Trust's efforts to strengthen the School Management Committee (SMC). A positive step which the Haryana government had taken was to notify that the SMCs of Haryana Schools would be headed by a parent and not the principal of the school or the village sarpanch. A functional SMC plays an important role in bringing accountability of the school to the community, the purchase of materials, recommendations for hiring teachers and so on. White Lotus Trust has been involved in giving inputs to the SMC trainers appointed by the government and in making trainings participatory

3. CARE INDIA

While initiatives to bring out of school girls to school should be lauded (whether through enrolment drives or through providing solutions for access such as buses and bicycles), to stop with the physical presence of a rural girl in school is inadequate. As Kumar and Gupta (2008) put it, 'The space available for rural girls from deprived backgrounds is narrow, not merely in terms of educational opportunity but also culturally, in the context of family, caste and social hierarchy. For example, the obstacles that SC and Muslim girls must overcome in

order to realize their basic potential for school education are far too complex to be negotiated with sporadic empowerment strategies alone'. Just bringing them to school without equipping them with the skill to negotiate formal education will lead to their eventual dropout again. In this context, a flagship programme for adolescent girls who have never enrolled in school or had dropped out very early and who are in the age group of 9 to 14 years is conducted by the NGO CARE India.

3.1. THE BRIDGE COURSE MODEL

Called Udaan (meaning 'flight'), the bridge course programme is residential in nature and spans a year. It aims at enabling the girls to complete the five years of schooling that they missed, through transacting a carefully designed compacted and accelerated curriculum in language, mathematics, science and social science in the one year that they spend there. At the end of the year, the girls appear for the class V Board examination of the State and then move to upper primary schooling. In the context of Mewat, CARE helps these 100 girls who pass out each batch to get admission in the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya or another suitable school.

CARE first piloted Udaan in the HarDOI district of Uttar Pradesh in 1999 where it still continues to function. It was then replicated successfully with some cultural adaptations in Mayurbhanj district in Odisha with tribal girls, in Madhubani in Bihar with girls drawn from dalit and mahadalit communities and more recently, since 2011 in Nuh, Mewat district of Haryana with girls belonging to the Meo Muslim community. The aim was to see if this model of an accelerated bridge course would be beneficial across disadvantaged minorities.

3.2. SPECIAL CURRICULUM

Udaan has a unique curriculum, which, apart from its focus on academics, places a premium on developing the girls' personal and social identity, building their self-esteem and understanding of the world.

The two dimensions through which this is accomplished are through the creation of a facilitative learning environment and a social learning curriculum. The basic idea underlying this curriculum is that the girls must build a critical perspective and understanding of the social, cultural and developmental features, practices and beliefs that characterise the

context in which they live. An important aspect of this curriculum is gender equality. One example of this is the emphasis placed on the games and sports activities which girls engage in. These include cycling, football and cricket, i.e. so called 'masculine' sports. The residential aspect of the bridge course and the responsibilities which the girls are given are also an integral part of the personal growth which is envisioned for each student who is part of the programme.

3.3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

When CARE India decided to start the Udaan programme in Mewat, one of the challenges which they faced was finding a suitable local partner who would overcome the community's distrust of a residential bridge course. Initially, there was a lot of suspicion from the community who felt that the organization was being funded by American money and their latent object was to convert the girls to Christianity. There were also fears that the girls would be videotaped or that the spiritual values of the community would be subverted. Three strategies which CARE used are worth noting.

Firstly, they built a partnership with a NGO with a local presence, i.e. in this case, SRF Foundation. SRF was instrumental in procuring 5000 square feet of land through the panchayat in Tapkan village of Nuh block for building a residential facility for the use of CARE India's UDAAN programme. SRF used their contacts in the community to bring the girls who had dropped out of school and who were between 10 to 13 years back to school through CARE-UDAAN's one year residential bridge programme.

Secondly, they contextualized the content of the course to include interests of the community. 'Most of the teachers in Udaan are from the Meo-Muslim community. They teach learners Urdu. In the morning Bal Sabha the day begins with Urdu nazms which the girls really enjoy singing. During the course of the study one could see girls humming these *nazms* while doing their work. Apart from music girls often recite poems or narrate folk stories from their own context and then discuss them' (Ranganathan, 2014).

Thirdly they actively courted the community through creating a roster through which various mothers would stay the night at the hostel. Parents are allowed to visit their

daughters every Sunday. In addition, quarterly community seminars are held at Udaan to keep formal contact between the teachers and the girls' parents.

4. CENTRE FOR EQUITY AND INCLUSION (CEQUIN)

Perhaps the toughest challenge in the context of educating rural adolescent girls from deprived backgrounds lies in overcoming what Kumar and Gupta (2008) call '*the deep mental blocks in the adult mind about the capacity and efficiency of girls to participate in the economic workforce as decision makers. These blocks are so deep and pervasive that they have acquired a psycho-social base in the culture*'. Therefore, sustained changes with regarding to the understanding of gender and the social construction of gender roles are not possible unless the community is part of this journey of the adolescent girls' education. One of CEQUIN's guiding perspectives in its work in Mewat has been that efforts to sensitise and empower adolescents in school regarding the issues of gender should be coupled with community engagement for sustainability and to avoid backlash toward the girls.

4.1. CREATING SPACES FOR WOMEN

In 2014, CEQUIN carried out a gender audit in 10 villages across the 3 blocks of Ferozpur Jhirka, Nuh and Nagina Mewat to understand the issues faced by women and girls. A key aspect of the audit was to empower women to do this themselves, thereby helping them articulate their own issues. CEQUIN's initial engagement took the form of creating public spaces for women (*Nari Ki Choupal*) in a highly masculinized ethos. The intent was to give the women a public space to gather in and articulate their thoughts and share their experiences. It was also hoped that this would spur the women to mobilize and form collectives such as Self Help Groups and Health Groups. The women were initially hesitant but as soon as they were in a group, they started to share their perspectives and have fun. The women were also aided in starting small businesses which could be run from home such as sewing, knitting, and embroidery. Through this multifaceted engagement with the women, women were encouraged to take leadership in various spheres of public life.

4.2. WORK WITH ADOLESCENT BOYS

The organization's intervention with women is supplemented by work with men and boys. These efforts were based on the insights from CEQUIN's baseline carried out in 2014 among

600 females and 300 males. More than 50% of the male respondents supported the following three aspects as areas where they hoped their wives' situation would be better than their mothers, i.e. the need for safe spaces for women, mobility and opportunities for education. A little less than 45 per cent felt that their wives should get opportunity to earn money and also participate in decision making process related to their children. That the younger generation of men are far more receptive to women's empowerment and wanted educated earning wives was a critical insight thrown up by the Baseline.

The organization's experience of working with a group of boys in Sakras village was extremely positive with regard to the long term impact of such interventions as they were very receptive to training and keen to learn more. Apart from 'in-community' and 'in-school' leadership workshops, CEQUIN decided to further build their capacity and give them more exposure, by bringing them across to Delhi for an exposure visit and creating a pool of 'young agents of change' in Mewat, with whom the organization could continue to work in the future. Apart from the 'Agents of change' workshops, 16 days in November 2016 were devoted to concerted activism among boys. The CEQUIN staff visited schools across Mewat, talking to boys about the need to end domestic violence and to raise awareness about this issue, which had also come up in the Baseline as a serious concern.

It is also important to highlight that in engaging the community, CEQUIN adopts an 'insider' approach. An important aspect of CEQUIN's staff recruitment is that the individuals should be area sensitive. The organization's Mewat Office uses only local staff. For instance, while the Gender Audit was in progress in a village, one of the senior staff members was accosted by a local Mullah who was deeply suspicious of the proceedings. However as the staff member was Muslim herself and well versed with the Quran, she was able to hold her ground on religious terms. This went down so well among the women who were present that the Mullah's daughter-in-law publicly supported the CEQUIN staff, convincing him to allow the audit's conclusion without disruption. Other efforts to build trust and help in community mobilization have been CEQUIN's engagement with the district administration as well as with the ASHA and Anganwadi workers in villages.

4.3. BREAKING GENDER STEREOTYPES AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS

CEQUIN's football camps for girls are an instance of this strategy. In Mewat, public spaces are very masculinised. Therefore, getting girls to play an outdoor sport helps shatter a gender stereotype in an innovative fashion. The main aim of organizing football camps is to build the leadership capability and confidence of girls during the fertile period of adolescence where aspirations for their adult lives take solid shape. As the organization's work in Jamia Nagar, Delhi has demonstrated, motivating the girls to take this step to play football engages their interest and inspires them to follow the dreams despite their socio-cultural backgrounds which might be hostile and at times, parochial. In addition, using the sports camp, CEQUIN attempts to have interactions with parents and community members on the last day, thereby enabling them to get a buy-in and support for these girls, ensure continuity and gain access to the communities in which these girls live.

In partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s India Development Programme (IDP), CEQUIN also conducts career counselling workshops (DISHA Chat) for both adolescent girls in the senior secondary classes as well as for girls who are out of school in Mewat. Through classroom training for the in-school cohort, information is provided to the girls on various livelihood options to encourage them to actively search out wage employment, businesses and enterprises. They are helped to understand how their aptitude can be aligned with opportunities which are available, so as to plan their career. When these workshops are conducted for out-of-school girls, they are also encouraged and facilitated for re-enrolment in school or signing up for open-schooling or vocational training.

5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to give an overview of the levels at which interventions must be pitched in order to create lasting impact with respect to interventions for adolescent girls. The types of intervention which were explored included

- targeting the retention of rural adolescent girls in school (i.e. improving the physical infrastructure, providing academic support , building leadership and life skills and gender sensitization projects with adolescent boys),

- bringing to the mainstream those girls who are out of school (i.e. efforts to independently identify and enrol out of school girls, overcoming issues of physical access and designing bridge courses to help drop outs move to the upper primary level of schooling)
- creating a culture of critical thinking regarding gender roles, both among the women and men of the community, in order to sustain interventions among adolescent girls in school and open new avenues for livelihood and independence among out of school girls.
- Strategies for engaging the local community (building partnerships with other NGOs and leveraging each other's strengths, contextualizing interventions to incorporate aspects of interest to the community, creating pathways for open dialogue to prevent misunderstandings, strengthening formal institutional structures like the SMC which link the school and the community, the use of area-sensitive and contextually aware staff)

Having come to the end of this exercise of mapping the status of adolescent girls' education in Mewat, one has a better sense of the possibilities and challenges with respect to what might ameliorate their situation. At this point, one can better appreciate the reasons for the social tension with which the onset of adolescence is greeted. A girl is now no longer completely a child nor an adult. In a parallel sense, just as the adolescent girl straddles the world of the child and the adult, it seems that interventions on her behalf must also straddle two extremes. As adults and educators, when we develop interventions on the behalf of a rural Mewati adolescent girl, we admit and we take responsibility for creating, ignoring, perpetuating or mitigating the conditions which have caused her deprivation.

Yet while doing so, we cannot completely take over in such a fashion that the budding agency of these girls is hampered. They have their own ideas who they think they are and who they want to be. Those must be respected. To paraphrase the philosopher Hannah Arendt, the challenge lies in being very careful to give these young girls the 'chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us', even while we fulfil our responsibility of preparing them in advance 'for the task of renewing a common world'.

CHAPTER FIVE

INPUTS FOR INTERVENTION

Based on this mapping study, one may identify the following aspects as significant in designing and executing interventions in Mewat.

1. 90% of the schools in Mewat are run by the government and 82% of the students enrolled in the district go to them. 23.6% of private school students are girls. Only 10.9% of these students are Muslim girls. Therefore, the government school system remains the best avenue for interventions targeting Muslim girls in Mewat.
2. The block-wise breakup of girls in terms of enrolment at all levels can assist the targeted conception of programmes to facilitate the access of girls to education. Punhana block has the highest enrolment of girls at the primary and upper primary level, followed by Nuh. At the secondary level, Nuh comes first, followed by Punhana. Taoru block shows the highest enrolment at the secondary level. While Nagina block shows the lowest numbers of girls enrolled, it has the highest percentage of Muslim girls enrolled when compared to the total number of girls at each level.
3. Poor literacy and the under-development of the region have been barriers to the Muslim community gaining a deeper perspective on the value of education in general and girls' education in particular. Part of this has been because of the community's alienation from the mainstream of development, leading to a greater influence of conservative religious leadership. Therefore, apart from the government schools, efforts must be made to engage with the authorities of madrasas because they tend to possess the trust of the Muslim community. While Punhana has the largest number of madrasas, Nuh has the largest total enrolment in them. However, Punhana outpaces Nuh in terms of the largest number of girls enrolled in madrasas. Indeed, there are nearly three times the girls enrolled in Nuh or Nagina, in Punhana.
4. There needs to be a village-wise audit of the number of out-of-school girls, as enrolment does not necessarily mean attendance and attendance does not

automatically imply learning outcomes. The lack of upper primary and secondary schools nearby pose an important challenge both for boys as well as girls in accessing formal schooling. In addition to creating infrastructure, there needs to be holistic intervention which will address the following key points through government and civil society partnership.

- a. The contractualization of teaching staff as well as the paucity of female teachers in government schools has drastically affected the quality of teaching-learning processes and the participation of girls post the primary level. Both girls in the government run Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya as well as out of school girls identified 'padhai'- or the quality of the teaching-learning process being central to their understanding of a good school. The development of a clean and aesthetically appealing school environment as well as creating opportunities for games and sports are areas where there can be fruitful collaborations between the government schools, NGOs and the Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives of companies.
- b. There is also a need for targeted subject specific pedagogic interventions such as for Science subjects and Maths because girls who are first generation learners or whose parents have not studied beyond class VIII find it hard to obtain support for these. In addition, the possibility of creating mobile libraries/science labs and community centres where girls can study must also be explored.
- c. Interventions among adolescent girls in school as well as new avenues for livelihood and independence among out of school girls cannot be sustained without encouraging critical thinking regarding gender roles, both among the women and men of the community. This must be a non-negotiable component of any intervention.
- d. The legitimate anxiety of both the parents and girls regarding sexual harassment and safety in accessing upper primary schools must be acknowledged and addressed through initiatives which involve community and gender sensitization.
- e. The role of health issues in restricting access to school must be recognized. While there has been a recognition of iron deficiency and proliferic anaemia

among girls and women in the district, more attention needs to be paid to mental health issues. Issues of menstrual hygiene and the lack of access to sanitary napkins is another pressing need.

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