

"Living In Bawana: Childhood Experiences of Girls"

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Section - 1

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand the childhood of girls living in the Bawana. We enquired about the life experiences of these girls, their everyday routine, their understanding of their roles in the society. We tried to explore the process of socialization of the girls in a resettled colony of migrated families. We also tried to understand how differently girls and boys are socialized in the society and how this socialization affects the development of girls.

Through this study we wanted to understand how a girl spends her day in Bawana, what are the issues that affects her, what are her concerns, the things that excite her, things that she looks forward to, things that upset her, makes her angry, disappoints her, things that she wants to do. We wanted to know her as a person. It enabled us to explore the life of a girl who migrated to Delhi with her family and helped us in understanding the effect and role of schooling and education in her life.

Childhood is a very important phase in our lives, and our experiences in these years have an impact on our personality and identity. Erikson asserts, “ego-identity develops out of a gradual integration of all identifications” (Erikson 1950:213), which were gradually acquired through various stages of development. Therefore, each stage has an important role to play in the child’s development. Thus it would be important to understand how the whole process of migration and living in urban slums affect the development of girls.

Socialization process of girls in to gender roles begins during childhood. The socializing agencies start differentiating between girl child and boy child very early. So through this study we also wanted to understand how strongly these distinctions are imposed on girls and how this impacts their childhood.

The childhood experiences of these girls are also affected by many factors like poverty, migration, education and religion. In this study we are trying to understand the impact of these forces on the girl child and how she tries to cope with them.

Since childhood is in itself a very broad area, and it was not possible to explore it in its entirety so we focused our explorations to the aspects of work, education and gender. Thus one of the objectives of this study was to understand and analyze the childhood experiences of girls belonging to the migrant families in the context of work. We also wished to investigate the nature of educational experiences that these girls live through. The third objective was to understand the socialization of these girls into gender roles in their pre-pubertal age.

The Site

Bawana is an urban slum colony in North West Delhi housing 9000 families in five main blocks. It is a re-settlement colony, which has old and new migrants from nearby states of Delhi. Most of the original inhabitants of the colony are those whose slums were evicted from the heart of Delhi around 2000. From the heart of the city they were pushed out to this borderline area and were given small plots of land in compensation.

Overall, only a physical relocation of the colony has happened, the issues of a healthy life are far from being addressed. The position of children especially is vulnerable in the colony, because the institutions of education and health are very weak for children. They stand at a special position, because although they live in the political capital of the nation, they are acutely marginalized from many opportunities of growth. The role of education becomes critical here in enabling children to break this inter generational cycle of poverty and more so marginalization.

Many NGOs work in Bawana and all households are in some manner influenced by one or the other NGO. Navjyoti , a Delhi Police Foundation that runs integrated community development projects in Bawana has considerable reach in the colony. This NGO provides tuition classes and run certain other programmes like computer courses and youth guidance and counseling programmes for the children and youth of the families living in this colony. This NGO has worked here from the past several years so it has established a trust with the community. We decided to first interact with the girls who were enrolled in Navjyoti, this gave us time to get familiar with community and the streets of Bawana.

Methodology

Our study is qualitative in nature and therefore uses some of these tools, such as field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs and group discussions, to gather data. Besides we have spent considerable amount of time doing participant observations in the field. All these tools have helped us in developing an understanding on the lives of girls living in Bawana.

Sample

In order to do a qualitative study in a comparatively small span of time we chose to have a sample size constituting of twelve girls. We used purposive sampling technique to select our potential sample as we had selected the girls in the age group of 8-12 from the entire group and later from the selected group we further selected girls of different age, birth order amongst in siblings and religion. Before actually starting on with the process of interaction with the community we approached 'Navjyoti', an NGO. Six girls from the sample belong to the different groups of girls attending tuition here. The other girls were chosen as a sample, through a gradual process of interaction with the community after making ourselves familiar to the people there through continuous visits to the colony. Finally, after a very informal interaction with the girls the selection of the sample was done in two stages.

(a) primary- interaction with the girls belonging to the age group of 8-12 years, to gather basic factual information regarding their family and themselves

(b) Secondary- selecting the desired sample from this age group, based on the principle of maximal variation. As our sample size was small so to include the maximum variety we had chosen this principle. So in our sample we tried to incorporate it by keeping variation in our subjects in terms of

- (1) religion (both Hindu and Muslim girls were included)
- (2) the girls differed in their order of birth among their siblings ranging from being the eldest to the youngest.
- (3) number of sisters and brothers
- (4) location of their house in different blocks of the colony
- (5) school going or drop outs or girls going only to the madarsa

Further a semi-structured interview (consisting of both open and closed questions) was used as a research tool to gather some primary data. We decided to use semi-structured interview because it is “flexible, allowing new questions to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says”. (Flick 2002) Thus, we worked on “a framework of themes to be explored” in the field well in advance. We also conducted semi structured interviews with the mothers and other members available from the girls’ families.

In order to observe the girls in and around their houses we decided to spend time in their streets, and interact with their neighbours. Meanwhile we also used to walk in the neighbouring streets and the streets of the block where our respondents reside, with a purpose of making our presence visible in the community.

After strengthening our rapport with the girls we spent time with some of the girls in their natural setting while playing games like ludo and carom with them. It helped us to too in making observe some of the natural responses to certain play situations like losing and winning, strategising (differing in case of boys and girls), having interest or not at which point of time in the game etc. Some of the inhibitions which were still their between us and the girls, gradually disappeared during this period.

Finally to explore the subject’s understanding of the different gender roles and their perception of the life experiences of a male child in the society, we conducted group interactions (in groups of 3, 4, 2) with them trying to know their individual responses to the question “had I been born a boy, I would have” It was the concluding tool used in the process of data collection.

We spent around twenty days in Bawana, spread over the months of May and June, as we wanted to observe them and talk to them at different times during one month. This was also time for summer vacations for the girls who were enrolled in government schools, so it was easier to interact with them. The girls had some free time in the afternoon after finishing their household chores, so we would be able to spend some time together in their houses. Many girls were leaving for their villages also during this time, so while finalizing the sample we had to keep in mind this as well. We used to visit Bawana three days a week, so that we could keep some time for our reflections and for strategizing for our next set of data collection.

This set of methods and tools to gather the relevant data for our research was very helpful for us in getting familiar and developing an understanding of the sample, their immediate surroundings and the their concerned life experiences paving way for this proposed research study.

Section - 2

The ethos of Bawana

History

A resettlement colony in north-east Delhi, the jhuggi-jhopdi (slum) colony in Bawana, is quite cut-off from the main city. In 2001, when this colony was established by the government, 9272 plots were allotted in the area, which were divided into 5 blocks. A-1000 plots, B-1800 plots, C-972 plots, D- 1500 plots and E-4000 plots. There were two kinds of plots available, one of 18 yards and one of 12 yards. Those who had the required documents were given 18 yards plots and those who did not were allotted the 12 yards ones (Jagori Report on Bawana). Each plot was given at the cost of 7000 rupees, many people who were unable to pay such a high amount in a short time span returned back to their villages. Further, these plots were given on a lease for 5 yrs, which means they could be taken back by the government if required after 5 yrs.

A woman in her 40's described Bawana (at the time when she had arrived here with her family 7 years ago) "*yahan pe bahut sunsaan tha to logo ko maar kar yahan phak jaate the.*" (It was very deserted here, so people were murdered and thrown here). They were so scared of staying there that at nights even if someone knocked at the door or passed by they would not come out to see. According to her, they were the first ones to be allotted the plot in E block and then this block was nothing but a huge piece of land divided into small plots. Nobody agreed to live there, and their neighbours were allotted plots in other blocks which were inhabited by families. They began their life in Bawana by building a jhuggi on their plot, where now stand a two storied pucca house.

Though the government gave them these plots but the basic facilities were absent. The Improvement and Clearance Act (1956) defines a slum as, "areas that are unfit in any respect for human habitation; and are 'by reason of dilapidation, over-crowding, faulty arrangements and design of such buildings, narrowness or faulty arrangements of streets, lack of ventilations, light or sanitation facilities, or any combination of these factors detrimental to safety, health or morals.'" (Menon-Sen; Bhan 2008: 4). This is exactly what could be observed in Bawana colony too. The main road had over-flowing drains and with no street lights at night. The public convenience that was made by the government charged 1 rupee for each person, every time one used it. This could not be afforded by many families, as it would cost a whole family 5-10 rupees

per day, thus people would go to the fields. This was unsafe for women and impossible for both women and children to go at night. (Jagori report on Bawana 6-7). Women go in groups for relieving themselves either early in the morning or in the evening, many girls told us about instances of sexual harassment that they faced or they have heard about from various people near the fields. Our respondents, Afsaana and Noori also shared few stories of rape cases they have heard from the elders, which took place near the canal. So they were advised not to go alone.

None of the streets or houses was provided electricity, so, many people used to and perhaps still pay private contractors for 10 hrs of electricity, which is illegal. Water is also a huge issue, as either it is polluted water or highly chlorinated water that is supplied. Both are a reason for high rates of stomach infections and illnesses. Bawana was very poorly connected previously. There were only 2 DTC buses plying to and fro from Delhi to Bawana. Now there are privately run RTVs and private vans that have been introduced (Jagori Report 7). Bawana did not have even a crematorium of its own; people had to go to a crematorium situated in Narela, to burn or bury the dead body of a loved one.

Composition

In this colony initially the people who came here were the people dislocated from different slums of Delhi like R.K.Puram, Yamuna Pushta, Rohini power house, ITO, Raj Ghat (for e.g. the families of Rabia Khatoon, Anjali, Lalita, Poonam). Most of these families were originally from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. Not all the displaced families from these slums could manage to get a plot here. But after 9 years of setting up of this resettled colony there are families who joined it later either directly from the different slums in Delhi or from their native villages in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa etc. According to a survey done by Navjyoti, the majority population here is still Muslim. The ratio of Muslims to Hindus differs in different blocks and varies from 60:40 to 80:20. Not all the families who live here have the plots of their own as many of them live in rented rooms. There are families who own more than 2 plots (one of our respondents mother owns three plots and is planning to buy even more).

Presence of the state

The state has an important role to play in providing certain resources to the families here through certain infrastructure and basic facilities. In today's time there are five primary MCD (Municipal

Corporation of Delhi) schools and two middle schools in the colony. There is one police chowki also, which was not the case when the colony was established. There is a Police van parked outside the colony. According to the Navjyoti data there are 40 aanganwaris (day care centers for children), five ration and five kerosene oil shops, 27 public toilets, 3 community centers, 15 water pumps and a mother dairy booth. There is also a vocational training centre being run in the community centre of F block where training for sewing, stitching, beauty care etc is provided to the girls of the colony. There are no hospitals or doctors in the area. The nearest hospital is 3-5 kilometers away in the market. There were few mobile medical vans employed by the government in the area. People complained about these vans, as they said that the doctor would not bother at all, in fact he would insult them as they were poor. Now there are doctors within the colony itself, who examine people in a better way and treat them nicely. There is one dispensary and a D.D.A and Slum Department office also located within the colony. Despite of this entire state infrastructure, the families living here still face a number of problems with the basic issues of safety, hygiene, medical facilities, education, employment etc. The government policies and the buildings do exist here but the motivation and confidence among the families to be able to establish a stable household and see a secure future for them is still missing in majority of the cases. There is an increased need of initiative from the government side to create more awareness about the health and other facilities along with the idea of how the families can make use of them. Such lack of government's sensitivity and initiative towards health related needs of the community has given rise to a flourishing business of the fake doctors. There can also be seen a strong faith among many families on '*jhaad phoonk*' in the mosque as an effective treatment of serious illness like chicken pox too.

Gendered spaces

The public spaces in Bawana colony seems very much gendered apart from the jhanda chowk, in the streets and the lanes connecting two blocks, women and girls are far less in numbers than young boys and men. Girls had reasons to be passing by in the streets we hardly saw a girl just sitting and chatting in the streets, like the boys. On the streets we often came across men or young boys riding a bike or gossiping or just sitting whereas, it was difficult to find the girls on the street. We could interact with the women on the streets, but the girls would stay indoors. The only time when we could see them on the street was when they were cooking (if their kitchen is

one the street), or when they were cleaning the street, washing utensils or filling water. For interviews and when spending time with them we sat in their houses.

The parks and the canal are crowded by boys and it is rare to see a girl playing in the park or bathing or swimming in the canal like several other boys. Only 2-3 adult women were seen at the canal engrossed in washing clothes and accompanied by young boys diving in the canal and playing with each other. Many of our respondents stated that they did not visit the fields behind the colony during night and if they have to go there during the day they make sure that they take an elder female member of the family or a friend from the neighborhood because it is unsafe to go there all alone.

Mapping the colony

It was only after three or four visits that we were able to recognize the five blocks in which the colony was organized and where one block ends and the next one begins. Wider than the streets are the lanes connecting the blocks with the Jhanda Chowk.

The Jhanda Chowk

Jhanda Chowk is the place where the national flag is hoisted to mark the celebrations of Independence Day. It is called a chowk. This area is always hustling-bustling, the most live part of Bawana, where people keep coming and going, there are many concrete clothes shops, few grocery shops, an auto stand at this place. Often we used to cross this chowk to go to E block. It was also our entry point to E block, and this was our first landmark and thus all our explorations would begin from this chowk.

Within each block there are streets of approximately 2.5 – 3 meters wide with drains running on both the sides just outside the houses. There is a small concrete slab ramp in front of each house to cover the drain exactly in front of the door. During our visits to the colony we observed that most of these drains were either overflowing or were blocked with all kinds of garbage. Most of these drains are in a bad condition and are home to all kinds of mosquitoes and flies, which happens to be one of the reasons of children falling ill several times, as one of the respondent said. The situation is even worse especially during the rainy season when the streets are all covered with the drain mud, garbage, and dirty water overflowing from the drains. It causes a bigger problem to those houses which are a level below the level of the street (most of which are the *kachcha* houses, simply made of plastic sheets spread over four bamboo poles) because the

drain water enters inside the house during rainy season. Though there are 3 garbage dumping stations within the colony but the streets, the main road, the lanes are all littered badly (except the streets or part of a street where the family themselves keep them clean). The sweepers employed by the government are hardly seen there cleaning the colony. Many people shared that cleaning of the drains becomes one of the reasons for frequent fights amongst neighbours. Even around the common water taps from where the families get drinking water, plastic pouches, wrappers and garbage is a common sight.

Apart from the inability to afford Rs. 5-10 per day for using public toilets other reason for some people to avoid its usage is that these toilets are most of the time very dirty or not cleaned properly. A female respondent also mentioned that in her block the inner latches of the bathroom doors are also broken so it is unsafe to use them. We even observed few of our respondents coming from the toilets all drenched in water. When asked the reason they said that they just went to the toilet to take a bath and they wear their clothes while bathing. That's how they take a bath everyday.

As stated earlier the sizes of the plots are 18yards and 12 yards. Most of the families have at least a minimum number of 6-7 members. So some of the families have constructed another room on the first floor of their house and others use the space in the street for certain purposes like cooking and sitting during day time or sleeping during nights. This gives very little space for the children to play within the house. Space is a theme explored by Nibedita Nath in her work "Growing up in Slums" where she observes "Space in slum is scarce. Home for the slum children constitute mostly one small room...there is of course no separate space for the children." (Nath, 2008; 307) While walking across different streets we saw some women cooking on a mud *chulha* (hearth) on the street, some sitting on the raised cemented platforms made along the front wall of their house and talking to women from the neighborhood, old women and children sitting on *charpais* spread on the street. Few of the families also had goats and they were tied just in front of the house or on the raised platforms. All these are single room houses so there are different ways in which people have organized this small space of their house. In some cases they have partitioned the space with a wall and in the front portion they have setup the kitchen. The remaining portion behind this has a bed or no furniture at all and is generally utilized for sleeping and sitting, watching TV etc. in some cases the inner space is untouched and

the cooking happens outside the room just in front of the house as they have set-up a mud *chulha* in front of their houses.

There is a police chowki located in the colony. We also saw the PCR vans on the main road several times during our visits. We also heard of many crimes happening in the colony and in the fields behind it, from our respondents. Some of them talked about women being raped, killed and thrown in and near the canal, fights between families over issues like water and throwing of garbage, fights between different groups of boys from different blocks of the colony itself. While talking to one of our respondent, Poonam, we came to know of a local *gunda* (miscreant) who lives in her street and is an influential man. He has good rapport and contacts with the police and takes money from the local families and assures security from the threats of police and other men and boys in tussle with the boys of her block. The same person according to Poonam, beats up and scolds the girls for being on the street without a reason or when they are seen talking to boys or any stranger. Even the girl appreciated this behavior of this person and justified it by saying “*wo sabko apni behan manta hai aur achcha aadmi hai*”(he considers every girl as her sister and is a good man).

Apart from these tussles and conflicts, we also got to know of other things happening illegally in the colony. We got to know of drugs being sold and bought in the colony. Afsaana talked about how after shifting in Bawana, her elder brother got into drugs with the other boys of the colony. The mother of another respondent confirmed this by saying that “*yahan par to nasha bhi karte hain ladke. bahut ladko ko behla lete hai*”. Kulsum(8 year old) while talking about why the girls should not talk to boys and said that boys are bad, they smoke and drink. When further probed by saying that do only boys do that, she said “*nahi ladkiya bhi karti hain.*” (No. Girls also do that). When asked to give an example she said “*hamare ghar k paas ek aurat rehti hai. Wo bidi bhi piti hai aur daaru bhi peeti hai. Papa keh rahe the ki wo gandi aurat hai*”. (A woman lives near our house. She smokes as well as drinks. My father was saying that she is a bad woman). One woman from a different street who was also Afsaana’s neighbor stated that “*yahan to har tarah k log rehte hai. Bahut ganda maahaul hai. Gandi aurten bhi rehti hain. Dhandha kati hai*” (all kinds of people live here. The ambiance is very bad. Even bad women lives here. They are involved in sex work). It pointed to the possibility of few women doing sex work.

The NGOs strongly place themselves into the picture by playing a very crucial role in the colony through certain programmes related to health, education, counseling etc. According to an official,

working in an NGO called Children's India International Trust" located in E block of Bawana, a total of around nineteen NGOs are working currently in Bawana. Some of which are Prayas, Jagori, Navjyoti, children's India international trust etc. some of these NGOs have been working here since last few years and have developed a trust with the community. Even people are also aware of this and their first tendency to identify a stranger walking in the streets of Bawana with some papers or documents etc. and interacting with people or merely observing the area, as an NGO official or volunteer. Most of these NGOs are in good terms with the community. This information helped us to adopt the strategy of approaching the community through Navjyoti. We approached this NGO because it not just shares a good rapport with the community but also because our sample was the girls and hence a highly sensitive issue for the families if some stranger wants to probe their girls about the details of their everyday life.

Due to the fact that many NGOs work here and many children are under the influence of the health, education and other programmes run by them, one can see a difference between the children who are involved with them and those who are still untouched by their direct effects like drop out children or those who don't go there but attend other institutions like Madarsa etc. For example, the level of confidence amongst the girls we met at Navjyoti was definitely more than the rest from our sample. There are frequent visits of the people from different funding organizations and different volunteers, interns from both India and overseas so the set of girls we first met at Navjyoti were so habitual to interact in a particular way with any new person coming and interacting with them at Navjyoti. There are certain ways these children are learning here to interact with the outside unknown world including the symbols like the medium of spoken language and even a particular kind of body language (with crossed hands right in front, standing in attention position).

Section - 3

Inside the House

Poonam, is studying in Class V of the MCD Balika Vidyalaya, Bawana. Her family migrated from Mahoba district, Uttar Pradesh. Poonam came to Bawana from the Mehrauli slum cluster with her family. Her parents work at the construction site in Vasant Kunj, so they live there on roadside and visit their children once a week. Poonam is their youngest child and she lives with her elder brother and sister in Bawana. Poonam's brother works in a factory in Bawana, while her sister attends sewing lessons in the sewing centre in the Baraat Ghar (community centre) in Bawana. Poonam does not go to Navjyoti for classes, so during the summer vacations she used to stay alone at home. Since her sister used to spend the entire day in the sewing centre, and would leave the house at 8:30 in the morning and comes only in the evening around 5:30. All this while Poonam stays alone at home and being the youngest, her only household responsibility is to fill water thrice a day. She wakes up early in the morning and helps her sister in cleaning the house and in cooking. When her sister leaves for her sewing class, she goes to sleep and generally spends the whole day sleeping. It is only in the afternoon at around 2 that she takes bath, have lunch and watch television. We observed that in her street all the girls bathe at this time in their own houses and after bathing most Muslim girls go to madarsa. But the difference with Poonam was that she was relatively free the whole day. While most of the girls were Muslim in her street and would go to madarsa, Poonam being a Hindu didn't have to do this as well, still she stayed at home the whole day, alone and doing nothing at all. When we asked her why she stays at home, when she can go out and play with her friends in the street, she told us that nobody plays in the street. While talking about games she said she likes to play outdoor games, such as hide and seek, but cannot play in the streets of Bawana, *ladke chidhate hain* (boys tease me).

Why do the girls stay at home?

We noticed that the girls remained inside their houses the whole day, and came out on the street purposively. So we wanted to understand why even young girls are not playing in the streets.

In the process of trying to know the reasons behind the absence of girls on the street, we came across different responses given by the girls which indicated towards the differences in how they rationalize their restricted mobility. Anjali, an eight year respondent, is a single girl child with two elder brothers. Apart from her parents and brothers two younger brothers of her father (her

uncles) also live in her house. Anjali hardly interacts with the children in the neighborhood not even with the girl named Rabiya who is her classmate in school and also attends the same tuition class at the Navjyoti centre. She doesn't even go to the park for playing like her elder brothers who go there whenever they are free from the shop. Anjali's family is the only Hindu family in that street. Rest all are Muslim families. Once asked about how she feels living in Bawana and particularly her street, she said "*acchha nahi lagta, sab musalmaan hain yahan.*" She also pointed out that her parents dislike the idea of her talking to the Muslim children, especially boys and the parents themselves do not interact with them much. When asked why she doesn't go the park, she said "*papa mummy mana karte hain. Kehte hain kabhi kabhi koi gahar pe nahi rehta to ghar ka dhyan rakha kar.*" Further she said "*safaai wafaai karma aur dekhna k koi hamare ghar se koi cheez na utha le jaye*" (to keep the house clean and taking care that nobody steals anything from the house).

Afsaana, a Muslim girl, living in E block, who is also a drop out from school, she had a different reasons for avoiding playing or going on the street as well as places like the fields or the canal. She said "*mummy kehti hai ki apne kaam se matlab rakho. Main apne kaam se matlab rakhti hu.*" Afsaana, like the other girls and children also wants to play at times but her mother doesn't allow her to play for more than half an hour outside the house on the street. She has to play inside the house. She does not play with the boys as she said "my mother does not let me to play with boys. She says it is a bad thing for girls to play with boys". Once caught, while playing with a boy, she was severely punished by her mother. She justified her mother's act by saying "*ladko se baat nahi karni chahiye. Woh chhichore hote hain*". She said she has heard stories from her mother and women from the neighbourhood about the presence of ghosts and witches on the canal and in the field. This has instilled fear in her on visiting these places alone. She also reported other reasons that emerged from the similar stories she heard from the same sources like "*ladke aur aadmi chhedte hain, yahan bachche pakadne wale ghoomte rehte hain, ladkiyo ko utha le jaate hain aur izzat loot kar neher(canal) me phak dete hain etc.*" When asked the meaning of "izzat lootna" she said "*pata nahi kya matlab hai par bahot bura hota hai ladki ke liye.*" Apart from the fear of the ghost and witches there is a fear of something which is not understood but its perceived negative consequences and the idea that it is something bad for the girl is sufficient enough for her to accept that she should not visit these places all alone and not at all in the night. Afsaana is taking care of three young children in the house and doing most of the household work. She lost her father few months ago.

The girls had internalized the fact that they are born as girls and girls have a specific role to play in the society. They had come to terms with being born as a girl, thus their destiny is different from that of boys. On numerous occasions the girls would articulate this internalization, such as, when we talked about doing household chores all the girls agreed that serve food and that their brothers cannot do it. One girl described this whole sexual division of labour as “*ladki jaat ka kaam, aur ladke jaat ka kaam*”. While another girl called a man *bechara* because there was no woman in his house who would cook for him and serve him.

When we asked girls, how their lives would be different if they were born as girls? While most girls said their lives would be more enjoyable and that they would go to school and play all day. They would have more freedom; they could go to the canal and bath etc.

What do they do at home?

The girls are asked to stay at home, but to keep them at home, parents engage them in household chores; provide them with games and television, so that they don't complain about getting bored at home.

Household work takes up a major portion of a girl's daily life in Bawana. Household work can be seen as a way of keeping the girls engaged within the house, while the parents are away for work. We have seen girls doing different things like cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, filling water etc. when we asked about what work the girls did, it had to be specified that we were asking about the work at home, for them 'work' was what their parents did, which had economic value. The work that they do, '*jhadu-pauncha*', '*paani bharna*', '*bartan dhona*', '*kapde dhona*', and '*khaana bana na*' were not in the category of work. All of them seemed to have accepted the work at home as part of their lives without questioning it.

Neelam, a 12 year old girl, cooks two meals a day and serves food to everyone in the family, washes clothes, sweeps the house, fills barrels of water with her sister. Poonam, being the youngest daughter has less work to do but she has to fetch water 3 times a day and has to clean the utensils.

Acknowledgement of work: All the girls whatever the age is had shared some responsibilities at home, and all of them were accountable for their work as their contribution to household chores was substantial. But interestingly none of them admitted it. During a series of interactions with each girl, we found that they regarded their work as no work and just a 'filler' activity. As Nath

observes, “This type of indirect contribution of the girls to the household is ignored and disregarded as they are considered as mere ‘helpers’ and not ‘workers’...they remain invisible workers.” (Nath 2008; 193)

During our visits we observed that the girls were busy doing things like cleaning and spreading the wheat for drying and then taking them for grinding; cleaning street drain. The girls never looked at it as work. Kumar notes, “The case of girls is quite different. Their involvement in the family’s work starts in childhood and continues throughout the school-age years, but never receives acknowledgement. That is what it means to grow up female: to learn to work and live without being acknowledged. (Kumar 2010; 79)

When we asked the mother of a girl, Rabiya, who was cleaning the street drain, she said she just likes to keep everything clean. This is a good habit. A sweeper gets paid for these things on a monthly basis but the girls do it out of habit and they call it negligible work. The amount of work and the hours of work and the hard work they put in to fulfill their responsibilities was not even acknowledged.

The boys also had to do some household work but the nature of the work demanded physical strength and all the girls accepted that their brothers help them in their work, which is in reality household work and not their work. For example, if the girl had to fill water, she would take all the buckets to be filled to the tap, wait there for her turn then fill the water and once this much is done she calls her brother who carries the heaviest buckets and the rest are carried by the girls. This just reinforces that boys are physically stronger than girls.

All the girls reported of being restricted within their homes or lane (*‘gali’*) for playing and were not seen in the main streets. Noori said “*ladke log ki tarah hum bhi apne dosto ke saath ghumte phirte, masti karte*” (Like boys we would have roamed around with our friends, had fun!). But they do not have any other way than to complain or accept the fact they have to be at home unlike their brothers who can go to parks, the field, the canal etc.

At home mainly they played in-door games like ludo, snake and ladder, *‘ghar-ghar’* and role playing. As Noori, a respondent said “*papa ne ludo laakar diya hai taaki main aur meri behan ghar par hi khel sake*, (my father has got us a game, ludo, so that me and my sister can play inside the house only, as the locality is not good).

Boys played more outdoor games like *kabbadi* and cricket which they generally play in the parks or in the open fields behind the colony near a canal unlike girls. The mothers of the girls were not very supportive of their daughters going to their friend's place to play for a long time. They believed that the girls spoke of everything else except studies. During one participant observation while playing carom with the girls, we noticed that one of the girl's brothers forcefully took her place and the subject did not argue and after some time could be seen sitting away, while the brother played with us and the others.

Inside the house the different body language of boys and girls indicate towards the fact that girls are socialized and encouraged towards being shy, calm, timid and obedient whereas boys seems more confident, vocal and free to express even disagreements over certain things that are not liked by them.

Another engaging tool was the television, which was a constant mode of information on the outside world. It provided the girls with pictures of how life can be, that is, ideal. Each house had a television and when we visited the girls, we observed particular channels playing on them. At Rabiya's house, the television was showing a program on pilgrims going to the Mecca. This is indicative of how even television is used to reiterate religious beliefs which form an ideal moral character for Rabiya's mother.

At Poonam's and Neha's place, we could see film songs playing on the television. There were posters of film actresses dressed in bridal wear at Poonam's place. Thus television was not just a way to keep the girls engaged in the house, but was shaping their ideology in various ways.

Relationship with their family members

In Bawana, each household is composed of different set of relatives. In our sample of twelve girls, we came across all women households, where men were living somewhere else in or outside Delhi; we also came across households in which the girls lived with their elder siblings while their parents visited them once a week; there were single parent families too. In this context, we tried to enquire about the relationship that the girls share with the other members of their family. Most girls reported about having a very distant relationship with their father. Except the one who missed her father, who lives in Rajasthan and comes only once in two months. Some of the girls said that they have very limited conversations with their father, generally about calling them for lunch or if they wanted something from the market. a girl who even wanted to

interact more with the father had the idea that only boys can and should talk to their fathers more, as she said “*agar main ladka hoti to papa se jyada baat karti, abhi jyada baat nahi kar paati hu*”. Others said that they were scared of their father.

Generally it is the father who is controlling the conduct of the family members, specially women and girls. Though this doesn't happen through a direct communication between father and the daughter, generally it is the mother who works as a link between them. But girls have a clear idea of the father's dominance. For example, one girl when asked whether she would want to ride a bicycle, she responded ‘*yeh to papa ki marzi hoti hai ki aap cycle chala sakte ho ya nahi.*’ Most of the girls had a much better relationship with their brothers, who would occasionally take them out for a movie or shopping, and in return the girls would wash their clothes and make their bed etc.

Some girls shared a closer relationship with their mothers and missed them in their absence, this is also because their mothers fulfill their small wishes, such as cooking their favorite dishes, and she is also the one who listens to their complaints and spends time with them.

Everyday negotiations within their household

In the earlier sub-section we described how using various strategies the parents would ensure that their daughters stayed at home the whole day in their absence. But most girls didn't accept this norm without resistance.

The older girls we observed had learnt to negotiate their wishes in their family. The desirable thing to learn in most families was sewing and in Muslim families was learning Urdu, while the girls due to the influence of TV were more interested in learning the skills of a beautician. So they would generally strike a deal with their parents saying that they would go to madarasas only if they let them do this course. Since their contribution in the house was substantial the parents would reluctantly agree. Noori's mother told us that she does not want her daughter to go to beauty parlour, I just want her to go to Madarsa and learn urdu, but then she wouldn't listen to me. So I had to give in and permit her to go to the beauty parlour and learn hair dressing. Neha's mother also said the same when we asked about her daughter's interest in learning these different courses.

Girls also rebelled against house work. Taseena, said that when asked to work, she would pretend to sleep. Also, if she was forced to make food when she was not in the mood, she burnt it and so no one asked her to cook for the few weeks.

Neha and Noori were best friends. They lived close by, though not in the same street. They used to go to the same madarsa. Both the girls were the eldest in their family and their mothers went to work in the factory. So they had to take care of their siblings and cook for them in the absence of their mothers. The girls had the instructions of not leaving the house, except for going to the madarsa. Neha and Noori thus had to fill water, clean the house, cook and wash utensils. The girls decided to work together and finish the work of one house first and then do it in the other house. This way they got to spend the whole day together and they could also take out time to play some indoor games at each other's home. They even help each other in filling water and bringing the buckets back home.

But some other girls were still struggling with their situation and had either accepted it as their fate or would dream about a better world where they were free to play with their friends, and had more freedom. One such girl was Rabiya, our eight year old respondent. She lives in the D block of Bawana J.J. Colony, with her mother, older brother and sister and her mother's sister (*khaala*). Her father lives in Rajasthan and does embroidery work. He visits them once a month. Her mother works in a factory in Bawana that manufactures geometry box. She told me she was the youngest in the family. Just like all the other girls even she was not allowed to play outdoors. The only reasons to go out of her house were when she had to go to school or to Navjyoti or when she had to fetch water. For Rabiya, Bawana is a place that restricts her movement and she is confined to stay at her home. She sadly puts it, "*Mein toh apni gali mein hi rehti hun. Papa kahin jaane se mana karte hain, wo kehte hain mein hira (kho) jaungi.*" Thus while describing the village life she talks about the mango tree which she can never find in Bawana and the lots of space to play within their house and outside. Thus her eyes lit up when she describes vividly how she plays under the mango tree with her doll, fills water from the nearby pond (*kalma*) and she can go to see *nautanki*, such as *hanumanji ki nautanki* in her village with her family. She also talked about the big house they own there, where everyone lives in their own rooms unlike Bawana where five people have to accommodate in one small room. Rabiya was so excited to visit her village that she would keep telling me about the number of days left for her visit, every time we met.

While Anjali, another eight year old girl was the only girl child in the family and thus had to share all the household responsibilities with her mother. Though in the beginning she said that she doesn't work at home rather only helps her in the household chores in very small ways, we later found through our questions and nonparticipant observation that she fills water thrice a day, brooms, and mops the floor, wash utensils, sits at her brother's shop to relieve him for lunch or take some rest, wash her own clothes, sometime her brother's too. She hardly gets the time to play, but she doesn't complain like Rabiya neither she rebels like Tasina and nor does she negotiate with her family like Neha and Noori. She has just accepted it as her fate.

Section - 4

Outside the House

Mahaul kharaab hai...

This was the phrase used by all the girls and most of the members of their families, who we interacted with. They were presented as the reason for behaving or conducting themselves in certain ways. We were very curious to know what the girls meant by this phrase, why they used it so frequently to rationalize their restricted presence and mobility in the public spaces. It was also an important investigation because it was an inseparable part of a girl's experiences of living in Bawana. Most of the girls referred to "mahaul" as the ambience of the different blocks and the colony on the whole. It included the mind set of people especially young boys and men in the area, and also certain incidents of crimes like rape, murder, kidnapping etc. happening in the colony or behind it in the fields. Also while talking to the members of the girl's families, the same reason surfaced as a cause of strict control on the mobility of the female members of the family. As Afsaana's mother explained that the ambience here is very bad, boys takes drugs, harass girls, drunkards hang around in the day time too. This control is practiced through certain instructions from the parents to their daughters and providing certain material for recreation and entertainment (like indoor games- ludo, snake and ladder, and TV, with cable connection providing different channels) at home only.

Rabiya Khatoon's mother pointed that though there are good opportunities of education for girls in the colony due to the presence of many NGOs working here, but the general ambience is not good because girls and boys engage in notorious activities after leaving from home and boys wait on the streets to talk to girls. According to her, both, young boys and girls were responsible for spoiling the ambience. Though Rabiya's mother appreciated her conduct, her contribution to the household work and the zeal to learn new things like sewing, and beauty parlour training but the fact that Rabiya is a girl and the ambience here in Bawana is not good, made her plan things for her as "*Rabiya jahan tak padhna chahegi ham use padhaenge chahe zameen bechna pade par barhawi k baad ham uspe guard laga denge ya phir ghar me hi tuition laga denge.*" By "*guard laga denge*" she means that we will send one of Rabiya's brothers to accompany her to and back from the college or wherever she takes admission after class XII. Rabiya is also aware of her mother's ideas and accepts them unquestioningly. She has internalized the idea that the

girls who go out and interact with boys are not ‘good girls’. As she is the one who categorized girls in two types- good and bad.

The girls said that men tease them and told us about the various incidents and the kinds of sexual harassment they have faced so far, they also told us about the girls who were raped, however, no one could recall having known any girl who was raped. On asking who should be punished for teasing girls on the street again the answer was that it’s the girl’s fault so she should be punished. The girls fault is to go on the streets. She is supposed to stay at home and not be seen in public spaces; otherwise she is directing unwanted attention and hence calling for misbehavior from boys. Leela Dube also says that it is a commonly held notion in India that a girl is herself responsible for what is known as ‘sexual harassment’ in India. In context of their limited and restricted movement in public spaces, she quotes Johanna Lessinger and says that, “it is not only the molestation but a fear of being labeled as a girl of bad character, which a girl tries to avoid in following a strategy called ‘public chaperoning’.” (Dube 1988; 16).

Though many of these girls want more freedom in terms of moving in and around the colony, market, temple, canal, fields but they prefer staying indoors. When asked “*agar tumhari beti hogi to kya tum use baahar ghumne doge?*” they unanimously said “*nahi. Hum bhi unhe ghar me hi rakhenge, maahaul kharaab hai.*”(no we will treat them in the same way because the ambience is spoiled.)” Kakar (Kakar 2007; 55) says “the restrictions enforced by women of the family, by mothers and grandmothers, are not presented to the girls as punitive measures but as the reality of the world in which she will live.” From here, first of all the possibility of being on the streets and other public places like market etc. without any important reason becomes least as compared to boys and secondly if it is unavoidable in certain cases to go out for some important purpose they are conscious of their body language and the way they dress up in order to be not gaining attention of the males around. As Rabiya stated “*hum to chupchaap jaldi jaldi chale jaate hain. Sadak pe jyada baat bhi nahi karte aur haste bhi nahi hain.*”(We quietly and swiftly walk through the place. We don’t talk much on the road and doesn’t even laugh.) In some cases if the males present around, comments on them, the best way adopted by the girls Lalita, Afsaana and Rabia Khatoon is to quickly run back to home or the place where they were going, without even looking at the person. However Noori said that in such a situation she threatens the man by saying “*chappal maar dungi*’ (I will hit you with slipper) but she also said that sometimes she

also ignores to respond back and quickly walks back to home and narrate the incident to her mother.

Education

Shifting to Bawana from Sadar Basti was not a planned decision of Afsaana's family. Rather it was the accident of their jhuggi catching fire one night which made her family shift here with a family of their close relative. It was not just the jhuggi but all the belongings of the family including Afsaana's documents like birth certificate and class three passing proof, which too turned into ashes that night. She couldn't get admission in a school in Bawana due to the lack of those certificates. She finally remained a drop out. Though there are five schools in the colony itself but not even one is accessible to Afsaana because of certain factors that comes into play and changes the priorities of her life from schooling to something else. Afsaana's life experience is a clear example of how migration can lead to the drop out of children from school. Her family is poor and was trying to build a home in Bawana. Father expired, brother left them as he got into drugs, and now the two elder sisters had to work in the factory to earn some money. In a family, struck by all these tragedies, Afsaana, a 12 year old becomes an important figure. She takes care of three young children in the house (her brothers son and daughter, her own younger sister), does all the household chores and also struggles to try living her childhood by playing games indoors, talk to her friends on her way while filling water from the common tap, and by cycling (takes a bicycle on rent for Rs. 5 per hour). Afsaana left her school and the dream of becoming a lawyer too as she said "*main bakil banna chahti thi*". In school, math was her favourite subject. She developed an interest in the subject but before she could develop the basic skills of addition and subtraction, the fire not just burnt their jhuggi but also the possibility of her becoming an educated young woman. As stated by a woman from the neighborhood, "*Anna (her pet name) bahut hoshiyar bachchi hai. Agar school me uska naam likha dete to woh bahut achchi padhai karti. Par haalat hi aise hain ki wo school nahi ja sakti.*"

Mausami's family migrated from Rasulpur village, Gonda district, Uttar Pradesh. Before shifting to Bawana, Mausami was living with her family in the slum cluster near Power House, Rohini. Mausami was born in this cluster in Delhi. She is now ten years old and has been living in Bawana for the past seven years. Besides her share of household responsibilities, Mausami has to attend school and goes to Navjyoti as well. All this leaves her with little time to play. Mausami is studying in class V in the MCD School in Bawana. She is also enrolled in Navjyoti tuition centre

and attends it very regularly. She likes to read story books and often borrows books from the Navjyoti library. Mausami's mother also puts emphasis on her studies. When we asked her about why Mausami does not attend madarsa, she said Mausami does not have time to go to madarsa, as school and Navjyoti keeps her busy and she does not even get enough time to finish her homework. Even after putting so much emphasis on studies, Mausami's mother has not thought about her future, her educational aspirations. She has never gone to any of the parent-teacher meetings or enquired about her studies and her progress in class from her teachers. In an interaction Mausami complained that she does not get enough time to study at home because often when she takes out her books to study her mother sends her for some work, which she cannot refuse.

Mausami's mother wanted to send her to all girls' school, but Mausami could get admission in a co-educational school. However, much to her relief the classes for girls and boys were on different floors so it was almost like a girl's school and she had given strict instructions to Mausami about not mingling with boys. In Mausami's school boys have classes on the ground floor while girls study on the first floor, it is only during recess that there were chances of Mausami encountering boys and be friends with them. Thus her mother instructed her not to leave the classroom even during recess, to go out to play in the field, she said, "*school mein ladkiyan ladko se mazak karti hain, unhe udhar jana kya zaroori hai jahan par ladke hain? padhna hi hai toh kayde se padho aur sidhe ghar aa jao*". In a similar context Kakar says that the "the curb on girls freedom are the way things 'naturally' are, and to which the girl, any 'good girl', must comply for her own protection and the good name of the family."

In school the girls don't get to play in the school grounds because of the presence of boys. This was the direct impact of the societal values on the school. Even in Bawana the girls were not permitted to play in few parks that they had in the colony because boys used it for playing, and the school followed the same norm. When we asked her mother if she feels insecure for her daughters in Bawana, she said, "*ladkiyan sahi hain toh ladke kya karenge, hum phir shikayat bhi kar sakte hain un ladko ki.*" So by putting pressure on Mausami to behave her in public places, avoid talking to boys and not to roam about in the streets without any purpose, she is trying to save her from sexual harassment. The message transmitted to the girl is that it is she who is responsible for maintaining distance from boys and men, thereby protecting her 'purity' which is also the honour (izzat) of the whole family." (Kakar 2007; 55)

In our sample of twelve girls we observed ten out of twelve girls were enrolled in the MCD schools in Bawana. Of those six girls wanted to be teachers, while one girl wanted to be a doctor. We observed that none of the girls knew about how to reach their goals, while their parents also didn't take it seriously. Mausami's mother remarked, "*jo banana chahe ban jaye.*" (She can become whatever she wants to). But she didn't even know what Mausami wanted to become. Some mothers, such as, Neha's mother left it to destiny, she said, "*jo kismet mein hoga ban jayegi.*" (She will become whatever is written in her destiny). They had not planned anything for their daughters in terms of education and employment; they wanted to teach them so that they could find a suitable match for their daughters. "As Chanana (2001) has observed, social and educational goals converge in the case of girls, denying them any scope for exercising agency. The cultural agenda demands the curbing of girls' child-likeness at the youngest possible age to enable them to cope with the psychological effort required by their adult roles as wives and mothers, and by the norms governing these roles." (Kumar 2010; 81)

School education is important for her daughter according to Rabiya khaton's mother because "*iska aadmi pata nahi kaisa hoga. Surat se achcha ho par dil se na ho to? Padh likh kar apne parivaar ko paal paegi.*" She later also emphasized that apart from formal schooling there are other skills that are important for a girl to learn in order to be perfectly suitable for marriage. As when we asked her "when will Rabiya get married", she replied "*abhi kaha se shaadi hogi? Abhi to padhai na seekhi, kuch hunar-kasheeda (certain skills like embroidery, sewing etc.) bhi nahi seekhi hai. Sab kuch seekh jaegi tabhi to achche khandaan ka ladka milega*" The orientation is not towards thinking of a determined career of the daughter, rather for her being able to support her family in the times of some marital problems or husband not being supportive or earning or things like breaking up of marriage. Kakar (Kakar 2007; 52) also writes about how in Indian society the aspirations for an occupational career are far more ambiguous in case of girls than boys. He further says "the parent's cherished goal for the daughter, however remains a 'good' marriage; her education should help the girl to find a well-educated, economically well-off man from a respectable family."

Religious Education

Rabiya, our eight year old respondent, was also enrolled in Navjyoti tuition centre, where we met her for the first time. Her elder sister who is only two years older has stopped going to school

and now only goes to madarsa to learn Urdu. But during our field visits, Rabiya also stopped going to Navjyoti and when we asked her she said, she would also go to madarasa now, just like her sister.

In Muslim families, more emphasis was given to madarasa education and learning of the Urdu language. Majority of these girls also attend the nearby madarasa in their block. Each block in the community has at least one madarasa. The main purpose of going there is learning to read Urdu so that they can learn to read the Quran. These girls spend 2-4 hours a day in the madarasa where the teacher (they call them as hafiz ji) takes their classes. Both boys and girls go there and at the same time. The Hafizji is appointed by the community and a family in turn gives Rs.2 each, every Friday in the mosque. Learning to read Urdu and later the Quran is a very important thing for these girls as it plays a very important role in certain spheres of their life.

A mother said, for a girl to get married and also to ensure that she gets a good groom and family, her knowledge of Urdu and ability to read Quran is very important or is a kind of eligibility. The she also said that after her daughter (who is at the second highest level of the stages of learning Urdu,) learns to read Quran she will also buy a *burqa* (veil) for her. It leads to better marriage prospects of the girl as all this signify that the girl is not just religious and obedient but also holds a good moral character.

Kulsum, who has not started going to madarasa yet but will soon join, said that knowing Urdu is much more important than Hindi. One could forget Hindi and leave school but has to learn Urdu. On being asked how would it help, she said “If someone from the in-laws family dies, who will read the Quran. That is also, why reading the Quran is important.” Learning to read Quran also has significance for children in general as, one of the girl, who lost four of her siblings in past recent years due to certain disease, said “*mummy kehti hai k u agar Quran pakad le to main laddu baatoon.*”(my mother says that I will distribute sweets when you have learnt to read the Quran) According to her “*Quran padhne se saari samasya khatam ho jaengi*” (all our problems will come to an end by reading the Quran)

Fear of the Hafiz: We had heard a lot about their Urdu teacher whom they called Hafizji. So we planned to meet him and asked one of the girls to take us to the madarasa. The girl quickly went into her room, got a dupatta to cover her head and then accompanied us to the madarasa. Then she went in to call her teacher, while we waited outside. She quickly came out without the head cover and cheerfully told us that Hafizji is not there. She was in the mosque without the head

cover. This made us realize that the girls also cover their heads because of the fear of the Hafiz. They had told us earlier that he beats them if they come late for the class or do not behave appropriately and also that he has their parents sanction for the same. These girls' mothers of the girls who went to madarasas were themselves illiterate and never covered their head but they all voiced their desire that their daughters should cover their head and learn Urdu. It was also important for boys to go to mosque but not forced too much. There are different hafiz in different madarasas (two of them whom we got to see were in their 40's.). Neha and Noori were the two girls whom we initially saw with the head cover all the time. In our initial interactions, both of them explained that Hafizji says we will forget everything if we read without the head cover. It was interesting to note that the practice of covering the head outside the madarsa also, was internalized. Neha's mother also felt that head cover is important and a required practice for a girl to be a learned and religious woman, as she said "In our Islam, it is a sin if one sees the women's hair. The other men, apart from the males in the family, should not get to see it." Neha covered her head inside the house also because her mother warned her that if she doesn't cover her head she will complain about it to the hafiz, who will beat her or punish her otherwise for this. But in case of Noori, she covers her head only when goes out of the house because the madarsa was very close to her house and generally the hafiz who crosses the street to go to the other block, if he gets to see her on the street without a head cover, she is punished for that, like other girls of her madarsa. She is very scared of hafiz and also dislikes him as she explained that their hafiz is very rude and beats them a lot. It is the fear of punishment much more than the result of his teachings which makes the girls cover their head in both these cases.

Navjyoti

The very first meeting we had the first of girls was in the office of Navjyoti, As stated earlier there are many other NGO in this colony working in the area of education, child and women health care, counseling, run night school etc. many of the girls and women are directly or indirectly are influenced by them.

Navjyoti and the Girls

Navjyoti gives tuition classes to the school going children of the colony. So many of the girls who are enrolled in the government school also comes to the Navjyoti tuition centers located within the colony. There are volunteers from the community itself who are paid some amount to teach the students in rooms taken on rent by this NGO. So for an initial interaction with few girls

they allowed us to talk to the class VII girls who were there in the office that day as they were making some presentations on the issues like Dowry and child marriage as there were some guests from outside the NGO, (probably from some funding agency). After their presentations were over we got some time to spend with them and introduce ourselves to them. When the girls were asked to introduce themselves and talk about certain things like their daily schedule, their family, their interests etc. we made an interesting observation. Even after repeated gentle reminders about what they had to share about themselves, many of the girls talked about the information related to them in a fixed and formal kind of way which included their name, their parent's name and their occupation, her school, grade, and her favourite colour and food. More interestingly one of the girl said "*main English me bolu? English me jyada comfortable hu.*" (shall I speak in English? I am more comfortable with English). As she started she was speaking some sentences in English about herself and each sentence was followed by its translation in Hindi by the same girl. Like "*My name is Aashiya. Mera naam aashiya hai. I am 10 year old. Main 10 saal ki hu.*" A little probing helped us getting to know that they have learnt this way of introducing themselves to the outsiders coming here or anywhere in general.

Later we identified six girls from the Navjyoti tuition centers to be our respondents. We also observed during the initial interactions that the girls who went came to Navjyoti, were more upfront and interested in conversations. They seemed more confident than the girls we met later, and who were not associated with any NGO. However when it came to talk about issues like girls role in the family, marriage, sexuality etc, they wouldn't talk much and would behave like "good girls".

A respondent from our sample, Rabiya Khatoon, seemed an active and confident girl. She was attending tuitions at Navjyoti. Her mother has also been associated with polio drop campaigns and child vaccination programmes in the past as a community health volunteer. Her mother was very happy and a proud mother when she was sharing with us that how Rabia is very particular about the hygiene issues and cleans not just the house but the entire street in front of her house. She has also taught them how to wash hands properly which she had learnt at Navjyoti. The mother showed appreciation towards such habits inculcated by the NGO in her daughter as she explained that she learns good things from there and also shares with everyone at home. She was happy that the NGO was teaching the girls to be 'good girls' through inculcating certain practices like this. But on the contrary if we try to see the impact of the presentations on social

issues like dowry, child marriage, importance of girl child's education etc. we could see the difference between 'learning to say' that dowry is bad and 'learning to practice' the idea in their own life. Because constantly while interacting with us, Rabiya's mother pointed that she has saved a lot of money and she will definitely give things like television, double bed, fridge etc. according to her "*iske alawa main use maruti car bhi dunggi aur salaami me ek lakh rupaye dunggi*" (apart from this I will give her a maruti car and Rs. 1 lakh in cash). Even Rabia was very happy about the fact and pointed out several times that "*meri ammi kehti hain mujhe dahej me bahut kuch dengi* (my mother says that she will give me a lot in dowry)". This also puts a question on the impact of NGO by highlighting the gap between the actual reach of its impact in the mind set and practice of people and their own vision.

While the other girls (not associated with the NGO) we interacted with were not so open initially but as we became friends they themselves came up with many interesting things to discuss like gossips, sexual harassment that they have faced on streets, their fears etc. on one occasion we asked that if you were men and saw two girls walking on the streets what would you do. The Navjyoti girls just smiled and didn't say anything. But the other set of girls quickly said they would whistle or would stare them. May have been saying this playfully? They saw whistling as a performance of masculinity and also that being a male, it is not a big issue to whistle and comment openly on the girls around...

Concept of 'good' girls

During one of the interaction suddenly a conversation on marriage began. Using the opportunity, we asked if they would like to have an arranged marriage or love marriage. The girls laughed at first and then one of them replied, there are two kinds of girls- one those who listen to their parents, follow their instructions and do as they say. These girls marry the boy of their parent's choice. The other kinds of girls do as they please, don't listen to their parents. These girls marry the boy of their choice. We belong to the first category, we listen to our parents and thus we would marry the boy of their choice. This articulation pointed towards many issues pertaining to girlhood; sexuality. Parents are controlling the sexuality of the girls. So good girls are not supposed make friends with boys and then run away.

The idea of good girl also entailed 'how the girls should talk, what kind of clothes they should wear, what kind of physical appearance is expected from them.' During an interaction Kulsum pointed out that girls should not talk like boys "*jaise - Main ja raha hu. Main khaunga.*" Girls

should have long hair and boys should have short hair. Girls should serve the food to boys and men in the family, as it is the girl's job to serve the food. If the boy's friends get to see them cooking or serving the food, they will make fun of them. Anjali agreed and added that "*ladkiyo ko ladko ke kaam nahi karne chahiye. Ladka jaat ke kaam ladkiyo se alag hote hai.*" The same girl, Kulsum, was telling us that her parents are looking for a suitable match for her khaala (mother's younger sister) and as soon as they find a good boy for her; they will marry off her khaala to that boy. Here we got an opportunity to know her notion of 'good boy' too. She explained to us that a good boy is one who never makes you cry, and takes care of you.

During an interaction with Mausami's mother we asked her about the ambiance of the colony and the neighbourhood. We also asked if their three daughters ever faced any problem outside the house in the colony. She said "*agar hamari ladki sahi hai to koi kya kar lega. Apne aap ko shai rakho bas. Koi kuch nahi karega. Agar koi phir bhi badtamizi karta hai to ghar aakar hame batae.*" Apart from the idea that if our girls are right in their conduct then nothing wrong can happen to her (which also shifts all the blame on the girls and her conduct). The other interesting notion that emerged from this was the expected behavior and response from a girl in the situation of harassment is not to take an action and quickly report the incident to the parents. This reinforces the idea that the girls are physically weak. Rabiya Khatoon and Lalita also said during one of the interactions that in such a situation they will run back to home and report it to their parents or simply remain quiet about it. Kakar (Kakar, 2007; 55) looks at it as "she is made to understand, undermining a sense of female agency, that young women are weak and vulnerable, unable to resist determined male advances or the promptings of their own sexual nature." On the other hand the idea instilled in the boys in situations of physical fight and conflicts is to retaliate back. As Poonam narrated the incidence of her brother's fight with some of the boys of the other block and how those boys had come back with knives and rods to take revenge from her brother.

Kulsum, an 8 year old, said that her mother does not allow her to go to one side of her street as their lives are a "*kharab aurat*" (Bad woman). Dube writes, "A girl has to be carefully guarded against even a remote semblance to a woman of loose character, a woman of the street, a prostitute, someone who uses her charms to attract men." (Dube, 2001; 106)

Never was a girl or a woman witnessed casually chatting and laughing with others in the public spaces, while this is true for boys and men of all ages. This is connected to the fact that a good

girl will only go outside for a purpose and for the purpose alone. As Krishna Kumar remembering his school days, also observes, “As they walked they looked impossibly purposeful....We boys used the street for so many different things- as a place to stand about watching, to run round and play, to try out the maneuverability of our bikes. Not so for girls. As we noticed all the time, for girls the street was simply a means to get straight home from school.” (Kumar 1992; 83)

Street

The street culture of each block in the colony was different and had an essence of its own. In B-block, one could hardly find any woman, man or child simply sitting or doing other things on the street. The doors were always closed and the window curtains drawn. However in the afternoon one could listen to the different sounds of movies’ advertisements, songs or daily soaps coming from the television sets of people in different houses. The street seemed a different space outside the domain of the four walls of one’s home. At times some women, who were talking to each other on the ramp of one’s house, quickly entered back their house after noticing us and drew a curtain or simply closed the door. While trying to locate one of our respondent Kulsum’s house, we had to ask the address from a woman standing at her house’s door. She said that she didn’t know the person or her family, and haven’t heard such a name in the neighborhood. Very interestingly we later found that Kulsum’s house was just one door next to her house. Even in one or two cases when we found some woman standing or talking to the other woman, the place they used was the small ramps in front of their houses and not the area of street. Contrarily, the E- block was highly charged with people on the street all the time, especially children. Many families had their hearths on the street like that of Neha’s family. We even observed Neha washing utensils on the street in front of her house in a small space. Some people also carry out the daily activities of bathing (generally men and boys) and cooking on the street. Whereas in case of Noori who was in the same block but one street next to Neha’s street, did all these activities inside the house only. Taseena’s family even had animals like goats, hen and ducks on the street in front of their houses. For them street was an extension of their inside world, their home.

Though some of the respondents from our sample had access to the street for certain things and some did not have access at all. But the street was a contested place to be considered as a public or private space. We could see the changing nature of the street in relation to the gender,

age and religion of the respondents and the other people in the colony. As men had more access to the street as compared to women, older women could still sit and chat in the street in the absence of men, generally in the afternoon but young girls, daughter-in-laws specially did not have the same degree of access or did not have it at all. In case of the street where Anjali lives, all the families apart from hers are Muslim. We never saw her and her mother even on the door of their house. They always remained indoors whereas two three times her neighbor Rabiya, Rabiya's sister and khaala, still were seen sitting on the ramp and the two steps they had, right on their door. On the other hand, in E block, in the two streets where Noori, Afsaana and Neha lived, the number of Hindu and Muslim families was almost equal. And during the afternoons, women sitting and talking to each other in the street was a common sight.

Separation of space and interaction between boys and girls is a common feature we observed with most of the girls. From the youngest to the eldest subject from our sample, all girls agreed that there are strict restrictions given to them regarding their any kind of interaction with the boys apart from those who belong to their immediate family. Some of the reason they provided, for not interacting with boys were – boys are bad, they smoke, they abuse, they tease us, they also beat us at times, they might harass us etc. one of the girl who was beaten up badly by her mother for playing with a boy, said “*ladko se baat nahi karni chahiye. Wo chhichore hote hain*”. It was interesting to note that when asked “has she herself ever faced some kind of an experience of this sort”, she responded that she has never faced any of such things. It was her mother and a woman from the neighborhood (who narrated an incidence like this to the subject's mother, and also suggested her things like, not to send the subject anywhere alone or let her talk to a stranger boys) who told her few related incidents

Section - 5

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the childhood experiences of the girls living in Bawana, a re-settlement colony on the outskirts of Delhi. We believed that “childhood is a social construct” (Nath 2008; 4) and we wanted to understand this social phenomena and the kinds of pressures it exerted in the lives of the girls living in Bawana.

Bawana is home to a close network of the complex forms and ways of interaction of the people with the state, NGOs, and the Mafia (land, drug, and electricity). It creates different situations and circumstances for the people living here. Their lives are no doubt full of different kinds of struggles but the numerable uncertainties amongst the families regarding their safety and security(specially that of women and girls) is a major reason why the childhood of specially the girls differs both from the boys of the colony itself as well as the other girls in the city. They are very much vulnerable to different kinds of risks. While living in Bawana most of our respondents feel highly restricted. Though some of them wants to break free but that is not what is expected from ‘a Good Daughter’ (as three of them said) so they would rather like to be inside the house and known as good daughters than go out, play, talk to people around, go to the canals, have fun playing in the parks, visit the fields alone at any time, have fun with their friend going around the colony, the market and the temple.

We had planned to explore the nature of work and educational experiences that these girls go through during their childhood, and in this light we will be able to understand their childhoods. However as we were getting to know the girls we realized that besides work and education there were many other determining forces in their childhood and without looking at those our research enquiry would be incomplete. These determining forces were purely societal, these were religion, gender and the NGO.

Gender becomes a central organizing force in the lives of these girls living in Bawana. It lays a ground for all sorts of experiences these girls go through and likely to go through in the future. From the youngest respondent Rabia and Anjali (both 8 year old) to the eldest, Noori and Afsaana (both 12 year old), the actions, behavior, desires, conduct, food habits, clothing, recreational activities, access to spaces, contribution to the household work, educational experiences, aspirations, wishes, outlook on life, society and their future roles, their expectations,

interactions, play etc. almost everything is strongly influenced by the fact that they are girls and hence they stand much below the boys, in social hierarchy. There is a deep anxiety internalized by these girls and constructed by the adult family members toward the opposite sex. This anxiety amongst these girls has become an inseparable part of their experiences of living in Bawana. The families constantly reinforce this fear and try to keep a strong check on the mobility of these girls by trying to keep them away from the elements perceived by them as 'bad', which includes bad boys (who smoke, drink, take drugs, harass girls), bad men, bad women, bad habits (talking to and playing with boys, visiting public spaces unnecessarily, talking or laughing out loudly, showing masculine behavior, .

Bawana is a Muslim dominated area. However the ratio of Hindus to Muslims varies in different blocks. Apart from the street culture and interaction between families, religion especially Islam had a greater influence on the education of children in that area. There is at least one madarsa located in each block of the colony where the Hafiz (different in different madarsas) teaches these children. There is a greater emphasis on the madarsa education where children learn to read Urdu and hence read Quran later. Madarsa education holds a great significance in the life of the Muslim girls going there (though not all) because knowing Urdu (as Kulsum stated) is at times even more important than the knowledge of Hindi and school subjects. We found that it makes the girl obedient, holding a good moral character, orienting to the family needs and expectations by virtue of being religious. Hence this identity of the girl helps her secure better marriage prospects. The hafiz acts as an influential socializing agency in this process through propagating the 'right' conduct in the girls (like covering her head, not speaking to stranger males etc.).

We found that "the general conception of childhood as a period free from responsibility, conflict and full of fluttery, play, leisure and opportunity" (Nath 2008; 6) was not really true in the case of these girls of Bawana. The girls were sharing household responsibilities besides studying. They hardly had any leisure time to play as they would always be busy with either work or school or madarsa education.

In most cases neither the girls nor their parents acknowledged the amount of work they did their contribution to the household was substantial as they were relieving their mothers for eco work. All the girls had the responsibility of filling water for the entire household at least twice a day. Sibling order also influenced the nature and the hours of work the girls had to spend doing

household work. The youngest girls in ten family shared less amount of responsibilities as compared to the eldest ones.

Education was also an important part of the girl's lives, while all our respondents were enrolled in the government schools except one. School was not really helping the girls in questioning the social norms and the differential treatment that the girls were facing. Rather it reinforced the norms as we were told by our respondents that they do not get to play in the school grounds because it is used by boys, just the way they are made to stay indoors at home, in school also they are instructed to stay in their classroom even during lunch.

Navjyoti was helping the girls in coping with the school studies; however, we noticed that even Navjyoti was not really helping the girls in asserting themselves. It remained in the sphere of health and hygiene. As one of our respondent Rabiya Khatoon's mother enthusiastically told us about her daughter teaching everyone in the family how and when to wash hands, maintain cleanliness, cleaning the street drains etc. All this was not outside the concept of good girls as normatively defined by the society.

Through negative responses or discouraging of certain behavior in girls and reinforcing the same in boys indicates toward the idea of the contrast between the socialization of both as the expected behaviors form them too. In cases of harassment or some conflict taking place outside the house the girls were discouraged to retaliate or simple even respond verbally. the idea inculcated in them of quickly escaping from the site and reporting such things to parents and adults in the family becomes a strong way of conveying to them that they are the weak sex and unable to deal with such situations rather they should not dare to do so because with their each act and behavior outside the domain of home, lies the family honor. On the other hand the boys meant to be strong and brave hence they should stand up for themselves and if faces some conflict with other en or people should deal with it there and then without escaping.

The idea that girls are different from boys biologically and hence they must appear different according to societal norms set for them is a reason why the masculine behavior is discouraged amongst girls like having short hair, talking like boys, wearing pants etc. the same is in case of boys who are not supposed to behave like girls and also restrain themselves from jobs such as washing utensils, cooking or serving food, which are primarily seen as the girls job in the

society. The fear of facing embarrassment or being laughed at by the friend creates a social pressure (especially in form of peer pressure) to discourage the flexibility in the gender roles assigned with girls and boys.

The childhood of girls living in Bawana revolves around the normative concept of good girl, their educational experiences be it in madarsa or school, reinforce the norm and help them become a good girl and prepare them for their future roles. Similarly their parents socialize them to be a good girl by teaching them all womanly things and involving them in household chores.

All the twelve respondents were doing most of the household work but their work was not recognized and acknowledged as work rather it was perceived as a small help which these young girls could offer to the mothers or other elder female members or it was perceived as training for their future roles of god wives, daughter-in-law and mother.

The imposition of restriction on their mobility is also done to protect the honor of the family. Thus their childhood is not a period when they are free, can be careless about their behavior and conduct. They don't have leisure to pursue their hobbies or interests they have internalized the fact that they are girls and should behave like one. Poverty and slum adds to this issue, like this young eight year old girl told us how she dislikes living in Bawana because she does not have enough space to play cannot go out and walk around does not have her parents living with her and giving her attention.

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