



पढ़ेंगे, लिखेंगे, संघर्ष करेंगे.. न्याय के लिए

Annual Report

2024-25

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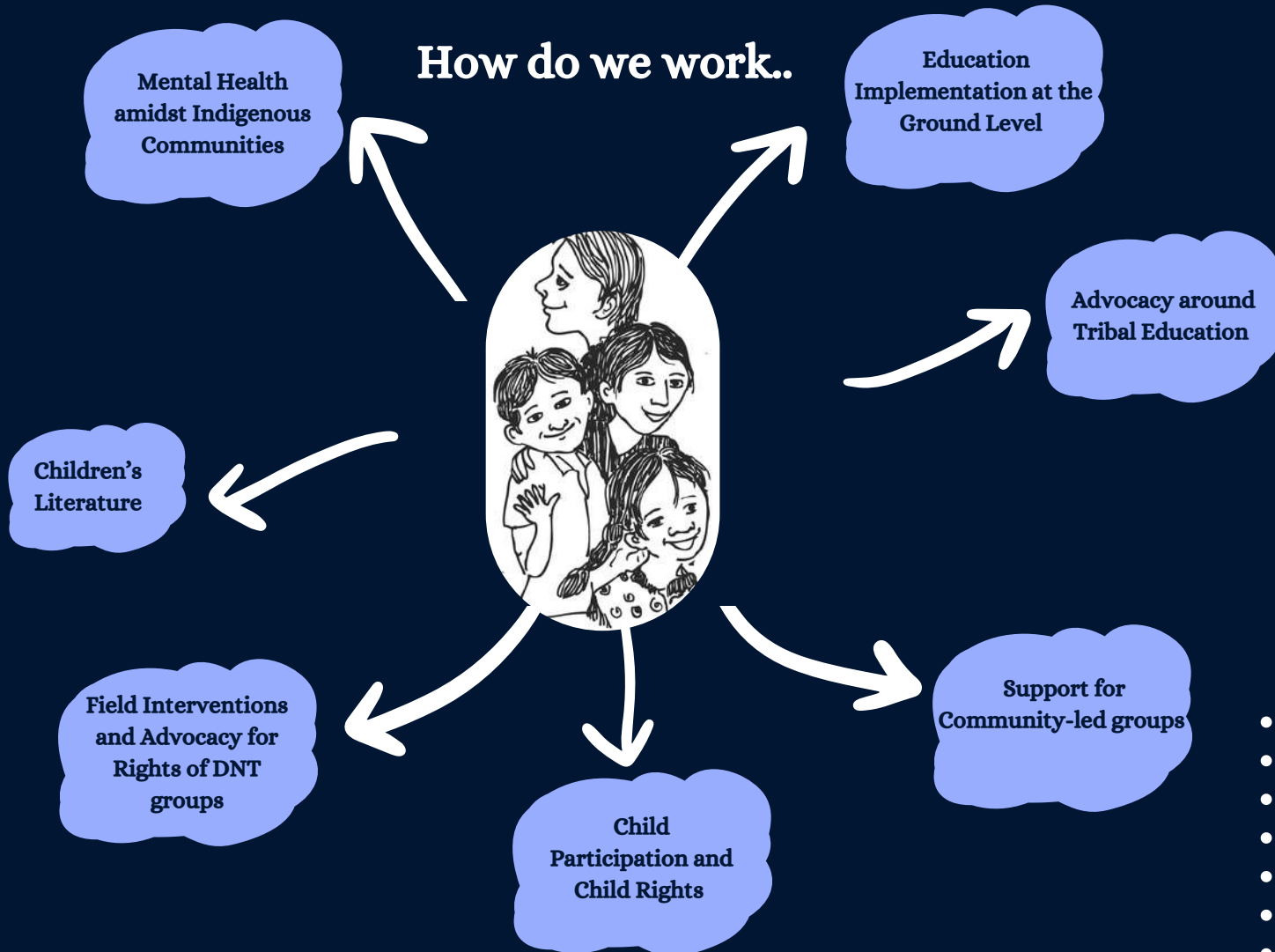


About us

Muskaan has actively worked with indigenous communities and Vimukta communities since 1998. We operate at the grassroots level in informal urban settlements and villages in order to nurture the potential of people across various age groups and life-stages. We try to focus on individual journeys of community members while drawing strength from collective pursuits. A key aspect of our undertaking is to strengthen leadership within marginalized communities, enabling them to spearhead and guide interventions at community level



How do we work..



A Different School

Children from Pardhi, Kanjar, Gond, Dalit communities come to our school. We adopt an alternate learning pedagogy that centers around providing children from indigenous backgrounds learning opportunities in their own language and based on their context. This is done through various activities including games, songs, stories and naatak. Children from our school have gone on to become lawyers, teachers, activists etc. Our school is registered with the M.P Board till Class 8 and older students are giving their exams through open schooling.



220 students studying in Jeevan Shiksha Pahel School



20 students passed their Class 5 exam



10 students passed their Class 8 exam



8 students passed their class 10 exam.



13 students passed their Class 12 exam



22 Students engaged in theater activities.



40 children engaged in frisbee



18 student performed in Malwa Mahila Kabir Yatra





As a part of the integrated learning theme, where across the school, children were exploring food in science, language and math, the children from Class 1 were told to draw a food item on a cloth, and then stitch on the image of their choice. This two-month long activity started with children learning to put a thread in the needle and make different kinds of stitches. In the activity, the children made beautiful items, some local to their bastis such as roti and chutney, or chicken, as well as their favorites biryani, dosa etc. The activity had multiple layers attached to it. One is that it helped increase the concentration of young children through a fun medium. It also sparked their creativity, with children developing new styles to represent the image that they had in mind on the cloth. The children also collaborated with one another, supporting each other through the process. Developing an idea and sticking with a project takes a certain degree of perseverance, hard work and determination to stick with a given assignment. A brief video with the children sharing about what they had made is [here](#).

Food and Community- Lessons from the Basti: The session started with a core question..How do we identify a person? By their behavior, caste, religion, habits, clothing, and community...But among all these, one of the most significant identifiers is food. Food brings people closer, but it can also create distance. With this idea in mind, we planned an activity. While working with children, we often noticed hesitation and a sense of inferiority when it came to non-vegetarian food. It raised questions for us: Is this divide in food choices merely about personal likes and dislikes? Or is it more about community-based divisions? We felt it was time to explore these questions further



As we began these conversations, it became clear that we were not just dealing with discrimination or inferiority complexes or critical views. Rather, food has many unique aspects that are worth documenting.

Each community has its own diversity — in preparation, flavor, and nutritional qualities. But it's not enough to see this just from our own perspective. It is important to see it through the eyes of the children and the communities. Because a deep divide — still unresolved — became visible as we listened to the children's experiences. This divide is slowly erasing the identity and uniqueness of communities and their cultures. We took the class to an exposure visit to Gangnagar, where "Chatan" is a common dish in the daily meals of the Gond community. Chatan is made from the parts of a chicken that are often considered inedible and thrown away by others. The history of Chatan reveals the economic hardship experienced by the community. As the community migrated to different regions for survival, they faced financial difficulties. The women of the community shared that... Though meat has always been part of their diet, after migrating to cities, with larger families and limited income, they began using Chatan to make up for the shortage of meat.



Our teachers are working on action research projects based on the unique challenges that they have identified in their classrooms. Projects are as follows;

- Dhani and Rekha (2nd grade): Focused on improving students' pronunciation and writing of the short "u" matra through activities like poem recitation and word formation games.
- Anupama (up to 10th grade): Noted that teaching grammar, particularly sentence structure, is challenging. She seeks methods to effectively incorporate grammar into students' speaking and writing, emphasizing the need for multilingualism.
- Pramila Govind Gohite (Math, EVS, and Social Science): Found that students struggled with maps and engaged them through creative activities for better comprehension.
- Kusum Mohe (3rd grade Hindi): Aimed to improve weaker sentence skills by grouping students by reading levels, using songs and stories for those struggling with matras. Observations showed significant improvement in reading fluency for previously struggling students through targeted pronunciation correction.

Exposure Visit to Rang Mahotsav: On the occasion of Republic Day, January 26th, the Lok Rang Mahotsav is celebrated every year in Bhopal. In this festival, people are introduced to the cultures of almost all tribal communities of India. Exhibitions are set up showcasing traditional dance, music, food, jewelry, and handicrafts. Thousands of people participate in this grand celebration. This year, 28 children from Muskaan attended the exhibition. One of the most interesting aspects of the exhibition was the display of pictures and information about the members of the Constituent Assembly. Some children stopped there for a long time, reading the information with great interest. They had often read about the Constituent Assembly in books, but seeing something related to the Constitution in a fair like this was a surprising and unique experience.



Theater is a medium of education in our school. Our children explore various complex topics through various plays. This year, our children developed the play “Nirgun Galiyan” which shares stories and lessons of Kabir, Premchand and Omprakash. The play questions baseless traditions- like caste based discrimination and ignites a passion to bring about change. This year we performed the play at the Potter’s Market ‘24



Winner at Bhopal Literature Festival: A proud moment for us this year was when Sameeksha, a young girl from the Bediya community who has defied all odds to continue her studies was given the best storytelling in class 9 to 12 category, along with 2 Delhi Public school students, at the Bhopal literature festival 2024.



Residential educational spaces

Children from DNT communities come from extremely vulnerable backgrounds. Young adults, especially young girls are pressured into early marriages from both families and community panchayats. The custom of bride price implies that girls are given for amounts that can range from 1 lakh to 10 lakhs and are given no autonomy and minimum agency in their choice of partners. Once married they are expected to work for their families whether its through waste picking, or selling alcohol or even through dance. Young boys are also pressured into early marriages within the communities. Many children and young adults have also lost their parents in traumatic manners, such as accidents or custodial violence and are left without any kind of safe space.

Family Realities - Other than 24 out of the 77 children, all have lost a parent in young ages, primarily due to some behaviour associated with inter-generational trauma. Thus while Mita's father died at the young age of 30 due to alcoholism, his four children were left on the streets. Their mother married again and took the infant with her, but the elder three needed protection. As the eldest daughter, we already had Mita with us and had been requesting her mother to keep the younger two with her. But one by one, they have become part of the Muskaan family. Virat, Bharat and Jugal lost their father to alcohol and their mother left home when she could not manage the pressures on her from her in-laws side and is missing. Sudha's mother has a mental health issue and her father is busy attending to her and the goats. Sohail Kapoor lost his father to an accident, driving in a drunken stupor. After her father's death, Sadhna, an adolescent child, chose to escape home to avoid the pressures of getting into sex work. [Names have been changed to protect children's identity]

We work to support these children and to give a safe space where they can be children, we have started our hostel, which is especially there for young girls. Many children and young adults have come to Muskaan and currently reside in the hostel space and are working relentlessly to achieve their dreams.



58 students (44 girls and 14 smaller boys) stay in the Main Campus, and 19 adolescent boys in the Boys Farm.



In addition to studies, the children participated in different activities through the year –

- Frisbee Tournaments – While they play the sport in the school every day, the students went to Lucknow and Delhi to participate in tournaments.
- Theatre – The children participated in two dramas, one was called ‘Nirgun Galiyan’ and the other ‘Guthli – Ek Ahsas’. While the former was drawn from Kabir’s music and poetry, a new play with an interweaving of scenes and music, the second one is a play that the students have been repeatedly performing in different programs. This play is based on gender fluidity and pushes the spectators to also examine their perceptions and biases.
- Literature Festival – Several children and adolescents participated in the Bhopal Literature Festival and won awards also in their story sharing competition.
- Music Festival – A group of students participated in Kabir Malwa Yatra. As a music troupe, they are now invited by various organizations in the city to bring their lively songs, songs that dream of justice and equality.
- Pottery Classes – To enable children to stabilise themselves, we find working with clay an effective medium. It brings focus and also settles the child’s restless mind. One of our alumnae students conducts this activity with the children. Gradually, a senior student of the hostel is also co-facilitating this activity.
- Movement Therapy Sessions – Weekend sessions with groups of children are carried out to support in healing and examining one’s own feelings.



Library and Community Centres



Many children in Bastis do not have access to books, especially stories that represent the everyday realities of their communities. In schools, children may have access to 4 or 5 books, which get used throughout the academic year. These books do not have many pictures, are simply black and white, and do not incite the urge to read amongst young children. Reading books is an interesting and alternative medium to introduce topics of many subjects and to support the socio-emotional learning of children.

At the library centers, a variety of reading activities were regularly conducted with children, aimed at encouraging reading habits and enhancing their cognitive abilities. These activities included:

1. Read Aloud Sessions – Selected stories were read aloud at the centers so that all children could listen together, sparking their interest. These sessions were followed by discussions to deepen understanding and engagement.
2. Independent Reading – Children were encouraged to select books of their choice and read independently, fostering self-driven exploration.
3. Group Reading – Small groups of children read the same book together, promoting the habit of sharing ideas and engaging in discussions.
4. Paired Reading – Children were paired to read together, which supported collaborative learning and peer interaction.

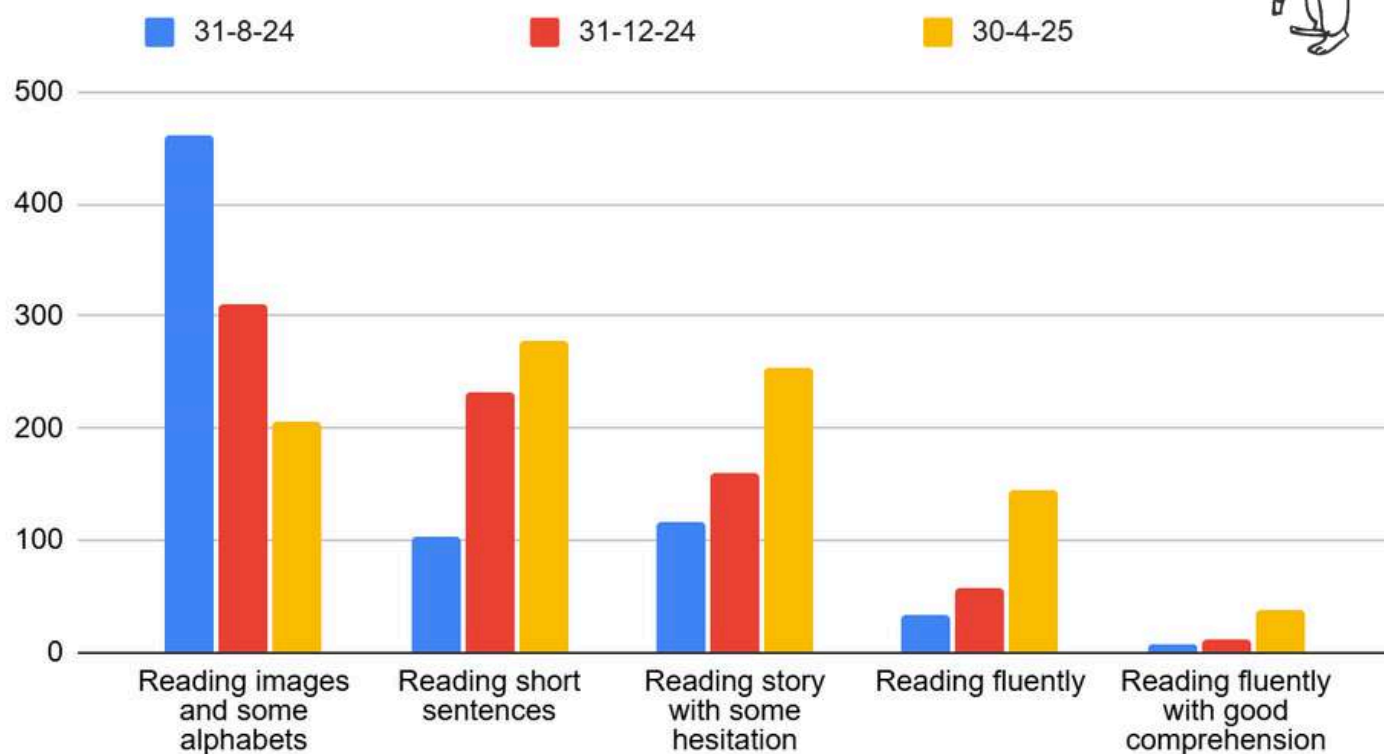
Through these activities, not only did children develop a love for reading, but there were also noticeable improvements in their language skills, self-expression, and social understanding. Importantly, the entire process—from reading to discussion facilitation—was documented carefully, creating a resource that will inform and strengthen future planning, training, and learning practices. This approach ensures that the insights gained continue to evolve and contribute to meaningful, long-term change in gender-sensitive education.

Across the communities, there are 14 libraries active. While 927 children attend these libraries, another 1021 children are accessed on a door to door basis, giving books because they are not able to come to the centres for library activities.

The trends in the literacy levels has been like this -



Reading Level in Libraries



The data denotes that there are more children progressing to the next level of reading every quarter. If we examine basti-wise data, we find that a community within the Dafalet at Kajlikheda where there is not a single child attending schools, we note that the number of children has grown from 63 to 89 attending the center. Learning levels have also improved significantly, with 13 children trying to read, growing to 54 children attaining literacy skills in the initial reporting period.

Children engaged deeply in the read-aloud session, actively listening and responding to questions. Many children, especially those new to books, showed curiosity and interest in exploring stories. For example, after reading Mala's Silver Anklets, the children asked, "Is Mala portrayed as powerful because she scares everyone?"-

The habit of sitting in one place and attentively listening to stories was successfully developed among the children. If any child caused a disturbance during the read-aloud session, the other children themselves would ask them to stay quiet. Afsana the Gandhi Nagar library facilitator shared that during one such session, 3 children Gautam, Raghuveer, and Lakhan were disturbing the entire class. Then the rest of the children collectively asked them to leave the classroom. Seeing this, the three of them also quieted down and listened to the story with full attention and participated in the discussions.

Over time, they learned to sit in one place, listen attentively, and engage meaningfully. Some students also found themselves reflecting on personal experiences, where they were restricted from wearing certain types of clothing, such as jeans.

Curiosity and Imagination

The children's interest in reading has grown and their responses in the library sessions clearly indicate this. When asked what might happen next, they would respond with great interest, making their own guesses and offering various answers. This participation not only reflected their imagination but also showed that they were listening to the story attentively and were deeply engaged with it. The children had different responses when asked why Moina might have been denied permission to stay at the committee office: Aarti said, "Maybe the committee office is far from her home and only boys stay there, not girls." Another child, Lavanya said, "If she stays at the committee office, then who will do the household work? That's probably why her family didn't allow her." Darya Kaul analyzed, "Girls aren't even allowed to stay outside the home, so maybe that's why they said no."

Developing a Perspective through books

We have received a grant from IBBY- Yamada Fund for enhancing critical literacy and building perspectives on social issues through books. This opportunity is giving us a push to dedicate time to exploring certain themes through the libraries. In the first quarter of 2025, we conducted a workshop on exploring and deliberating on gender diversity and fluidity through books.

The activities in the centres have been very promising, and show the potential of books for change



Dialogue on Indigenous Education



We held a three day dialogue in Manav Sangraliya Bhopal with activists working in the field of education from across the country. During the event we covered a range of topics pertaining to questions of identity, the erasure of it in colonial and brahmanical educational spaces as well as indigenous experiences of education. Panel discussions were held with notable scholars that included Dr. Ganesh Devy, Dr. Virginus Xaxa, Dr. Bodhi. We also invited international speakers Dr. Lorna Wanosts who spoke of Canadian experiences of indigenous education. Over the three days we understood how 'formal education' space have been taken over by those who are only seeing the adivasi child as someone who needs to be bridged to the mainstream and/or the challenges within 'educating' an adivasi child, instead of the rich knowledge and experiences that have existed for the longest time, need to become part of the mainstream conversations. We spoke of the need to support communities in their efforts to teach their children to not only survive, but flourish, by critically understanding how 'colonization' and 'caste' has continued to 'spirit-murder' our souls, and has rendered many tribal groups to extreme poverty. Dialogues and Deliberations were done in different languages to ensure inclusivity. On the last day, we broke into groups and thought through areas of work where we could come together, to take these ideas forward.



Publications

A storybook acts as both a mirror and sliding glass door, validating children's identities through representation in literature. Many marginalized children, such as those in rural areas, working children, and Adivasi and Dalit children, often lack representation in educational materials, leading to alienation and decreased interest in reading. To address this, fostering deep diversity in children's literature is essential.

Our books, co-created with children from these communities, reflect their daily lives and realities, written in their language and incorporating cultural practices. They cover themes like social issues and resilience, with stories translated into multiple languages and shared across the country.

■ We have published two unique books this year - *Railway Chronicles of Bhopal* and *Gaanth*.

■ *Gaanth*, an anthology of six stories, three young women (Muskaan team members) sharing their childhood memories of what was unfolding around them, in their houses and localities, during the 1992 riots in Bhopal, and the other three, being orally shared anecdotes, by elders in the communities of the same time. Losses and friendships - these stories bring pain and also hope in a way that in the nooks and corners of our bastis and cities, that humanity survives.

■ *The Railway Chronicles* is a travel in time for Bhopal - connecting with the world, it traces the industrial revolution, the advent of britishers, migrations across the globe while staying centred to bhopal.

■ We collaborated with 4 students from National Institute of Design to add four short stories as a part of our series "Padho Rakho Shrankala"

■ We had a lovely launch event around these two books with other established authors, Neha Dixit (*Many Lives of Syeda X*) and Sabah Khan (*The Queen The Courtesan The Doctor The Writer*) in december 2024. Working class Muslim women's lives and under-representation of Muslim women in writings became the point from where we all connected and felt the need to have these issues as part of regular discussions.



Book Review

Title: Payal is Lost

Story by: Manjana, Aanam, Rangespal, Deepu, Nitisha, Binota, Meenasingh, Kumkum, Vinod, Surendra, Bhanuraj, Dilbaras, Aasif, Pradyamani, Raja, Rajveer, Diya, Savita Sohit, Shashikala, Maheen Mirza, and Shivani Taneja

Art by: Kanak Shashi

Payal is Lost isn't just about looking for a missing friend—it's a gentle, immersive journey into a basti, told through the eyes and voices of children. Developed through a collaborative classroom process, the story feels honest and immediate, rooted in lived experience.

As the children set out to find Payal, they take us through spaces that define their world—markets, scrap yards, fishing boats, and railway tracks. Each place quietly reveals the textures of their community life, from struggles to shared joys.

The heart of this book lies in its friendships and the strong sense of belonging that binds the children to one another and to their surroundings. Kanak Shashi's art, alongside the children's own drawings, makes the storytelling even more vivid and grounded.

This is a story that celebrates everyday life in the basti—its warmth, its resilience, and the voices often left unheard in children's literature.

Review published in @kitabonkesang



Children's Participation - Azad Jugnu Club

We facilitate Azad Jugnu Club, bringing together children and adolescents from the bastis. Azad Jugnu Club serve as platforms for children to address various issues concerning themselves, like discrimination in schools and communities, sexual violence, and other issues that indirectly affect them too as members of their families living in compromised conditions with water shortage, or rubbish all around.

Our facilitators conduct capacity-building sessions on the significance of children's participation, facilitating discussions in the basti, and forming groups while ensuring children's voices are brought to the forefront. Many of our facilitators are also erstwhile members of Azad Jugnu Club. Community level meetings: Meetings are held regularly in the bastis, sometimes using story books, activities and games and conversations. The topic of the meeting is often similar across the communities, but also specific depending on the need in a certain area. For example, the children raised issues as -

- * Berasia villages - Issue of inadequate rations being distributed from the PDS shop
- * Kajlikheda - School admissions not taking place because of lack of documents
- * Bapu Nagar - Stench and garbage strewn around the community after the weekly market
- * Madni Nagar - Corporal Punishment

As they identified these problems, they tried to resolve them through collecting evidence on the problem, and then sharing with related stakeholders.

Several meetings were held around sexual abuse, which brought out several instances of abuse within and outside families. Some of these cases have been taken up to the police.

The themes of menstruation have been taken up across the communities to bring in more girls' participation.

Issues emergent from the children/adult facilitator would at times be taken up in meetings with adults/parents for resolving the problem. In a meeting in Bagh Mughaliya, parents discussed how/when/why they have also been resorting to violence and neglect of children. There were discussions on how to overcome this and the need to keep children safer.



Child Federation Meetings: The groups of different communities come together on a quarterly basis to plan and share stories from their localities.

Two meetings distinctly stand out from the four meetings held in the year as they were taking the group towards national and international forums.

In one of the meetings (October 2024), the children were taken through a participative exercise where they explored different problems in children's lives and had to rank the issues in terms of priority. Child Labour was considered a critical issue, followed by early and forced marriages. This meeting was part of a chain of meetings being held in SAARC nations and the children understood the legal and governance issues around children's policies.

In another meeting (February 2025), the children's representatives from different communities came together and analyzed their work - what has been possible, what is being missed out, who is being missed out and why.

Children visit police thana: In March 2025, youth Facilitators took ten children each from their respective communities for a visit to the local police station. During this visit, the children shared their thoughts and personal experiences. During the discussion, a child from Mandwa Basti named Siddharth raised a serious issue. He shared that his father often comes home drunk and fights with his mother, which affects his studies and makes it difficult for him to concentrate.

For the Kanjar / Pardhi youth to visit the police station, is a step towards empowerment, as they are otherwise on the run from a police vehicle. It is also unsettling for the police personnel to have people from these communities sit and ask them questions.

Following this, under the leadership of Vimla Madam from the Urja Desk Department at Kamla Nagar Police Station, we organized a rally against substance abuse. During the rally, the children visited local shops and explained to shopkeepers that selling any intoxicating substances to minors under 18 is a legal offense and should be strictly avoided. Through this police station visit, the children gained valuable knowledge about cyber safety and legal rights. They also learned how to approach the police with their problems and how to seek effective solutions.





Community Mental Health

The trauma experienced by vulnerable communities because of decades of institutionalized marginalization is complex and multifaceted. The communities with whom we collaborate with have experienced violence from various institutional spaces such as police, school etc. The impact of this trauma presents itself in issues of addiction, substance abuse, self-harm, domestic abuse, etc. Denotified tribal communities are particularly vulnerable because stigma of criminality that has continued decades after the repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act. For women in the community, patriarchal norms and restrictions further adds to their experience of violence. There is a notable prevalence of suicidal thoughts and attempts across all ages and genders, highlighting the deep vulnerability within these communities.

We have trained young people from the community to provide mental health and psycho-social support to people in the bastis. Coming from the same context, our counsellors have a first-hand understanding of the challenges and lived experiences of people from the community and hence can provide a unique kind of care to people. Our basti counsellors have been trained in mental health and psychological first-aid, as well as arts-based therapies, dance movement therapy and narrative therapy practices. We have collaborated with Dr. Sukruti Khushwa, and organizations Kolkata Sanved, Umeed Mumbai, amongst others. Over the last year, our mental health community has expanded to 3 bastis- Mandwa, Ring Garden and Shamnagar bastis- reaching more people from the Pardhi, Muslim, Ahirwar, Mochi, Banjara and Ojha Gond communities in Bhopal.

We worked through 8 community mental health practitioners who are from Gond, Pardhi, Muslim and Banjara communities. Our community practitioners have conducted individual counselling sessions with 259 people and group therapy sessions with 430 young and old people in 13 bastis across Bhopal.

De-addiction Session in Gautam Nagar: People from the Gond community primarily live in Gautam Nagar, they rely on waste picking as a means for survival. In Gautam Nagar, we have observed high cases of addiction, and alcohol and drug abuse that has resulted in the loss of many lives in the basti. Children as young as 8 to 10 have issues with substance abuse. We have conducted sessions on wellness in the bastis, to tackle this issue. During the session, we took people for a field visit where we did an awareness session on the impact of substance abuse on the body. We did sessions on relaxation and self awareness with people using art-based therapies and narrative therapy practices.

Narrative Therapy Training of 4 Basti Counsellors: Jyoti, Chanda, Arin and Jasveer participated in a 9 month course on community mental health through narrative therapy with Umeed Mumbai. Narrative therapy incorporates a respectful, non-blaming approach of therapy, specifically in an Indian context. Narrative practice attempts to use a person's strengths, ambitions and dreams to challenge prevailing social conditions within the community.

Our team participated in the fifth biennial summit on Dance Movement Therapy for Change wherein we shared our ground experiences of using DMT in the bastis. Our young basti counsellor Arin who was the youngest panalist in the summit shared his experiences engaging with DMT as a medium for healing as a young Pardhi youth and the need for trauma informed care for marginalized communities.





Nazariya - Livelihood

Traditionally people from NT-DNT communities survived through a range of nomadic practices that included hunting within the forests, or selling alcohol amongst other activities. Presently, the lack of educational opportunities have resulted in lack of livelihoods opportunities. In most families, the women is the primary earner of the household, that is done through waste collection. Children also accompany their mothers, carrying sacks the size of their bodies, travelling long distances, carrying scrap and getting little to no returns to survive.

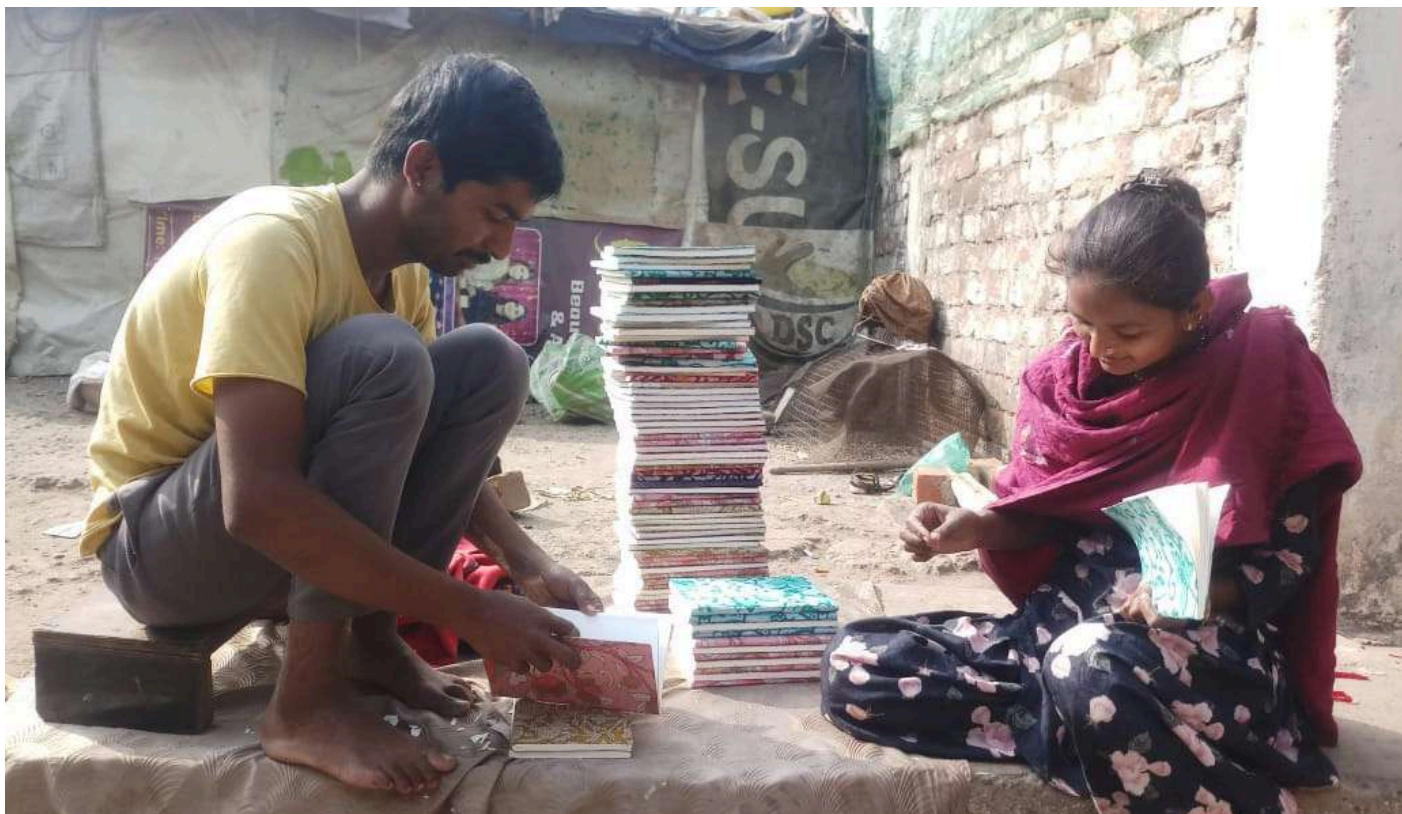
Children were forced to drop out because they had to support their families through waste picking or begging. We realised that without supporting families in accessing livelihoods, we would not be able to support children in accessing higher educational opportunities. Following the first COVID lockdown in 2020, Muskaan started to support two groups as collective enterprises. The first group, based in the Pardhi *basti* in Ehsaan Nagar, focused on crafting handmade diaries, while the other, comprised of youth who reside in Muskaan's hostels, specialized in handmade soaps..

We have also started a stitching centre in the basti where women can make bags, pouches and other items. We support them in connecting to external markets wherein they can make increase their earnings. Both groups have been successfully turning in profits from the sale of their products, which are then distributed amongst the groups as either financial support for their families, or as savings for the youth



21 young adults and women have been a part of the Nazariya project
Total profits earned for the sale of diaries, soaps etc. is Rs. 75,000





The diary-making work began in Ehsaan Nagar basti during the COVID-19 pandemic and has been running regularly since then. A group of 12 to 15 youth—both girls and boys—are involved in this work, and they carry it out with dedication.

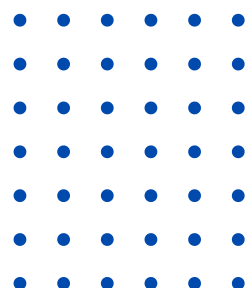
Among them, a woman named Sonia has become an important resource for us. Sonia is married and has one child. She lives with her husband, child, and extended joint family, which includes her in-laws. She regularly works from home making diaries, producing around 10 to 15 diaries daily. This work helps her manage her household expenses and meet daily needs.

At one point, due to certain challenges, she stopped making diaries and started working as a waste picker. While working she experienced violence from police, and returned to diary making. She is now happy and says, "I will not go back to waste picking. I will continue with this work. Please keep giving me diaries so I can keep making them. I want to make this my permanent work and I won't leave it."

Sonia now works with great joy and dedication. Her husband supports her in this endeavor, helping with tasks like transporting materials. The whole family is happy, saying, "Our daughter-in-law is working and fulfilling her needs."

Being from the Pardhi community and a woman, Sonia has faced many challenges in life. One of the biggest is earning a livelihood. Amid many struggles, she found this work of making diaries as a means to support herself. She now also trains others and has even provided training to women in self-help groups supported by the municipal corporation.

This work has given her confidence. Today, she takes part in household decisions, fulfills the family's needs, and lives life on her own terms.





DNT Rights and Advocacy

The Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871 branded over 200 nomadic communities in India as "born criminals," imposing restrictions, surveillance, and displacement. Although independent India repealed the act, the stigma persists, and De-notified Tribes (DNTs) continue to face discrimination, exclusion, and poor access to welfare and livelihood opportunities. The stigma of criminalisation is very much present today. On ground we have seen arbitrary arrests, detentions, torture and even murders of people from DNT communities, in complete violation of the constitutional safeguards and legal provisions enshrined to each citizen in the country.

Our work involves learning the ground realities and experiences of people in the communities, as well as bringing them in the mainstream conversation through research and publications. We are also collaborating with young adults to support them in telling their stories through our writing workshops. The material is being published in our journal "Mein Hu" and we are also reaching out to external publications such as People's Archive of Rural India to bring awareness on issues of the community. We also work on advocating for DNT issues with legal and state forums.

- 245 people from the Pardhi community came together in solidarity against police violence, and for collective healing in Guna on January 19th.
- 225 people from the Kanjar community came together to advocate for their rights in Berasia on 10th March
- 45 youth from the Pardhi, Kanjar, Bedia, and the Gond community participated in a reporting workshop with People's Archive of Rural India
- 22 youth from Chhara, Madari, and Dalit communities participated in our writing workshop in collaboration with Vimukta Trust
- 159 DNT Caste Certificate made for people from the Pardhi community



Guna Case: Deva Pardhi, a 22 year old was picked up on the eve of his wedding and was tortured and murdered in police custody. His uncle Gangaram was also detained at the same time and was the sole witness to the assault and is currently in jail. Since July 2024, we have been supporting Deva's family in accessing justice. The family has been extremely resilient in their fight for justice, approaching every entity possible. In Guna there is absolute apathy towards Pardhis with the larger society labelling them as "thieves." Many lawyers in the region take money from families, but rarely work towards supporting them in accessing justice. Our team has been working with a team of lawyers to provide legal assistance. While a judicial magistrate inquiry has found the police guilty in this case, no arrests have been made in 10 months, reflecting the inhuman prejudice against people from DNT communities. The case has recently reached the supreme court where a division bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta, hearing a petition filed by Deva's mother, Hansurabai, called the state's behaviour "ridiculous" and "inhuman". As we have been working on this case, we have been speaking to families in other villages in the district and have found a similar trend of violence, prejudice and absolute state apathy in the manner of basic human rights.

Writing Workshop with Peoples' Archive of Rural India: The voices of the Vimukta communities and Adivasi communities remain absent in mainstream media platforms. Most of the narratives presented often support preconceived ideas or casteist attitudes towards these communities. Our goal is to have as many community voices as possible share their stories, and their real voices. In September, we collaborated with Siddhita from PARI to conduct sessions on journalism, writing, photography with over 40 participants from DNT and nomadic communities like the Kanjar community, the Pardhi community and the Gond community. During the course of the workshop we introduced the participants to the history of journalism, and how journalism was used as a means of resistance and establishing identity during the independence movement. We did a reading circle, and read an article on the Rajbhoi community, understanding how good journalism can raise important questions on caste based discrimination, and gender. We worked on understanding the basics of photography and how a photo tells a story about a person. We introduced the participants to the basics of writing and supported them in engaging with interviews, and practicing their writing skills. We also took the participants for a field visit to two bastis in Bhopal, a Gond basti and a Pardhi basti, so that they could practice their interview skills as well as understand the similarities and differences between people from both bastis.





Writing Workshop with Vimukta Trust: In order to get diverse content from regions beyond MP and the places where Muskaan works, we had planned to organize writing workshops within Muskaan as well as with other organizations working with DNT rights. We collaborated with Budhan Theater in Ahmedabad, which is an organization led by people of the Chhara community and who work with youth from Chhara, Madari, Sansi, Rajbhoi and Dalit communities. We introduced the participants to basic writing practices, photography and ethics of writing. We also did some activities to understand bias and mistakes that mainstream journalists make when covering stories of Vimukta communities. From the workshop some writings have emerged that are included within the second edition of Journal. For example, a youth from Ahmedabad, hailing from Madari community, had written a piece on an incident that had taken place in his community. It also had an element where his people resisted for justice. This piece was written in Hindi language and in Gujarati script. We have maintained that form of writing and has included it in the journal for this edition. The participants of this workshop also included a person who was not comfortable with writing and therefore we also had a session on mobile photography and that youth immediately picked it up and captured some really nice pictures. There were sessions on writing a media article, story, individual experience, drawing out our experiences, etc. While one youth was interested in writing about an incident of police violence that took place with his brother, someone else wrote around communalism and how they witnessed it. One person from the Chhara community wrote about his friend who was pushed out of school and was forced into a life of addiction, who eventually took his own life. Such traumatizing experiences also surfaced. There were women who shared their experience of pregnancy and miscarriage.

Another part of the workshop also focussed on identifying the strengths of our people and highlighting that while telling our stories. A youth from Madari community talked about his wife, while another participant who was 60 years young, talked about an elderly lady in Dabgar community. On the last day of the workshop, we also arranged a field visit where we met Dabgar community, Raj Bhoi community, and others; this was Vatwa area of Ahmedabad.

19th January Program: Every year, on 19th January we gather to remember Tinti Bai, a young girl from the Pardhi community who died by suicide because of continuous torture by police officers. We also mark the loss of Indrimalbai who similarly lost her life because of police torture. This year, in light of the murder of Deva Pardhi we gathered in Guna. During the session, through a range of activities we initiated conversations to understand the prevalence of violence in Guna, as well as to understand the underlying impact that it had on the lives of people in the region.

From the many stories sharing an anecdote by Gendavan Bai of Silvasa village- “We go out to earn a living or collect scrap, and we get tired. When we come home and sleep, the police come and pick up our sleeping children. They say, “You committed a theft, bring 5 lakh rupees,” or demand even larger sums. To arrange that kind of money, we have to take loans. If we had that much money, why would we be collecting scrap in the first place? And even the loans we get come at an interest rate of 300%, which makes the amount grow so large that it's extremely difficult for us to repay. two months ago. My two sons, my daughter-in-law, and I had just left home to collect scrap a little distance away when the police caught us and accused us of stealing. They started abusing us badly. Later, they let me and my daughter-in-law go, but they took both of my sons to the police station and beat them up badly. They demanded a huge amount of money to release them. After beating and threatening my sons, they took my husband's number as well and picked him up too. To get all three released, I had to pay ₹1,80,000—₹60,000 per person. The police falsely accuse us without any reason. We have to run around after lawyers, pay them too for getting our people out—it becomes a huge hassle. If we had money, we would have a house, a car—why would we be picking scrap? Our only crime is being Pardhi. Just having the name 'Pardhi' makes the police assume we're thieves. Now, if any theft happens anywhere, they come straight to Silvasa looking for us.” A purpose of this sharing was to understand the collective nature of this targeting, and to understand that this violence is an outcome of historical and institutionalized discrimination and prejudice towards people of the Pardhi community. Following this, we shifted towards understanding how we could collectively support each other through healing- we did this through dance movement therapy and art-based therapy activities.





Advocating for Rights of Kanjar Community: On March 10th in Dekpur, Berasia (Bhopal), an important meeting was held by the Kanjar community. During the meeting, members of the Kanjar community shared their grievances. This included speaking out against police brutality and the custodial killing of Tulsidas Kanjar. People from the community also questioned why they weren't given basic documentation like their caste certificates, which would support them in accessing welfare schemes. A young woman from the community Uma shared her experience of trying to pursue her higher education. After class 8 she tried to get admission in the DNT hostel, but because she did not have a caste certificate, she was denied admission. After being denied access to basic welfare schemes, the people of the community mentioned that multiple applications and requests have been made to the government and even in Bhopal, but till now, caste certificates have not been issued for them.

Following this, a session was also held to discuss questions around identity and the strengths of the community. People shared about the unity of the community in moments of joy and in times of distress. They spoke of their songs and food and their hopes and love for the next generation.

From the meeting, a collective letter was written for the SDM in Berasia, demands included being granted caste certificates, a hostel for youth from the Kanjar community and access to jobs for educated people from the community.



DNT Caste Certificates: This year, a huge victory for our team has been that we have been able to get caste certificates for people from DNT communities. People from DNT communities in Bhopal were denied their caste certificates because of which they could not access basic welfare schemes. We have submitted 18 applications for this purpose all of which were rejected because they said that Vimukta communities such as the Pardhi were nomadic in nature, and they were not residents of the state. We kept visiting the SDM who continuously rejected this request. We consulted the DNT Commissioner Neeraj Vashist who understood the challenges faced by the communities and agreed to support us in the matter.

On January 28, 2025, a special camp was organized in Rajeev Nagar to distribute caste certificates to the Pardhi community. The event was graced by the presence of the local MLA, Mayor, SDM Madam, and other government officials. The main aim of this camp was to enable members of the Pardhi community to access educational, employment, and welfare schemes by providing them with official caste certificates. During the camp the MLA stated, “It is our priority to integrate the Pardhi community into the mainstream. Caste certificates will help their children avail educational concessions, get better job opportunities, and access government schemes.”

He also assured that more such camps would be organized to make essential documents accessible to all community members. The SDM emphasized that the caste certificate is critical for the Pardhi community, without which they cannot avail scholarships, reservations, grants, or other welfare schemes. She affirmed that the administration is committed to ensuring all eligible individuals receive their rightful entitlements. The Pardhi community participated enthusiastically in the program. Many people received their caste certificates for the first time and expressed their happiness:

Jasveer said: “Now I can apply for a college scholarship, which was impossible before.”

Kapoor Singh remarked: “For the first time, the government has paid attention to us. Now we have our identity!”



Youth Leadership

The programme has a large component of building youth leadership as we recognize that the work should be initiated, led, and managed from within the community.

Leadership Building: We have been conducting youth leadership sessions with people from Vimukta communities from Ahmedabad, Sawai Madhopur and Dewas. In the first phase of leadership building, we had focussed on building perspectives around Vimukta identity, Gender justice, Constitutional values, Intergenerational trauma, Experiences of childhood, DNT history, etc. From first phase to second phase, youth associated from GSK and Budhan had been consistent. These youth are from Bawri and Madari community respectively. Our plan was to now move on to community leadership centered around action. In the second phase, we conducted another workshop in March, wherein Bawri and Madari community youth from GSK and Budhan attended it. Alongside, three youth from Bacchhda community associated with Jan Sahas had also participated. We also involved youth from Pardhi and Kanjar communities from Satna and Berasia respectively. These set of young people have been associated with us (Muskaan).

In this phase, the first workshop quickly went through the aspects covered in the first phase, as several youths were participating for the first time whereas it was a recap for Bawri and Madari youth. Further, we tried to identify several issues in our respective communities. Some of the issues were being taken up by the local organizations/partner organizations in their respective areas. However, some issues were not touched upon but seemed critical. For instance, the need for the change in the functioning of Jati Panchayat, intra-community conflicts leading to people losing lives, issue of lack of opportunities for girls and women to move forward in life, etc. We then tried to remember the heroes and heroines within our community, whom we look up to. We identified them as our leaders. Gradually, we opened up the idea of community leadership, the sense of ownership and the commitment associated with it and the urgency of strengthening such leadership. We opened up the idea of Sangharsh and Nirman and reflected on these through various examples of community led struggles. We also opened up the presence of Savarna dominance in social sector, who takes up work based on some kind of convenience or hindsight. Simultaneously, we also understood our dynamics with Savarna people heading the organizations and Sangathans in the social sector. While they enjoy a particular respect, but the lack of 'equality' in its wholeness being missing was highlighted.



In several ways the need for community-led youth groups was emphasized. We also emphasized on the need of writing; be it a report of an activity or a session they attended, a fact-finding report of an incident, a fiction piece or an application to any government department. We also formed groups and engaged with this kind of writing in each of these groups so that they can start thinking about the nitigrities and the need for writing when they take up their work. Towards the end of this workshop, all the groups identified some or the issue that they were willing to work on for the next two months (until we meet again). They made a solution- centric plan as to what is it that they are required to do, where is it required to be done, with whom with they need to engage (community/Government), when (when is it that they should decide to take up critical things) and how is it that they will undertake this. We also saw films, sang songs of resistance, played Dafli, went to old city, lake, market, etc. to spend more time with each other. Broader issues of caste injustice, communal violence, gender injustice, etc. were knitted within our conversations. In all, there were 23 participants who attended this workshop. Further we have been getting in touch with coordinator from the partner organizations to support the youth in their efforts and provide local mentorship and resources to them.

Youth Leadership Session in Khajlikheda: Over the past 4 months, we conducted a gender-focused meeting with the youth of Kajlikheda who are from the Dafale community. The Dafale community is a DNT community who primarily work in making and selling dholaks, and are from the Muslim community. The discussion took place outside the settlement, near the pump house by Kerwa Dam. A total of 26 young people participated. Some new youth joined the conversation this time, so the discussion revisited earlier sessions and focused again on the perceptions people hold about women and men. Beliefs like “women can’t do hard work,” “they are weak,” “they cry easily,” and “most quarrels and abusive language come from women” were brought up. Through various activities, participants were encouraged to reflect on how they perceive the men and women around them. For example, they noted that they often see men fighting in public, while women are usually seen fetching water from afar and handling both household and outside labor. This led to the question—if that’s what we observe, then how do we come to the conclusion that it’s mostly women who fight? The group discussed these ideas using real-life examples from their surroundings, challenging stereotypes and encouraging deeper thought. It became clear how, from childhood itself, we form such rigid ideas about men and women that even when we see something different happening around us, it becomes difficult to accept it. For instance, some participants observed that although women are not truly loved or respected in their own homes, they are still viewed as helpless or weak. Some youth even said that it’s the family that repeatedly tells women they are weak, which eventually makes them believe it. But if women are doing more work, then how are they weak? Many such questions and examples were emerging during the discussion, giving everyone a new perspective to think from. However, it also became evident that for young people to truly observe, question, and reflect deeply, there’s a need to create more such opportunities.





Leadership Sessions with the Pardhi Community in Guna: Understanding the desperate need for an intervention in the region, we have begun conducting sessions on leadership with young people from the Pardhi community across 5 villages. We have done a range of sessions in the region focusing around themes of identity, leadership, justice and collective healing. We used both theater and arts based practices for this. Many people actively engaged in the process, saying that it did create a sense of relief and a return to their childhood to participate in such sessions. During the sessions, we also attempted to understand an oral history of the people in the community, the strengths and special qualities of people in the community. A purpose of this activity was to understand how we could leverage these strengths to encourage people to challenge prevailing social injustices.

Youth Leadership Session in Berasia: The workshops have also been initiated with the Kanjar group there. In April, we conducted a three-day workshop in Berasia, with 17 participants—all of whom are above 17 years of age. The day started with a game called “Bol Bhai Kitne,” which helped build some initial understanding among the group. This was followed by an activity called the “Life River,” through which participants reflected on their life journeys, including good and risky moments, and obstacles they had faced. The history of the DNT (Denotified Tribes) community was shared through a PowerPoint presentation and interactive discussion. Everyone also shared what they felt was special about their community—many mentioned the constant support of the panchayat in times of difficulty, and the unique skill of hunting. Some fun games and a meditation session were also held. We also initiated a discussion on the caste system, which continued with a “Power Walk” activity that helped explore themes of power, access to opportunity, and the privileges associated with gender and caste. We also did a session on the concept of gender and the ideas and behaviors associated with it. The session focused on the socialization of women and men—how society shapes their roles, responsibilities, and expected behavior. Through an activity, participants explored the division of work, traits, and responsibilities often assigned to men and women. Later, there was a visit to the local police station (thana), where conversations took place around efforts in education within the community and the various challenges faced. Participants also discussed each other’s efforts in addressing these issues. During this visit, several young men spoke openly about the negative attitude and behavior they often experience from the police.

Integrated Approach - Baghmugaliya

Baghmugaliya: The Basti

At a distance of 5 kilometers from a well-established and air-conditioned mall in Bhopal is the basti of Baghmugaliya. Home to a mix of different social groups, a large population of the basti comprises people from the Gond tribe, and its subgroup - the Raj Gonds. Unlike the mall, Baghmugaliya struggles with a lack of access to clean water, sanitation, and uninterrupted electricity. Understanding the conditions of a basti like Baghmugaliya and the daily lives of Gondi people who live there helps us comprehend the status of marginalized groups in a city like Bhopal, especially tribal groups.

Children, Education, and Work

As the sun sets for the day in Baghmugaliya, Reshma and the other girls get ready for work. At the age of 14 years, the girls are excited to go to the nearby colony to carry the lights for the band, which is playing for a procession. They don't get paid much for this, but it is enough to contribute to their homes and to keep a little for themselves. In the basti of Baghmugaliya, it is typical for children to work from a young age; many leave their education to earn money. Children participate in jobs requiring manual labor such as digging, cutting trees, carrying lights, cleaning in nearby showrooms, or collecting scraps. Most children only attend primary school and drop out during or after that. Marriage is also a common reason for girls to discontinue their education.

Water and Sanitation impacting Health

When one visits the basti of Baghmugaliya, it is a common sight to see people crowded around a person's house with their cans in hand. Some people even pay up to 2-3 rupees for one can. To meet their daily requirements, people spend around 20-30 rupees daily, which becomes a lot for an extremely impoverished community. A consequence of a lack of access to clean water was that some women of the basti started using the Nala (sewer) to wash clothes. This led to them developing skin infections and conditions, which started affecting their health. A worse situation is that of sewage and garbage disposal. The basti has open overflowing gutters built throughout.



An Integrated Path to Change

Sports - A Way - A group of girls, including Reshma and her friends, has developed a routine of playing cricket daily over the past few years. This commitment, however, has come with its own set of challenges. They regularly face sexism from male peers, restrictions from family members, and other challenges in the community, but they persist in a focused manner.

Demanding Services - The people of the basti have rallied to get water tanks to come in and supply water to all households. Jawaan was also proactive in one of these expeditions in the past. However, filling out applications and visiting government offices has not led to regularity in the water tank visiting the basti. Therefore, we are working towards getting water taps installed in the basti. Currently, 30 households in the basti have come on board to deposit the water charges — the minimum number required to initiate the installation of a piped water connection in the area. The children's Azad Jugnu Club in collaboration with the community adults continuously complained to the Municipal Corporation on these matters and moved the machinery a bit.

Theatre - A group of girls practiced theatre of the oppressed for a couple of years. While it is currently not sustaining as a theatre group, the girls grew confident in this journey. Many girls have drawn boundaries with their families and demanded that they get opportunities to play and learn.

What started out with centres for educating children in primary classes, has turned into multi-pronged interventions over the years. Currently, there is a community library in the basti, which allows for space for children to gather, study, and also discuss their daily lives with facilitators. The children's group raises issues that may otherwise get missed, as children's health and well-being, violence and more. Beyond this, the organisation has also intervened in the area of mental health for community members. All of these interventions have grown and expanded due to a growing community engagement and investment.

With each passing year, the community's collective awareness is growing, and many young adults are taking roles of leadership. Young boys of the basti, who suffered from addictions and were prone to engage in violence frequently now engage themselves in constructive activities.

Gopi, now 25 years, was actively involved initially as a student-learner, and then participated in residential camps, youth workshops on gender and identity, and as earning pressures grew on him, he took on the role of a youth-teacher. He did this work for about three years but then progressed to join a car showroom. Two years there, he has become a Supervisor and has been able to bring in 25 women from his community to work there.





Learning and Growing

Our team members Savita and Brajesh participated in a 9 month program with Pravah on **organizational development**. This journey proved to be extremely helpful in understanding various aspects of organizational growth such as:

- The Five Elements Theory of the organization,
- The various processes operating within the organization,
- And the organizational culture.

Through this journey, we got the opportunity to observe our organization's enabling and disabling defaults. We also thought through what could be done at an institutional level to improve or correct the disabling defaults — including planning and implementation. This program was equally valuable from a personal development perspective. Helping us to understand ourselves more deeply, recognizing our strengths and weaknesses, and work on them proactively.

We worked on improving institutional processes, contributing to leadership development by conducting workshops with colleagues, designing and implementing action plans to improve specific processes. We held a two day workshop retreat to understand our teams strengths and the activities of the last year and plan activities for the upcoming year.

Visitors from various organizations enriched our **learning and exchanges** during the year. A group of 14 people from Patang (Sambalpur, Odisha), 20 people from Vardishnu (Jalgaon, Maharashtra), teacher-learners from BNS College of Education (Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh), friends from Ayang (Majauli, Assam) and the cohort of Agamishala visited us.

CORO Mumbai were recruited for a review of our program with denotified tribes to get an objective analysis and suggestions from an external source for the way forward. They visited the organization in May 2024.

Partnership with Playquity (Puiyador) for building gender equality through frisbee has ensured mentoring and training support for a group of girls. Similarly, partnering with Kolkata Samwed for dance movement therapy and Ummeed for narrative therapy enriched our team.

Many people came over to support us at the idea level to understand how to repair our mud home. It has been heartening to see the love and passion for earth-friendly construction in our country, and people lending us their time and resources in many ways to get over the struggle of the collapsing of the adobe bathroom wall. As we restore the toilets, we also take precautionary and preventive steps for any further damage in the coming years.

Papers and Presentations

The Death Of A Bridegroom In Custody Confirms India's
'Criminal Tribes' Are Policed Much As The British Did by
Shivani Taneja & Nikita Sonavane published in Article
14

Unending trauma of Vimukta communities: Custodial
deaths, institutional prejudice by Heman Oza and
Nikita Chatterjee published in Maktoob Media

Ultimate frisbee- संवैधानिक मूल्यों की एक सीख - अभिषेक,
राजवीर, नीलांश, एवं शिवानी, कला खेल और शिक्षा - परिप्रेक्ष्य
परिस्थिति और संभावनाएँ, अज़ीम प्रेमजी यूनिवर्सिटी

बच्चों की अभिव्यक्ति व लिखना पढ़ना सीखने में चित्रकला की
उपयोगिता- ब्रजेश वर्मा, कला खेल और शिक्षा - परिप्रेक्ष्य परिस्थिति
और संभावनाएँ, अज़ीम प्रेमजी यूनिवर्सिटी

कड़कड़ाती ठंड में पेट की गुड़गुड़- ब्रजेश वर्मा
चकमक में प्रकाशित

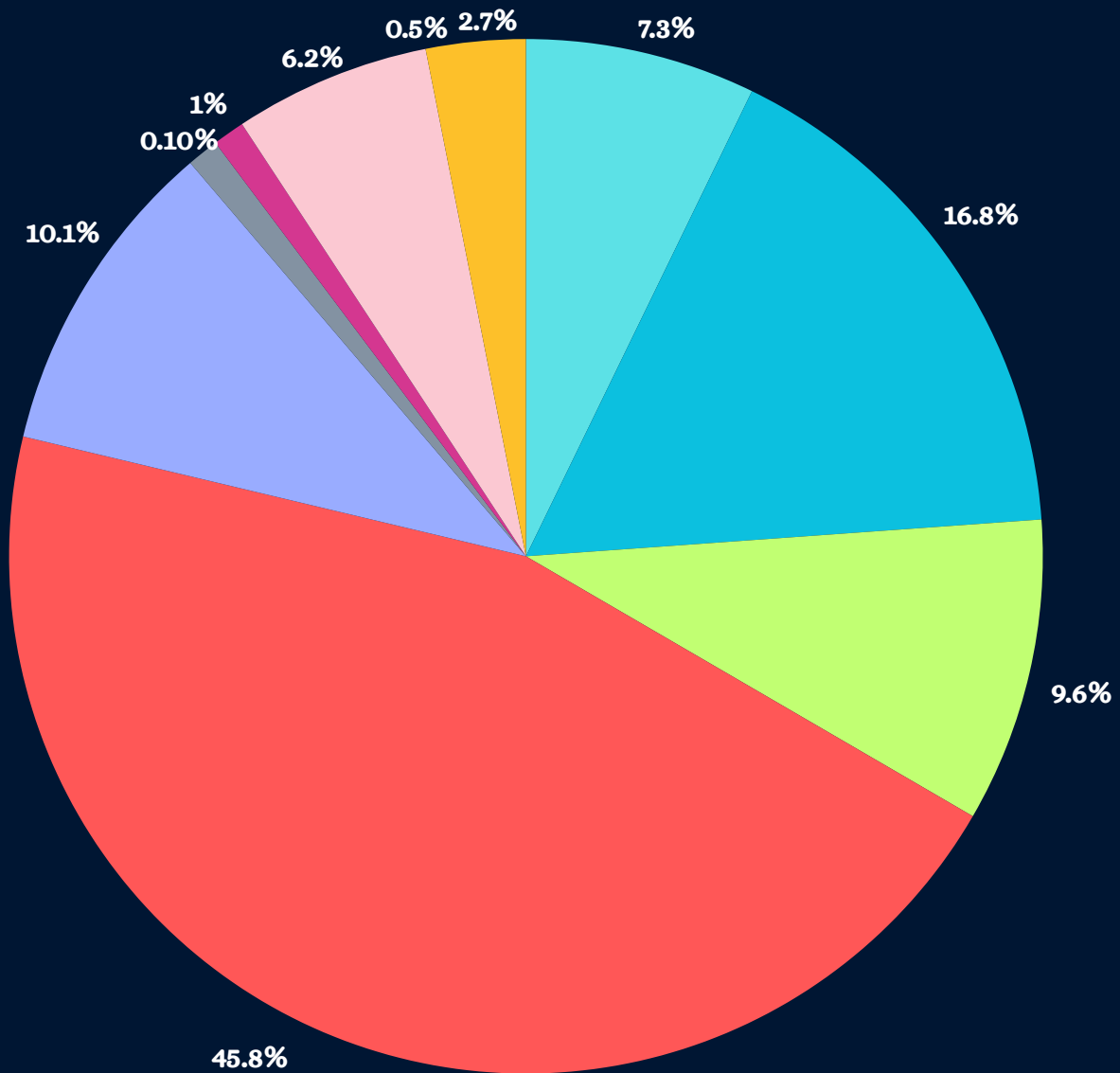
Reclaiming our Roots and Growing.. Making Education
Work, in Anthropology and Education Conference, Royal
Anthropological Institute, UK on June 27, 2024

Community Vulnerabilities and Our Approach, Wipro
Executive Managers Meet, September 10, 2024

Storybooks as Teaching Learning Materials at Wipro
Forum on December 4, 2024



Annual Expenditure 2024-25



Total Expenditure = Rs. 250,01,626

- School Program Expenses
- Outreach Education Program Exp.
- Hostel Residential Camp Expenses
- Community Program Expenses
- Child Protection & Youth Program Expenses
- Books Development
- Establishment Expenses
- Organisation Development & Capacity Building
- Administrative Expenses

Annual Income

2024-25

Sources of Income	Amount
Donations	₹34,02,065
Grants	₹233,87,767
Interest	₹15,64,763
Book Sales	₹549,295
Other	₹479,118
Total	₹293,83,008

Institutional Donors and Supporters

Art 1st	Asha for Education, USA	Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives	Black BioTech India Ltd.
Global Green Grants Fund	Human Capabilities Foundation	Indian Foundation for the Arts	International Board on Books for Young People
Jehanuma Palace Hotel	Let It Count	NMT Shipping	Patchwork Kids
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	Terre Des Hommes	UNICEF	Wipro Foundation

Staffing and Compensation

Overview

Number of Team Members	94
Permanent Team Members	42
Number of Youth Fellows	52

Pay Scales for Permanent Team Members

Pay Scale	No. of Employees
₹15,000 - ₹20,000	18
₹20,000 - ₹30,000	13
₹30,000 - ₹40,000	6
₹40,000 - ₹50,000	5



We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our donors, partners, friends, and well-wishers. Your continued support and trust have been invaluable in helping us carry forward Muskaan's mission of education, dignity, and justice for all. Together, we move closer to a more inclusive and compassionate world.

We are also grateful to our community friends who have dared to take new paths. Without you all, we wouldn't have learnt and managed to do what we do.

– Team Muskaan

