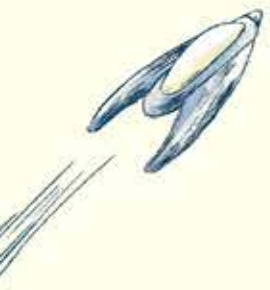


Girls Map Change:

*a girl-led
experiment
to measure
program
impact*



Aksharacentre
Dhuru Bldg, 2nd floor,
Gokhale Road, Dadar West,
Mumbai 400028, India
Email: akshara.frea@gmail.com
Website: www.aksharacentre.org

Mumbai, 2019



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Girls Map Change:

*a girl-led
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impact*

by the Akshara Team

June 2019

Akshara Maps Change

[and you can too!]

Aksharacentre is a women's rights organisation which believes in changing society by empowering women and girls.

- We work for girls' education and skills training so they can be financially self reliant
- We work to eliminate gender discrimination and violence against women
- We engage with young men to encourage them to be gender advocates
- We campaign for a safe and inclusive city in which women can be secure and productive

Focussing primarily on the youth community, our strategies are gender awareness and leadership trainings, youth mobilisation and collaborative partnerships.

The young women and girls' program called the Empowering Dreams Program, evolved out of our belief in girls' capacity to grow, their right to equal access to opportunities and their capacity to contribute in societal change. We experimented with the two dominant models of providing skill-building opportunities for livelihood and leadership training for girls. Akshara forged a different and third path by combining the two models. In the Empowering Dreams Program, girls from low socio-economic backgrounds learn financial, educational and gender life skills that enable them to access and complete higher education, and navigate life in the city of Mumbai as a self-sufficient woman. Activities in

the program include support for English-speaking and computer skills, financial management, increasing the employability of the girls, gender workshops, self-defense workshops, leadership training, communications skills-building, exposure visits, participating in campaigns for change, and so on. It is this program that was selected for the girl-led participatory evaluation using creative methods.

As it is a process-oriented program engaging small groups of underprivileged young women, we are acutely aware of undertaking evaluations. Every year we get feedback from the young women through feedback forms, interviews and base and endline questionnaires. These conventional means did yield data on our processes but we needed to go deeper to see if we were making a difference in the lives of young women.

The project, Mapping Change [2015-16], gave us the opportunity to interact with some of our senior participants to understand what they understood as 'change', what they had experienced in our processes which helped shape their attitudes and behaviour, and how they were living out these changes.

We share this experiment with you with the hope that you might want to use similar methods to evaluate your own programs with your partners and participants.

Nandita Gandhi,
Co Director, Akshara

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The Mapping Change Experiment

We wanted our method to be feminist and participatory



All of us, in one way or another, evaluate our programs. It usually works as a form of reflection and feedback besides giving us information about its impact. So far we have been evaluating our program by gathering data on the number of workshops and attendance, baseline and endline feedback forms and interviews done with our participants and running them through our stated objectives. Whilst these methods do give basic feedback about the impact of our program, we felt a huge gap. We wanted to dive deeper to see how our participants saw, experienced and lived change and what we could do to improve our programmatic activities.

We believe that no single assessment tool can adequately capture all dimensions of gendered change process. So we might need to fashion our own tool. We needed a method which could involve the girls to assess their own progress and reduce the distance between the evaluator and evaluated. Was it possible for us to develop a simple tool/s which would also give a voice to our participants? And the voices needed to be free, honest and introspective. Our participants would need to open up and look into areas which otherwise may not come up in standard evaluation formats. We skimmed through various possibilities and found Participatory Evaluation the closest to our requirements.

Participatory Evaluation [PE] is a huge and complex field and it is easy to get lost in its many forms and methods [Cullen, A. E. and Coryn, C. L. S., 2011). But it is a democratic method which is grounded in the principles of inclusion, collaboration and debate and it involves both the program facilitators as well as the participants. When participants or our stakeholders are involved in evaluation, it dynamically changes the process as there is an acknowledgement of their voices and expertise which increases their sense of ownership of the program. Without trying to fit ourselves into the existing types of PE models like Empowerment Evaluation or Practical Participatory Evaluation, we focussed on our objective for the exercise. We wanted our method to be feminist and participatory and provide a space for introspection on the changes in their lives in the context of Akshara's interventions.

Improvise your own Participatory Evaluation

Participatory Evaluation can be quite strenuous and painstaking so be quite sure you want to do it. If you do, there are some basic rules to follow and a lot of room for creativity. We summarise into easy to follow steps and you can refer to our process for reference.

Step 1: Preparing for P E

- Make sure that your program is a few years old, has defined objectives, outcomes and activities and has a body of participants which can be involved in the evaluation.
- Evaluation should be done on the basis of your programmatic model. Pull out any earlier evaluations, written reports, data, case studies you may have and see where there are gaps. Would you like to know more about the girls, their families, the community or some particular aspect of your program?
- Set out to define exactly what you want to get out of it. Involve all concerned personnel to write down your main objective/s. Break up your objectives into smaller research questions.
- Clearly set out what you want to evaluate. You might want to find out the way your programs are being run, like 'the impact of workshops on participants'. Or you might want to evaluate the end result or outcome, like 'building leadership'.

Step 2: Participation – the crux of P E

- Organise your stakeholders or program participants and have a session on Participatory Evaluation, its method and timeline. Let there be an open debate on it. Outline the method and what it will mean for the program facilitators and for the participants. The participants have to be comfortable with the methods they would like to use, for example, perhaps they prefer storytelling to poster making or oral methods as compared to textual ones and so on.
- Your participants should be a mixed group, for example drawn from different age groups, locations or cohorts, so that different points of views will add to the discussion and implementation.

Step 3: Orient stakeholders to PE methods

- Your methods should be aligned to the evaluation questions. Is it important for you to understand the nature of workshops or what your participants have absorbed or perhaps if they have indeed become leaders in the leadership training program? You can use a quantitative approach or a qualitative one or a mix of the two. The quantitative method will more likely yield data on workshops, attendance, frequency of visits and so on. The qualitative one will more likely capture changes in relationships, experiences, attitudes and behaviour.
- You might want to use video-graphy instead of photography or poetry and posters and that's fine. We wanted to go beyond the feedback form and short answers in an open ended questionnaire. Essentially, the method should excite your participants and give scope for in depth expression. Think through and make check lists or charts to help your participants introspect.
- The workshops for orientation and post any activities are important. The orientation will set the tone and give you an idea if your participants are keen on becoming your partners in the evaluation process. The activity workshop will introduce the tool and subsequent discussions.
- You can also discuss a timeline and schedule the workshops and activities. However, it is important to be flexible and adapt to the circumstances. In our case, such scheduling was impractical because our participants had hectic schedules and usually were active on holidays. Our workshops were sometimes split into two sessions according to attendance.

Project Goal

To capture the dynamic process of change in the lives of young women exposed to societal and programmatic influences.

Project Objectives

- To understand the nature of changes in young women developing leadership skills
- To engage in participatory research/ evaluation and develop tools and strategies
- To share strategies with other organizations with programs for young women

Akshara believes that young women have the agency to break the cycle of violence and poverty in their lives, help their families as well as build creative and productive lives for themselves. They know what is best for them and are 'experts' in balancing, juggling and negotiating for opportunities in the face of opposing values and forces.

*They know
what is best
for them!*

Method



The Sample

Participatory Evaluation is a qualitative process and we needed to capture girls' narratives of change in their lives and analyze it descriptively through a participatory feminist lens and process. Hence, we invited around 30 girls and young women to an orientation to understand and participate in this process. The criterion for selection was that they should have participated in Akshara's programs for at least 2-3 years and that the group composition be representative of diversity in terms of caste, age, religion. We were also keen to have a mix of body types and appearances, as we believe body image plays a significant role in the self-esteem of young women. Out of the 21 young women who signed up, two dropped out after attending the initial sessions, while some were irregular in their attendance. Since the emphasis was on voluntary participation, there was never any attempt to coax young women back into the evaluation.

The Data Collection Process

We relied mainly on the qualitative research method as we wanted to gain insights into the personal and behavioural as well as the conceptual changes in our participants. We enlisted the participation of young women to generate their own data through the use of creative exercises. Each exercise presented a medium which would help in pulling out participants' perspectives and experiences. Each one gave them the opportunity of introspection and reflection on the changes they had experienced in the past two years and possible

reasons for the transformation. All methods were interactive and activity-oriented except for the focus groups and individual interviews which were discussion based.

Photo-journals: the combination of photography with journal writing is an interesting way to get visual and written data. Photos can capture portraits, events, scenes and the context can be provided by written accounts. For our participants, we had organised a crash course on the basics of photography to understand light, angles, back grounding and fore grounding, textures and emotions. As photos have stories hidden in them, a checklist entitled 'My People, My Neighbourhood, My Space' was made as an aid to writing. [Annexure 1]. The photo journals enabled us to get a glimpse into the lives of the girls, as they wanted to represent it.

The activity of **Story Writing & Story Telling** has a universal appeal. Young people take to it easily so as a method it is implementable easily. Stories when analysed can provide an understanding of internalised beliefs, behaviour and perspectives which can be difficult using traditional methods. We had worked out themes which a resource person took groups of young women through and demonstrated the building of a story and ways of narration [Annexure 2]. These enabled us to understand areas of change and empowerment, as well as areas in which change was difficult.

Focus Group Discussions between a set of participants is useful for detailed information and to gain insights into behaviour, attitudes and feelings. Sometimes a vocal person may skew the exercise but usually participants provoke and question each other. Our questions on the issue of negotiations are in Annexure 3. These discussions can help talk about particularly challenging issues.

In-depth personal interview or a one-on-one interview with participants seems the simplest way to collect information but it can be the toughest way if not executed in amenable conditions. We were at an advantage as most of the participants had been volunteers with Akshara on and off for 2 years. They were at ease with us. By using the semi structured form, we could guide the interviewing down different paths as they opened up and yet veer it back to the main question. A schedule was prepared which is part of Annexure 4. These interviews would help with added information to supplement those using other methods.

The analysis of the qualitative data was done in the following way. All interviews, videos, minutes taken during each session were transcribed and printed out. All of them were read and re-read to review and organise them. Based on our indicators (drawn from our conceptual framework, as below) we developed themes from the material. Each theme was given a colour code, and the colour code was used on the printed data and on the soft copies of material. The material was then re-organised and analysed by the project team, along with the participants.

Conceptual Framework

The feminist economist, Naila Kabeer [1999] notes that, "... the notion of empowerment is that it is inescapably bound up with and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. In other words, empowerment entails a process of change." This experiment was structured around this broad concept of 'empowerment'. To capture this process of change, we needed to look into what Stromquist [1995] called dimensions of empowerment, that is, the cognitive or the critical understanding of one's reality; the psychological or feelings of self-esteem, the economic or the capacity to generate independent income, and the political or awareness of power inequalities and the ability to organize and mobilize.

Elaborating Domains and Indicators of Change:

We had formed an Advisory Group of educationists and experts from various institutions, knowledgeable in qualitative and quantitative research, to guide us in the process of the participatory evaluation. One of our meetings was a brainstorming session on 'change' in the lives of young women. In a parallel process, we shared the results of the brainstorming exercise with our participants. This triggered an animated discussion amongst them. Change meant.....

... a level of confidence – how girls see themselves and in the way they behave

... how girls negotiate their relationships with boyfriends and close friends

... how they negotiate relationships at home – the shift in their relationships with family

... girls daring to overcome their shyness and take social actions in the public domain

... an increase in their mobility – going out alone, going out long distances or using different means of transport

... increasing their social networks to those outside of their kinship circles

... developing a personal vision for the future

... realizing one's personal experiences as a part of a broader structure

... how girls could negotiate the modern and the traditional

We could pull the threads of both discussions together to organise them around three significant domains in the lives of young women. We have identified these three domains as those which critically affect young women's empowerment and hence are the sites where change can be most clearly mapped. These psycho-spatial domains are – the young women's self-image, her family and household, and the larger society or public spaces they navigate.

Each domain contains some indicators of change. For example, in the domain of the Self, we would see the following as indicators that the participant has a heightened belief in themselves, and an emerging critical consciousness. In the domain of the Family, the indicator was negotiations, or the ability to voice one's opinions, and speak to parents, boyfriends or elders in the family on issues on which they may have differing views. In the domain of Public Spaces, the indicators included the ability to take public actions, being unafraid of public spaces, expand social networks and participate in actions for public awareness on social issues, demonstrate increased frequency of going out alone or in groups over distance not done before.

Mapping Change Project: Domains and Indicators

Self

- Increased self confidence
- Understanding gender discrimination
- Personal Vision

Family

- Ability to negotiate choice of dress
- Sharing housework
- Use of Social Media
- Visiting the Akshara Centre
- Permission to be out with friends
- Discussions with boyfriends
- Having part-time jobs
- Managing menstruation taboos
- Challenging caste restrictions

Public Spaces

- Ability to take social actions
- Increased mobility
- Access to wider social networks

Profile of Participants

Age

The youngest was 17 years old; one was 18 and the oldest 23. The rest were between the ages of 19 to 21 years.



Caste and Religious Affiliations

Most of them were Hindus [58% or 11] from the general category and some were from Other Backward Castes [26% or 5]. The Buddhists [16% or 3] belonged to the Scheduled Castes.

Type of Family Structure

Most of them were living in nuclear families with 4 of them in joint or extended families. There were large numbers of families [6] who were headed by single mothers. Curiously there was one joint family which was a female headed household in which the mother, daughters, grandmother and an aunt were living together. In 4 families, there were only daughters and no sons.

Single Mother Headed Households: 6

Joint Families: 4

Joint all female Households: 1

All-daughter families: 4

Only child family: 3

Income:

Mostly their fathers were the chief wage earners and the average monthly income ranged from Rs 5000 to 10000 [US\$ 71 to 143] with some supplementary income from the wives or elder sons/daughters.





Types of Employment

Most of the chief wage earners were in the informal sector as daily wagers or in blue-collar jobs as deliverymen, photo-framers, weight checkers (for cargo), security guards, shopkeepers. Some ran canteens/ food stalls or were retired and drawing small pensions from the public authorities like the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) or Bombay Electric Supply and Tramway Company (BEST). One father taught at a local gym as well in his spare time. Mothers were homemakers, domestic workers, cooks, housekeepers, worked in government schools or ran home businesses as beauticians and seamstresses.

My mother requested me to find some part-time job.

“My father works in a photo frame shop. Often small nails pierce his feet; or his hands get cut by the glass. He comes home and removes glass shards and I can’t bear watching him.” Vidya

“My mother used to work from home on garments like threading or making designs on jeans. But now she has spondylitis, there are days when she can’t even move.” Shraddha

“My father gets angry, flares up on petty issues and sometimes refuses to give money for home expenses. Like the other day, the gas cylinder had to be replaced and the electricity bill had to be paid but he wouldn’t give money. My college fees were not paid.” Yogita

Residence

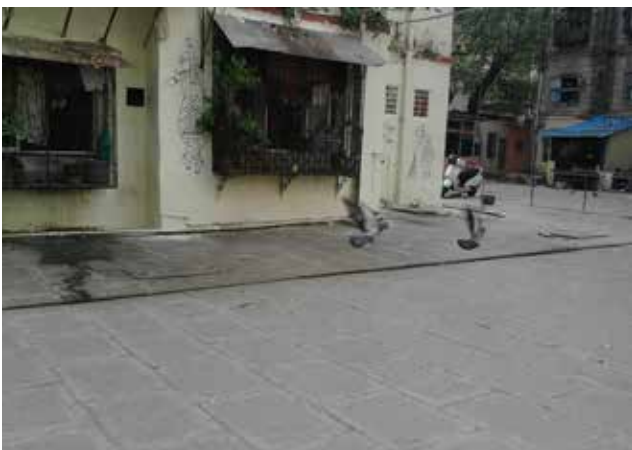
The majority of the participants' grandparents had migrated into the city from the hinterlands of Maharashtra. They stayed in the older areas of Worli, Dadar, Prabhadevi and Parel which were earlier areas of the textile mills with chawls (low cost tenements) for their workers. Unlike other cities, there is an acute shortage of low cost housing in Mumbai and in particular South Mumbai where most of these families resided. They stay in cramped rooms or kholis in a warren of buildings that form the chawls of Mumbai or in redeveloped flats under the Slum Redevelopment Scheme. Chawls are characteristically a Mumbai feature. They were built by the British mill owners and later Indian mill owners for housing their workers. There are a series of rooms in a row with a common corridor usually in a three-story building. At the end of each floor are common toilets. Families in chawls have a peculiar relationship of dependency, friendship and antagonism. Living side by side, with doors open to let in the light, neighbours were friends, a support system and also pesky gossipers.

Below are some photos taken by the participants as part of self-definition in terms of identity and location.

Family life is full of urban living strife with little interaction between family members except when it comes to a crisis or a problem.

"Everyone's schedules are different. My father does night duty, my mother returns home at 9.30pm and my brother attends classes in the morning and then goes to afternoon school. I go to college early in the morning. There is little bonding in my family. It's getting the work done and that's it."
Reetu

"My exams were around the corner but I could not focus on studying. If I studied at night, my father would yell at me as it disturbed his sleep. My family would not let me study even under the little light burning in the small home temple. Finally, I started going to a free library in my area." Vidya



Improvise your own Participatory Evaluation

Step 4: Taking care of your data

It seems simple but compiling and storing all the material is extremely important. It's best to have a dedicated space for storing the material physically and on computers so nothing is lost. The next part is organizing it under broad heads like interviews, transcripts, photo journals and so on.

Step 5: Making sense of the data

The word 'analysis' seems very daunting as it suggests a science and training. Here what we mean by analysis is organising your data in a way which starts to speak to you by showing relationships and important points. Analysis is the process of looking at your data in relation to different variables like age, education, number of trainings, and so on. In order to do this, you will first need to develop and use a coding system.

Codes can have labels which refer to your indicators or areas of enquiry. For example if you wish to use the code 'leadership' then you can go through your data and use a colour to highlight all words in interviews or photo journals which indicate leadership potential or acts. We went through all data generated by all the workshops and photos to see if the themes and indicators showed up.

Step 6: Interpreting the Data

There is a lot of to and fro from the data to the indicators and back. All observations, connections, and expressions should be noted down in a notebook or on the laptop. Compare, contrast, check for trends and sense what is being said. There could be persisting themes like parental control or fear of mobility. Involve the participants in your analysis as they can clarify what you are observing.

It is easy to get lost in the data. At such times go back to your main themes and your objectives. Are you evaluating what you set out to do or something quite different?

Group all your findings according to theme headings and start writing them down in a report. Comments on the activities and suggestions should form a separate part of the findings.

Step 7: Apply findings to programs

Programmatic remarks and suggestions have to be applied to the restructuring of the program and/or creating new inputs and activities. Or even a new program altogether.

The core findings will be around the impact of the program on the participants. The evaluation data will help you establish if the participants have changed their way of thinking as you may have anticipated or made behavioral changes or are in the process of doing so. You might observe unanticipated changes, and try and understand what triggered these. You might notice gaps in the implementation of program activities or that the relevant information is not being understood or that activities and information should be added.

Make a chart of your existing program activities and their results and outcomes. See if you can supplement any of them or create new activities to see new results.

Findings

Parents were
thrilled to see
their daughters
moving up



Becoming Self Aware

Data from all the workshops such as photo-journals, focus group discussions (FGDs), storytelling, personal visioning exercises and in-depth personal interviews were collated and examined against the framework of indicators to measure the impact of Akshara's interventions. The findings were structured according to this framework. Here we give some of the key findings, as the girls voiced them.

Growing Confidence

All our participants were first-generation college learners. They had studied in their native languages and after completing school had aspirations to go to college for higher studies. Their parents encouraged them as they were eligible for government or other scholarships for low income and caste groups.

"My school life was at an end and my college one was about to begin. I was nervous about how I'd manage and whether anybody would even be interested in being friends with me. I got admission to Lala Lajpat Rai College. My first impression was wah, such a big college! On the first day, I wondered how I'd get a word across. I could not even speak English." Anjali

The first steps to self confidence were taken as soon as they entered college. The online admissions system, introduced in the last few

years, has meant that the young women may not get the college nearby and of their choice due to high percentage cut-offs and reserved quotas. This meant going to colleges far from their neighbourhoods. So instead of walking back and forth as they may have done in school, they had to use public transport unescorted by their parents or brothers.

Most of them struggled to find their feet and voice as they come across a new range of people and learning subjects. This discomfort was compensated by a sense of freedom. Now there were long hours in college without any parental supervision. Parents, on the other hand, were thrilled to see their daughters moving up the education ladder but were worried about their safety as well as losing control over them. Parents set curfew hours and curtailed their choice of friends, pastimes which created frustration and became a communication gap between them. It took the girls some time and with a little help from friends and organisations like Akshara to expand their boundaries beyond the do's and don'ts set by parents.

Being able to speak up within and outside the home acquires tremendous importance for young women as it helps them in expressing their opinions with parents and brothers, as well as peers in college, and wresting more freedom for themselves as well as for other women in their families.

Growing Confidence



Pradnya is a 20-year-old who stays with her parents and a younger brother. She has a lot to say but takes time to open up. Her parents, whose native place is Sasara in Maharashtra, tried and failed to sustain a home independent from the joint family. There is regret at moving from a nuclear into a joint family but it was inevitable after her father fell ill. She is immensely proud of her mother for taking on the onus of earning for the family.

When I arrived [in Akshara] I was very shy and wouldn't respond even when spoken to. But in the years I've been here, my confidence has increased so much that I take a leadership role, speak even if not asked to and make decisions. Confidence increased because of mixing with different people both in Akshara and in college. The other big reason is taking social actions. When we go into the community or talk to the public, explain issues or do an event, it gives me a different feeling. Now I can speak without hesitation with my mother and travel by myself. Recently, Shivani and I got a job to photograph at a wedding. Earlier I would have thought - girls don't do this work but now I say - it will be a different experience for me.

Speaking Up



Yogita, a 21 year old, stays with her parents and younger brother. Her mother who hails from Belgaum is the rare mother who has an unfinished college and science education. She is quiet but not shy, has trained in theatre and likes sharing what she learns with her peers.

"I was apprehensive but attended the gender workshop and was surprised to know that society differentiates between girls and boys. In my house all of us do all the work because of our irregular timings. Once my brother was sweeping our little room and some neighbourhood boys came and started laughing and taunting him with jibes of doing "a girl's job". I was so angry then I remembered what we had discussed about gender roles and work. So I shouted back that they were idlers, getting all their work done by their mothers and sisters and doing nothing for them in return!"

Understanding Gender

All the participants had an experience of gender inequality and felt the discomfort of being marginalized, but in an abstract sense without specificities and applicability in their lives. Their participation in the Akshara gender workshops had given them an overall idea on the issue so they were acquainted with the vocabulary of rights and knew most of their legal rights like the fundamental right to equality, medical termination of pregnancy, right to public spaces and right to inherit property. However, when they agreed that women had a claim to their parents and husband's property, the participants did not take into account their mother's claim to their homes. It took time for them to reflect on workshop discussions and connect it to their own contexts.

Small shifts in their understanding of gender hierarchies and inequalities were seen. Patriarchy and gender discrimination was earlier seen more as something of the past, related to traditional practices and mindsets. With the workshops and discussions, this view shifted to seeing the relations of power underlying gender discrimination. For them, patriarchy was more pronounced in the village than the city, in the neighbourhood and at home. The college was not seen as a patriarchal space until hierarchies like selection of subjects (girls encouraged to select "soft" subjects) or teachers' discriminatory attitudes (regarding gender roles of girls and boys) were pointed out.

Although the girls were able to see and appreciate the pressure put on their mothers by society to behave in certain gendered ways, they were still more critical of women than men or women's patriarchal ideas and "baykanchi mentality" (women's mentality). The parental male figure of the father was not spoken of or criticised. When speaking of the gender division of housework that they bore the burden of, brothers were criticized for escaping housework easily and mothers censured for not dividing chores between sons and daughters. This was possibly so because mothers usually asked their daughters to lend them a hand to ease their own burden. The only exceptions made by mothers were when the young women had to study or attend meetings.

The participants were glad to have received information on violence, health and the body from various workshops. They had grasped the idea that there were taboos around a natural phenomenon like menstruation and were critical of them. However, they were reluctant to dismiss them completely, or act against them, so deep-seated were these beliefs. For example, they would still find it impossible to transgress the taboo of visiting the temple during their period, or cooking during this time, in some cases. Many mentioned that they would not go against these norms in their parent's homes but would do away with them in their own homes. It was heartening to see that many of them shared these discussions with their mothers. They disagreed with any form of physical violence and were able to cite examples of confronting sexual harassers.

"Around two years ago, I was a bit depressed and rued being a girl. I got my periods. In my caste, it's celebrated as a festival. Everyone is informed. I had a lot of fears surrounding it. I was not allowed to touch anything for those five days. I couldn't reconcile to all these things at that time. It was like being tied up in one place. It's a natural process and girls are being treated like they've committed some major sin." Vidya



Thinking of a Future

A vision for oneself for the future shows that the person has a sense of direction and goals, of striving for something and of being someone. If one has a vision, one can find ways of attaining it but in its absence, one is drifting in the currents of other people's goals.

Unfortunately for young women, all roads lead to marriage and there is a low sense of one's own achievements. But given an opportunity, young women are quite forthcoming on their dreams, fantasies and aspirations for their future.

Many articulated the dream of being free of all rules, regulations, constraints and responsibilities – an idyllic state of peace and freedom, which can be interpreted as a fantasy of being in natural surroundings far from the city and spending time ruminating with the self or flying free like a bird.

Coming from an under-privileged background, most had a practical take on their dreams – that is, one for the heart and the other for survival. For instance, being a poet and a teacher, becoming a chartered accountant and then pursuing professional singing. Finding a life partner who will not restrict them also figured in their equations.

Lack of good grades stymied many a dream. Financial constraints often thwarted aspirations, especially in choice of a college educational stream and career due to the high costs of professional and other courses. In addition, body image and attire issues also prevented young women from pursuing certain careers such as sports or being an air hostess. There is an underlying desire of breaking out of their class trappings into the middle class with flats, cars, expensive clothing and professions.

Young women sensed that what they wished to do and what they may actually end up doing will be determined by finance, parents' wishes and gender norms. For instance, if they dreamt of becoming a dancer, it was more likely and possible that they would be teaching dance as opposed to dancing at shows, which would not be allowed by the family. While there were many naysayers, friends, teachers, and parents often acted as influencers encouraging young women to follow through on their goals.



Young women are quite forthcoming on their dreams, fantasies and aspirations for their future.

Roshan is a 20-year-old who stays with her single mother and older brother in the residence that her grandparents made home when they migrated to the city from Aavashi-Gunde in 1952. Her life is pockmarked with memories of her parents' ill-health. Her father passed away when she was still a child. Her mother started catering to the needs of small eateries by making polis [rotis or flat bread].

“My mother started the business of making polis, which I now want to manage and expand. But making polis is associated with homemakers or illiterate women. So neighbours could not understand why I am engaged in it and how I imagine I can even earn a profit from something women make at home. But Akshara motivated me to keep at it and think of scaling up. I’ve always wanted to run my own business. My dream is to be the biggest businessman in Mumbai. I do not want to die a poor person and I am willing to do whatever it takes. I want a two-storey building with an annex with a swing and a BMW car parked in front of it.”

Negotiations within the Family

Marginalised people usually do not negotiate or resist their discrimination or make choices in their lives. So it is a mark of empowerment to see young women negotiate and try to get their way within the family.

Our young participants, like most youth, had to contend with a generational divide of age and culture. They faced numerous conflicting situations as young women who were not treading the same path as their parents. So how did they reconcile their differences in perspectives and actions? These negotiations had a direct bearing on their lives, education, mobility, dress, choices in employment and relationships. The increased awareness of gender inequality in some situations brought up conflict with parents quite sharply. Parents would like their children to follow their ideas and traditions on marriage, education, extracurricular activities and work. They would also like to follow the traditional behavioural etiquette of being deferential to elders, not raise their voices, argue or contradict parents and maintain a respectful distance. In the absence of communication and enforcement of diehard rules, young women were acutely aware and angry at gender discrimination and their lack of choices.

Our participants usually reacted to these conflicts with withdrawal, walking away or an angry retort. Parents considered them insolent and given to answering back. So their attempts at making choices regarding hobbies, entertainment, careers, boyfriends and housework ran into problems. Some reported having left home only to return in a few hours. In the face of these never ending conflicts, how do young women manage? They negotiate - and these are some of their ways.

Strategies of Negotiation

Coming up with alternatives:

Money was often a bone of contention. So, young women often sought to defray expenses by getting financial aid or earning a supplementary income through piece work or a part-time job. If curfew hours were the problem, alternative transport arrangements to reach home were made to address parental fears.

Barter tactics:

Young women may yield ground to their parents on the understanding that in exchange for the current acquiescence, they will eventually be allowed to pursue their own choices. Acquiescing to a parent's decision does not necessarily mean giving up their pursuit of happiness. They merely switch to a more acceptable choice such as joining theatre groups as opposed to doing dance shows. They may also skirt parental roadblocks by taking a circuitous route to reach the cherished goal. For example, asking permission to cut their hair like their brother's which they knew would be met with horror and dismay, and then changing tactics - as if they were climbing down and asking for permission to keep their hair untied and open.

Delaying Tactics:

This usually comes into play when young women are confronted with their family's marriage plans. They might argue for a specific age or after the completion of education or after finding employment. Some young women said that they used the same ploy with their boyfriends, that is, by laying down conditions to delay commitment.

Previewing:

Young women often rehearsed a road map to arrive at a solution to a problem or to execute a solution or to self-assess their own behaviour, especially if it was seen to be at variance with established norms. Depending on the dynamics of the household, young women observed and learnt which areas they should negotiate and with which parent to obtain support.

However successful or unsuccessful young women may be in negotiating with their parents, the constant need to negotiate eventually took a toll on their emotional health. Parental and partner relationships remained a tangled web which young women found difficult to live with.

“I get so annoyed when my mother takes off on marriage”



Priyanka is a 20-year-old staying in a joint family and continuously beset with conflicting advice from her many elders. She believes that parents tend to be overprotective of her because of their mind-sets and fears of the worst.

“My folks will say I am jaastshaani (oversmart)! That’s because I continuously argue with them! Most of my arguments are with my mother. Here are some examples....

Singlehood- I want to explore this-what is wrong in not getting married? I tell my mother I am going to be single [just for argument’s sake]. Actually I haven’t thought about it! But I get so annoyed when my mother takes off on marriage.

Learn cooking - why do I have to learn cooking? My mother goes on and on about it. The rotis have to be round, have to learn to manage the kitchen and have to put the right amount of salt.

Your future mother in law will fling this in your face. For god’s sake, I am not even married and my mother has come up with a mother in law!

Father is cool when I say stuff like this. Mother just harangues about my household skills. But I know when it’s time to shut up. No point dragging it. I strongly feel that my cooking abilities can be for myself and it does not have to be always linked to prospect of marriage.”

Expanding Networks

The relationships of working class women usually revolved around their family, the extended family, community friends and perhaps neighbourhood groups.

However, for our participants, the social world had expanded as they moved from school, to college and workplaces. The ability to network is an important marker because it shows that young women are building other bases outside of the traditional for emotional and information support. Networks provided them the opportunity to meet new people, travel, and experience new things, discuss different issues besides dancing and singing. Some of their social networks are:

Peer Groups:

Most participants mentioned forming friendships in Akshara workshops, which acted as support, for sharing confidences, going out together and for encouragement. Another peer group consisted of cousins and brothers or sisters with whom they could discuss relationships, family crisis and educational choices.

Social Media Usage:

Most of our participants had smart phones and could search the Internet to access information on education, part time jobs, qualifications for jobs, location of libraries and professional courses. Some of them found unique ways of ferreting out information such as accosting people near educational institutions including watchmen to find out about a course. Sharing of such information took place on social media groups.

A Safe Space:

It is easy to form networks in a girls-only space with its absence of parental hierarchy and restrictions. Participants described it as a “katta” [corner], “second home” and “school” where you shared meals and hung out with friends. For them it was a harking back to childhood, frolic and informality. It was a space for masti, guppa and gunta gunti - fun, chatting and sharing. It was also a space away from their prying neighbours.

Since young women admit that they do not interact much within their prying neighbourhood, Akshara also offers them access to a wider social network and a new community.

Events like Khula Aasman, Ma Beti Melavas and residential workshops/picnics are top of the mind recall for young women. It is at such events in Akshara that young women dance and sing in public for the first time and rediscover the joys of playing in public spaces.

Picnics and outings are enjoyed for the girl time, natural surroundings and the freedom it gives them as well as the joy of seeing grown women [when mothers accompany daughters] engage in activities like playing not usually associated with them. The free and frank discussions on issues within these new networks, the open sharing of problems with peers, participation in events and workshops helps young women shed their inhibitions. They lose their fear of speaking to their parents; travelling afar; being out at night; using public spaces; interacting with strangers, boys and girls; dancing, singing and speaking in public and to the public and are able to express opinions and take decisions concerning their lives.

Going Public

For our young women participants, any spaces outside their homes were alien and hostile ones which they did not tread on except with family escorts or other friends, and that too with some purpose in mind. Navigating public spaces, therefore, becomes an important indicator, as it encourages travel, interaction and exposure. Young women voiced their concerns about public streets and their confidence in taking social actions within their immediate community or in the city.

They faced numerous conflicting situations as young women who were not treading the same path as their parents.

The Paths of Least Resistance

For our participants, mobility was curtailed thrice over – they had first to overcome their own fears, then family opposition as well as neighbourhood censure. The first – their fears – they could overcome, as the prospect of freedom was too enticing. Their families and households were already rife with conflict but discussion and negotiations were possible. They found their neighbours, the self styled guardians of honour and traditionalism more difficult to deal with.

Purposive Mobility or that for practical needs meant going to school, college and running small errands for their mothers. Gradually that form of mobility was extended to other activities with parental support, like for seeking admission in educational institutes, skill based courses or for attending job interviews. One young woman reported that she was asked to pay the electricity bill as her brother was unavailable. At first she was apprehensive but having executed the task, she was delighted at the satisfaction it gave her parents.

Once they had shown themselves as reliable, they pushed their boundaries and started visiting banks, going for meetings at Akshara and helping younger siblings on behalf of their parents. Their own newfound confidence led them to newer forms of non-home activities like visiting eateries, movies and newer parts of the city. However, many young women also reported that their enhanced mobility and responsibilities eat into their time to study and attend to their hobbies. These purposive activities were usually supported by parents and our participants could quickly keep widening their limits. Those with no support at home had to learn to fend for themselves and use additional tactics to step out.

Purposeless mobility for extracurricular reasons or “useless” from their parents’ point of views were areas of debate and resistance. Our participants spoke of three forms of purposeless mobility: leisure, a “night out” and public shows. It was difficult to get parental approval for hanging out with friends, evening hobby classes like dancing or singing or staying back in college. Going out at night was a huge issue between parents and daughters. Parents were often worried about the poor street lighting, street corner boys and neighbourhood gossip. Daughters on the other hand wanted freedom to go back and forth without restrictions.

Getting approval for participating in public shows was far more daunting because it involved multiple violations of norms laid out for women such as no nights out, curfew hours, no public display of the body and not being in male company. However, young women who regularly participated in activities requiring late night attendance found that they had to be strategic and convince their parents about safety issues.

The nature of freedom seemed to depend on the internal composition of the family. The demise, illness of a parent or a personal crisis could lead to a complete change in behaviour patterns vis-à-vis mobility. A single mother, for example, may lean more heavily on her daughter to get things done therefore giving her more freedom of movement. Fathers and elder brothers were normally more authoritarian and even insisted on checking their mobiles. Good relations between a mother and daughter usually helped the young woman to escape the father’s restrictions.

Our participants reported that they did not violate some parental fundamental rules. They always informed their parents where they were and gave updates in case of delay or change in plans. It appeared that as much as they craved freer mobility, the young women were also afraid of sexual violence. The idea of a male as protector persisted in their minds. Fathers, brothers were often called upon to act as escorts. The young women silently tolerated the questioning on their friendships with boys. In the absence of male kin, young women depended on male friends to either pick them up or drop them home. When asked what they would do if they had jobs in a distant part of the city, they wondered whether they would accept such jobs at all.

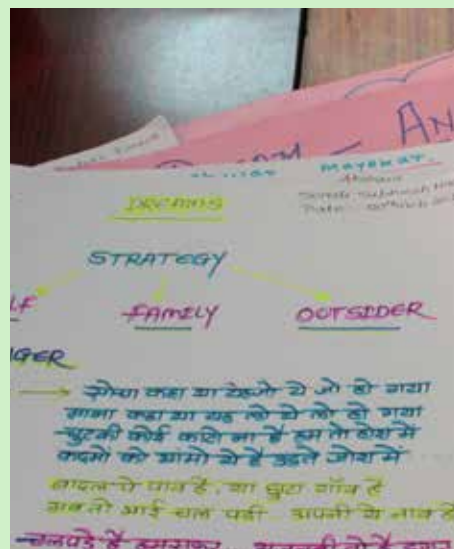
Their biggest challenge with their parents was getting them to accept going out with their boyfriends. All the participants reported that no matter how accommodating their parents were in other matters of mobility, they had strict, almost unbreakable rules about boyfriends. Young women made sure to bring the boys home, introduce them but it still did not dissipate their disapproval. They were often left bewildered and broken by their parents’ disproportionate reactions, insinuations and mistrust. Due to these restrictions, young women had formed their own WhatsApp group so they could message, chat and connect with their friends especially with boyfriends.

Social Participation

Practically none of our participants had ever participated in any social or political action. Their brothers might have been members of the local mitra mandals [youth groups] or with the Ganpati mandals [group that raises funds and organizes the Ganesh festival] during the festival season. So it was a totally new experience for them to come out on the streets in solidarity with some cause and quite a few of them voluntarily showed up for public campaigns.

For most of our young women participants, being a part of social actions was an exhilarating experience as they had hardly stepped out of their neighbourhoods [except to go to college], had been raised to be invisible and not speak with strangers. There was a swift transformation from being shrinking violets to audacious women. Participation in social awareness public campaigns meant that they needed to know the issue they were highlighting, interact with people on the streets, draw public attention by performing flash mobs, shouting slogans or walking in rallies.

The impact was tremendous. All of the participants who were part of campaigns said that they had changed to become more communicative, shed their inhibitions and taken leadership positions. For the young women, another big take-away was the widening of their peer social network as they got exposed to other NGOs as well as volunteers from other colleges. Many of them had not interacted with young people from different communities. Lastly, half of them reported that they had begun to take up cudgels against discriminative practices, be it refusing to pay for free public toilets, cutting off anti women jokes amongst peers and wresting the right to play in public grounds or in streets.



Shweta, a 19 year old is the only child of her parents and stays in a joint family with her two cousin sisters and their parents. Her grandparents were the first to migrate to the city as mill workers. She wants to be a criminal psychologist and a lawyer though her heart lies in art and photography.

She was part of the group of young women who had participated in the Occupy Street Library campaign.

"I had a good time during that campaign. It was not right that women hardly came to these roadside libraries and only men make use of them. Firstly, we went around the neighbourhood and did a survey of men and women about their opinions on the Street Libraries. Some were reluctant to talk. I was surprised at my own ability to reach out to strangers and get them to see our point of view.

Men were aware that no women used the libraries but they gave reasons of work and children. They could not see that women were teased and made to feel uncomfortable. We got a good response from women who said that they will use the library in the future. It's like the saying, if one step is taken then others can take four more. The second step was to go and 'occupy' it so that others would also come. I asked my mother to come and seeing her, my aunt came and then my granny! It was fun and we did some good."

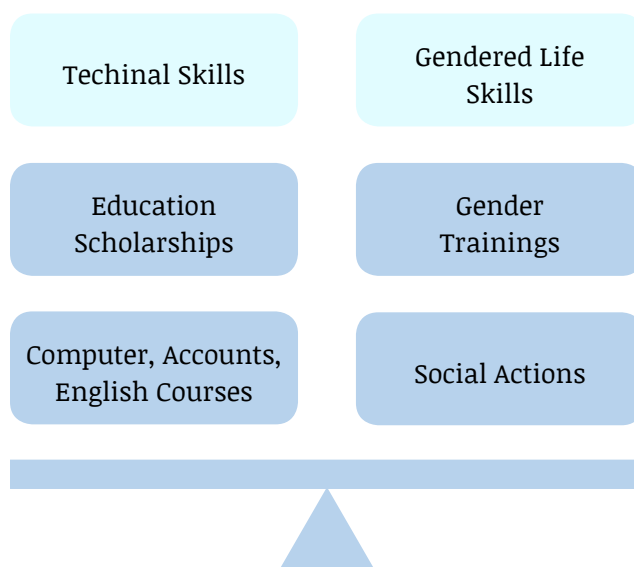
Some Conclusions

Our key question for the evaluation was “how does Akshara contribute to our participants’ empowerment?” and in order to understand it we needed to see explore “... the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability” [Kabeer N, 1999]. Acquiring this ability means moving oneself out of the “condition of disempowerment” towards empowerment. There are various influences and circumstances which can begin, propel and keep this process going which implies that it is a continuous and not a onetime one. We have taken up a small part of their lives as our canvas for exploration.

The girl-led participatory evaluation experiment has shown us what worked and what needed improvement in our program through the voices of our participants. There are limitations to this method of evaluation and there are the advantages of direct and personal feedback. The method of participatory evaluation brought out more nuances on some of our indicators which might have been missed while doing regular base line end line assessments. It also revealed to us unanticipated changes. At the same time, it was fun, spontaneous and experiential. Our participants had the opportunity to think, reflect and articulate feelings and ideas which they too might not have articulated earlier. The Akshara program rests on our belief in girls’ capacity to grow, their right to equal access to opportunities and their capacity to contribute in societal change. The Empowering Dreams Program makes specific interventions and expects certain results, that is, its participants are job ready and gender conscious citizens.

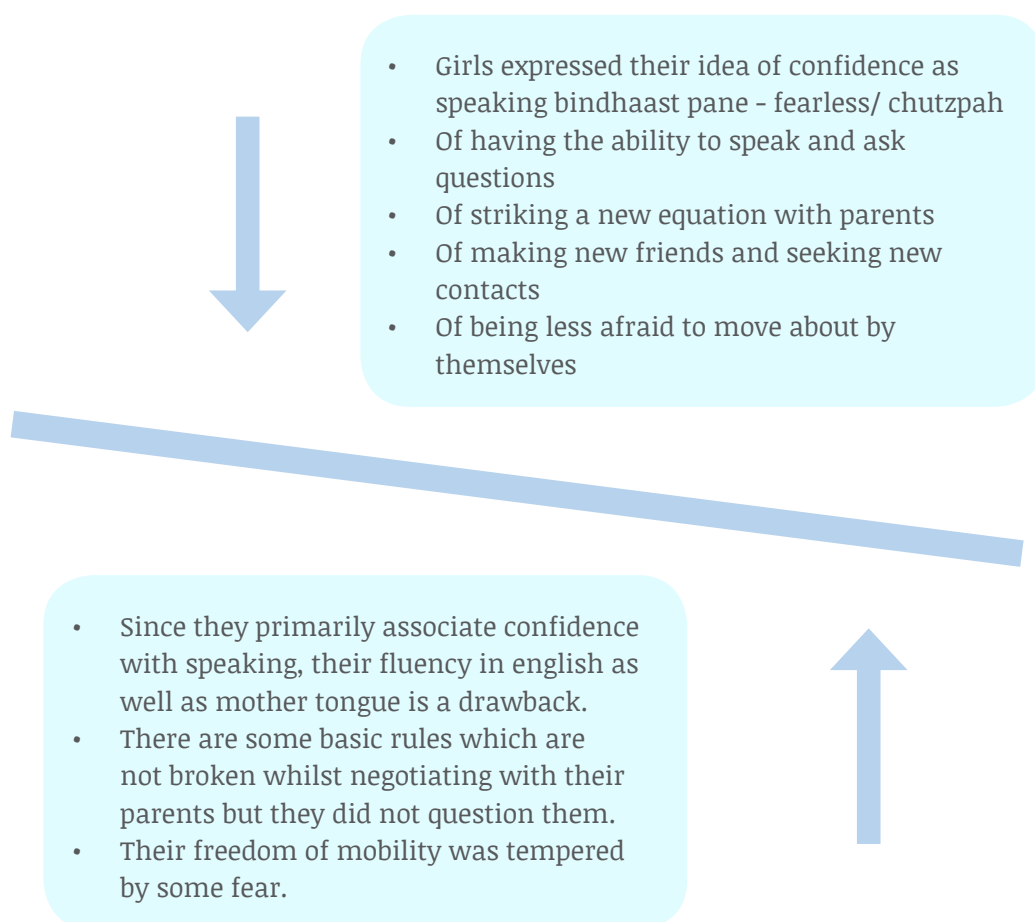
We had unspoken questions in mind but there was no way we could talk to at home.

Diagrammatically the EDP looks like this:



Akshara provides financial aid to those who need it for the completion of junior and senior college education as well as for vocational courses. The Technical Skills component includes basic computer skills, spoken English, accountancy and job readiness requirements like CV writing and interviewing skills. The Gendered Life Skills component include workshops on gender equality that cover social discrimination, tradition of patriarchy, sexual division of labour, legal rights, reproductive rights; on self defence including understanding the gendered body, forms of violence, strategies to combat violence, demonstration of self-defence techniques; on health and sexuality including the human body, reproductive systems, menstruation, taboos; and on relationships including equality, contraception, and negotiations.

What kinds of empowerment did the program contribute to? To understand this more, we analysed our seven indicators of change through the lens provided by Stromquist’s [1995] dimensions of empowerment: the psychological, cognitive, economic and political dimensions, as discussed below. We wanted to know which of these dimensions the Akshara interventions had impacted and how. We found that our interventions had contributed more to the psychological, cognitive and political dimensions of empowerment in varying degrees, and less in the economic dimensions.



An overwhelming four indicators – **growing self confidence, ability to negotiate, build social networks and increased mobility** could be incorporated with the **psychological dimension** or feelings of self-esteem. It appears that Akshara's inputs have helped the participants to grow significantly in self confidence, and their own voices verify this achievement.

The cognitive dimension - or the critical understanding of one's reality was reflected by two indicators, that is **the conceptual understanding of gender inequality and the ability to envision their future**.

"The Health and Sexuality workshop was my favourite. I learnt all about the different kinds of love, affection, and about how girls and boys can be gay, how those who are differently-abled also have sex. We had unspoken questions in mind but there was no way we could talk to at home. But Akshara cleared all doubts". Sonali

"I was so scared when the teacher asked me to break a brick with my bare hands at the end of the Violence Workshop. But I did it and realised that it was of wood and not brick. It was done for us to get over the fear". Nazuka

Our participants were able to quickly and experientially grasp that there was gender inequality and violence against women. They could understand social discrimination and its perpetuation by societal institutions. But even as they grappled with these questions, the deeper layers of their own gender socialisation showed up. For example, menstruation taboos. All of them rejected it in principle but no one mentioned that they would reject them at home. It was difficult to gauge how much of the gender trainings would be turned into behavioural change as the participants balanced their lives between their new ideas and traditional ways.

“I have always dreamt of being in the police force. I’d stopped a constable passing by and enquired from him! Now I jog every morning to get fit. I found out on the Net that there are 4 ranks for girls to apply to. The forms are available and I will sit for written exams and get a physical fitness test”. - Vidya

From their sharing and discussions in the visioning workshop, it was apparent that all the participants had thought of their future and what they dreamt of and what they would take up as jobs. But it also became evident there was some haziness about their future as they kept shifting their aspirations and positions.

The economic dimension or the capacity to generate independent income was a bit premature as our participants were students. But most of them were clear in wanting to take up jobs and some had part time ones to make a bit of money to buy themselves consumer goods.

“My English is not that strong. I can’t speak comfortably for too long only the normal ‘hi and bye’ talk. I learned gradually by doing the courses. I was happy to speak a bit”. Vidya

Whilst there was general enthusiasm at taking courses, most of them were irregular. The attendance registers spoke of their absenteeism in most courses. Some complained of not having time given their household chores and study timings. However, attendance in the CV and interview-skills workshop was good.

“When I applied for my first job, the manager complimented me on my resume saying that most college students’ resumes were full of errors or they faked their job experience”. Pradnya

The political dimension or awareness of power inequalities and the ability to organize and mobilize manifested itself in the social actions indicator. Most of the participants were enthusiastic about taking their politics down to the streets in the form of demonstrations, doing surveys, dancing in a flash mob, and interacting with the public. Some of them eagerly shared personal stories about confrontations and actions that they had taken. Most had developed a sense of confidence in being political on gender issues.

“There were a bunch of boys in college who would harass girls by shouting their names and passing comments. I was so annoyed that I went up to them and confronted them. Seeing their startled expressions, my confidence soared! Now they don’t harass girls anymore.” Vidya

In conclusion, we can put forward that Akshara’s programs have had a positive impact of empowerment on the participants, especially on their self-confidence and ability to negotiate. They have acquired strong, new networks they did not have before, and participated in social actions that were transformative for them. But their statements and sharing of experience also show the contradictions in their minds and the hesitation to take their learning forward, once they move out of the program into new spaces. They are on the road to empowerment, stepping forward and sometimes backward as they learn to speak out, resist, compromise and challenge. Through this evaluation, we have been able to observe how workshop inputs translate into learning for the self, and into social action.

The Route to Confidence

WORKSHOP

"Self defence workshop, I was very scared, it was the first time someone was imparting information. Very scared when asked to break the brick and all, afraid would hurt my hand, but they gave confidence, saying that when one yess? one can get strength and all the pent- up rage against someone finds an outlet. And really didn't feel a thing when I did it, broke it at first at the first attempt! It wasn't brick, it was wood, never imagined I'd be able to break something like this, but I could." - Shivani

"We were informed that abortion is not an offence as commonly believed by all of us. The idea that it's a woman's right to decide was new for us. I still recall that." - Sneha

LEARNING

"Took part in activities, gained knowledge, interacting with others learned what is happening around me and how one can conduct oneself, about communication and how one can express oneself. My confidence increased tremendously and had I had it when I was in Std.11, I'd have bagged a lead role as well." - Yogita

"Being able to put across one's point of view and convince the other person is always tough but it's something I learned in Ashara. To have the information and confront with facts." - Sonali

EVENTS

"I danced for the first time." - Sara, Roshan and Others.

"When I sang on stage it was a turning point because I'd never done this before." - Rashmita

SOCIAL ACTION

"We were all speaking with confidence. Venting our rage at the police and also this whole issue of attire. I was asked about it. I gave a befitting reply." - Roshan

"One just walks on the road to and fro. But shouting slogans, being among girls, being able to speak freely, we even gave out pamphlets, discussed the issue with people, kind of awareness and they listened to what we had to say, speaking confidently to the public. Being able to speak to strangers, convince them." - Pradnya

We have seen how the interventions have led to important outcomes, such as the expanding of the girls' social networks, which has been meaningful and important for them as it has created additional support structures for them, both emotional and informational. This is something we can now consciously begin to strengthen. Along with the in depth and frank exchange of views and personal experiences, the girl-led evaluation showed us several gaps in our program. In the domain of the Self and in particular with reference to self confidence and mobility, they saw themselves making great strides and recommended that Akshara continue some events like the Night Marathon and exposure visits.

The gender workshops should be conducted on holidays and in the afternoons so that it will be convenient for them to attend after college and housework. They also recommended new issues like stalking, domestic violence, caste, dowry and health related diets and physical trainings. In the domain of the Family, the girls were thrilled to share that they loved sharing what they had learnt with their family members. And in their attempts to negotiate with them, they learnt to see another point of view. They were rather elated when they could make their mothers see another view.

"I taught my mother and brother simple techniques of self defence like the elbow jab, kick, hand movements like punching". Shraddha

"I understood how to maintain relationships with family members and friends. I can't have the attitude that I'll do whatever I want. I need to heed them and understand my parents' point of view". Vidya

"A lot of our views got cleared up. For instance, the idea that if a girl changes her boyfriend she's not a nice girl, her character is in doubt but it was explained that if she no longer likes him it's her opinion, personal choice. There is this common perception that if a girl changes her partners she is of loose morals. So, at home, once when this came up and there was all this talk about how what some girl was doing was a sin, I told my mother, 'Please don't malign the girl. How do you know what the reality is, what that girl's situation is that prompted her to change partners?' My mother did see my point of view then." Sara

They recommended that Akshara have more events which will involve their parents like the Ma Beti Melawa [Mother Daughter Program]. At the same time, they saw the value of having separate spaces from their families where they could mingle with other girls or just sit. They asked for Safe Spaces to relax, get together, form friendships, dialogue and generate collective and creative solutions to pressing issues. They wanted another way of expanding their social networks. They also recommended more interaction on What's App and other methods as it is difficult for them to come together all the time.

Most of them had taken part in Akshara's social actions and campaigns and enjoyed the events and exposure to social and political participation. But their main interest was in seeking support to make them independent individuals in society. They would like more economically oriented inputs like support in finding jobs and scholarships for higher education and skill courses. This is the combination of inputs that Akshara will have to move into, that is, a strong gender component with an economic empowerment component.

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*“I just wanted to see for myself
what the night is like.”*



Annexure

ANNEXURE 1

Photography & Journal Writing

Check List

Photograph

(using mobile phone camera)
Give caption for each photo so that it is clear what it depicts
You can use photos taken earlier

Take full length so that attire seen
Be creative. Avoid posing the subject.

- a. 1 photo of Grandparent
- b. 1 photo of Parent
- c. 1 photo of sibling
- brother/sister
- d. 1 selfie with family
- e. 1 selfie

Journal Writing

MY PEOPLE

1. Write down name of native place
2. Write down which year came to city
3. Write down whether stayed in any other place in city
4. Write down which year came to current residence
5. Current age
6. Educational level
7. Livelihood – home based or other? Who all participate?
8. Traditional talent within family? Who?
9. Is there any traditional livelihood? Still in practice? Who?

Assess Educational Level:

- i) What is the education of your mother?
- ii) Learner Level – Write which generation learner you are

Assess Age of Marriage/Decision Maker

- iii) What was the age when your mother got married?
- iv) In your family, has there been any discussion on your marriage?
- v) If yes, who all were part of the discussion? You and your mother's role?

Photograph

- f.1 photo of home – external
How space is used for different purposes: Inside home
- g.1 photo of home – morning
- h.1 photo of home – noon
- i.1 photo of home – evening
- j.1 photo of home – night

- k.1 photo of Water source
- l.1 photo of Toilet – condition of public toilets
- m.1 photo daily route
- n.1 photo of locality- day
- o. 1 photo of locality – night

Journal Writing

MY HOME

10. Write down address of residence
11. Write down your daily routine
12. Write down male members' daily routine

Staying out

- vi) What takes place when you get home late from Akshara, how do you feel? Do you automatically give an explanation on why you are late?
- vii) Is this the same for male members of your family?

Getting Approval

- viii) How did you get permission on the form for this programme?
- ix) Were you asked to explain, what did you say?
- x) Describe what has changed if any in getting permission since you first joined Akshara? How many years ago was that?
- xi) In short write what you have learnt in Akshara workshops

MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

13. Write down who fills water in the family and at what time.
14. If that person is unable or absent who takes on the responsibility?
15. Write down who uses public toilets in the family
16. Write down who uses pay for use toilets in the family
17. Write down safe and unsafe areas and describe why
18. Write how you adapt to unsafe areas

Safe/Unsafe Areas

- xii) Have you faced sexual harassment in your neighbourhood/outside your neighbourhood?
- xiii) Describe and write how did you deal with it.

Public Toilet

- xiv) Have you thought of asking for proper public toilets?
- xv) Have you done anything about it?

Photograph

- p.1 photo of festival
- q.1 photo of favourite attire
- r.1 photo of favourite food
- s.1 photo of anything you did in your home
- t. 1 photo of how you use Akshara space
- u. Add any photo or sketch or visual about what you enjoyed at Akshara
- v. Have you taken any photo of past workshops or events? Use those.

Journal Writing

MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

19. Write down festivals in which you participate
20. Write down whether besides festivals you interact with residents from other areas

MY SPACE

21. Write down any animal which you feel represents you best when:
 - i. Schoolgoing age
 - ii. Now
 - iii. Give reasons for both in terms of what kind of personality traits that animal represents
22. Write down when you wear your favourite attire
23. Write down what are the family's traditional food habits
24. Describe your aspirations for yourself
25. Write down what your family aspires for you.
26. Have you shared what you aspire for with them? With whom? What was their reaction?

Conflict points

xvi) Are there any conflicts in the family over your choices? Eg., food, dress, your participation in events, any other?

AKSHARA SPACE

27. How often do you come to Akshara and for what purposes? Describe what you feel when you enter Akshara. When else do you feel like this?
28. What were the things you enjoyed in Akshara? Describe why you felt these were turning moments in your life

ANNEXURE 2

Story Writing and Telling Workshop Module

Participants were divided into the three groups to share their personal stories. The facilitator asked each group to either choose one story from the list below and develop it into a stronger, deeper version OR create a new story.

1. Your friend's father calls you at night and asks to speak to his daughter who said she would be with you. She is not with you. You were not informed by your friend that she would be using you as an excuse. Now you are caught – you don't want to be disloyal to your friend but you cannot lie to her father..... Continue the story
2. A girl is sent to live with her older brother in the city so that she can complete her higher schooling. He is employed in a full time job. Trying to complete household chores, attend school and study, she falls ill frequently. Soon she drops out of school. Continue the story.....
3. You notice a neighbour stalking a young girl. But no one else notices anything untoward. You speak to her and she refuses to say anything. Later she goes missing. The police arrive. Continue the story....
4. You receive a marriage proposal. Your family wants you to accept it and you are also agreeable to it. But after the engagement, the fiancé gets transferred. It would mean shifting out of the city and discontinuing your education. Continue the story ...

Guidelines:

Look back over your years with Akshara, bring what you had heard and learnt or a change you might have experienced in your life or your interactions with your family and community into your stories.

- Title your story.
- Who was involved?
- When did it take place?
- What happened? Give activity, details, sequence, background
- Where did it take place? Location details.
- Why did you choose this story – why is it significant for you?
- What difference did it make till now and will make in future?

Stories which were developed by the participants were read out and the Resource Person helped organise them so that the stories had an Intro, a Body and a climax or conclusion.

ANNEXURE 3

Questions for Focus Group Discussions

FGD Objective:

To explore how girls negotiate on the choices they face in life

1. FGD Questions:

- 1.1. Which of the workshops have helped you in talking to your parents? Please give the name of the workshop and an example of how you negotiated an issue or taken permission from your parent.
- 1.2. What was the reaction in your family when you did something not expected of your gender e.g. fix a light bulb, speak up for yourself when you are the subject of discussion amongst adults, or opened your own bank account.
- 1.3. You do not believe in taboos around menstruation but your mother believes in them, what do you do?
- 1.4. When have you taken your mother's side when she expressed an opinion or did something which was not expected of her and went against everyone else?
- 1.5. How do you respond when a parent says you must start earning a living? And when you're expected to hand over your earnings to the parent? But you want to buy clothes from your earnings?

2. FGD Questions:

- 2.1. Your parent tells you to focus on studying alone but you wish to pursue all your interests, how do you negotiate being allowed to do so? eg., music, dancing, sports, photography, poetry, singing, painting, fashion
- 2.2. When a parent tells you that a relative or neighbour commented on the clothes you wear, how do you negotiate your freedom to wear what you wish inside and outside the house?
- 2.3. How did you decide which course you will take in college? Were your parents consulted? Did they offer suggestions or you made your own choice and then sought approval?

FGD Objective:

To understand how girls negotiate on the topic of marriage and related issues

3. FGD Questions:

- 3.1. Your parent tells you to focus on your studies and paid work and not get into relationships. How would you respond if a) you are already in a relationship b) you believe you need to be trusted to take the right decision?
- 3.2. If your sister or brother wants to go in for a love marriage and your parents are opposed to it, what stand would you take?

How do you respond when your parent speaks of dowry? eg, you
- 3.3. earn first and then you can pay your own dowry. What are your beliefs on dowry?

FGD Objective: To understand how girls respond in interpersonal conflicts and bullying in college or their neighbourhood.

4. FGD Questions:

- 4.1. How do you respond when you face slurs on caste, religion or socio-economic status?
- 4.2. How do you react when there are fights over water or use of the toilet?
- 4.3. Your friends start ignoring you. How do respond and negotiate that you want to be part of the group and want to be friends and part of their WhatsApp group?
- 4.4. How did you respond when faced with objectionable content on WhatsApp or FB or when someone objected to what you posted on FB or circulated?

5. FGD Questions:

- 5.1. When was your best negotiation done? With who and on what issue?
- 5.2. Which issue was not discussed and which needed to be part of today's discussion?

ANNEXURE 4

Mapping Change Project – Guidelines for an In-Depth Interview

1. Akshara workshops, skill and space

- 1.1. When did you join Akshara? How did you know of Akshara?
- 1.2. Why did you choose to keep coming back to Akshara? What experiences do you remember which motivated you to return? Who all were there at that first workshop?
- 1.3. What was it about that first experience with Akshara that made you want to come back?
- 1.4. Many girls have described Akshara as a 'free' space? Do you feel so? What does it mean when you say "free"
- 1.5. How often do you come to Akshara when there is no programme and what do you do here?
- 1.6. What do you not like about the Akshara space?
- 1.7. In these past 2-3 years you must have attended several workshops [like on gender, violence, relationships, winlido] which is the one you remember first or your best one?
- 1.8. Akshara also has several skill based workshops [cv, giving interviews, computer and English].
What did you learn from it? Where did you learn to speak English?
- 1.9. How did the cv and interview help you when applying for a job?

2. Taking social and personal actions

- 2.1. Akshara organizes a lot of public demonstrations and events. What street or public social actions have you attended in the past years? Your role?
- 2.2. Any experience you've had of eve teasing?
- 2.3. How did taking part in it change your life? At the personal, family, college, neighbourhood level?
- 2.4. What has been your experience of domestic violence in the family/ neighbourhood? Domestic violence refers to physical assaults, verbal intimidation, violence in any form, which takes place within a family.

- 2.5. Have you encouraged or supported your family members or friends to improve their lives?
- In what specific way do you feel you need more training on how to combat sexual harassment?
- 2.6. Society does not encourage girls to voice their views.
When have you spoken in a public gathering in the past 3 years?

3. Knowledge/ info on gender

- 3.1. What change did Akshara bring about in your life in the following areas:
 - a) New information, knowledge you gained: Gender equality. Sexuality. Menstruation. Relationships. Decision making
 - b) Change in your behavior as in how you would act in a particular situation, which you wouldn't earlier
 - c) Change in your perspective, at how you now look at things differently
- 3.2. You have been through many workshops and discussed gender discrimination:-
- 3.3. In the last four weeks, tell me all the times when you felt like a girl?
- 3.4. Whom else did you share knowledge of what you learned in Akshara and what change did this bring about? E.g., gender equality.
- 3.5. How much do you know of your menstruation system? Taboos.

4. Self esteem

- 4.1. What is your understanding of the term 'confident' and when have you felt it, when have you not felt it?
- 4.2. Sometimes personal criticism can be harmful and hurtful and shatter self-esteem. Share any such incidents in your life.

5. NEGOTIATIONS AND COPING

- 5.1. Name one area of conflict with your parents? How do you argue with them? E.g. your mother wants you to do housework and you want to join a course?
- 5.2. Share instances when you've been told you're back answering and what happened at that time. Even though it wasn't your intent?
- 5.3. Share instances when you have accepted without question what your family decides for you. What were the consequences?

- 5.4. A family discussion is taking place to arrive at some decision or there is an argument between family members.
- In such a scenario, did you offer your opinion?
 - If yes, what was the family's response? If no, when did you feel you should have spoken up?
- 5.5. When there is a problem in the family or college, sometimes external advice or help is sought.
-When have you sought such external intervention on your behalf?
It could be friends, a relative, teacher, Akshara facilitator.
- 5.6. What about marriage, has that ever come up?
- 5.7. Were Akshara not there in your life what would it be like?
- 5.8. Anything about the Akshara space?
Any suggestions for Akshara about what you feel it can do?
- 5.9. Anything you wish to ask, say?

“A lot of our views got cleared up”



