

DEDICATING DAUGHTERS



Revisiting the Evil Social Custom of Sex Trafficking in North-West India



A Report by Prerana, Mumbai



FINAL REPORT

Revisting the Evil Social Custom of Sex Trafficking in North-West India

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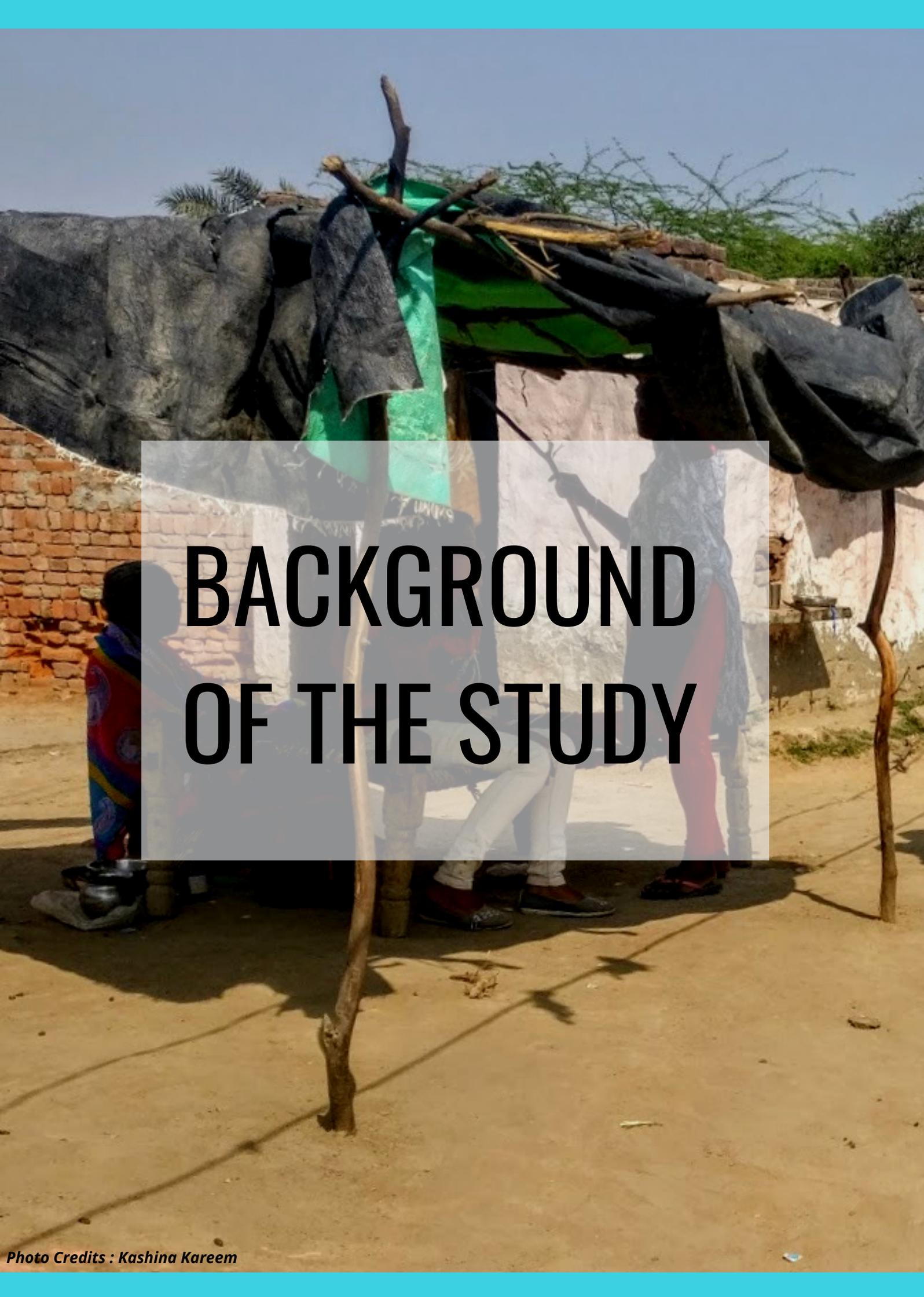
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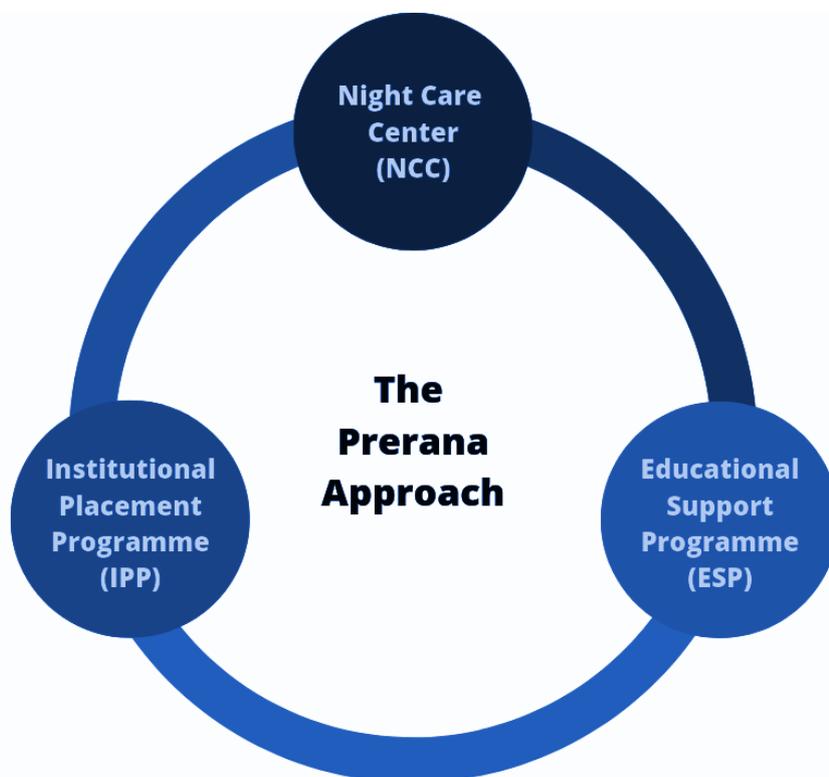
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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

About Prerana

Prerana started working in the red-light areas (RLAs) of Mumbai in the year 1986. The goal was to protect the rights of the children born in the RLAs by providing them safe spaces and opportunities to learn and grow. Prerana's three-pronged model was acknowledged by the Govt. of India in the First national policy on child trafficking and National Plan of Action 1998.¹



Prerana's interventions were also appreciated by the United States Department of State, who encouraged Prerana to start an Anti-Trafficking Resource Centre (ATC) in the year 1999. The ATC, started about twenty years ago, is a think tank to provide the missing and critical knowledge base, much required to sustain a social movement against trafficking in South Asia.

The ATC provides the following services in support of the broader anti trafficking movement namely - information dissemination, research and documentation, sensitization and training, undertaking capacity development programmes, legal intervention, generating social awareness, facilitating networking, facilitating victims collectives, advocacy, creating and disseminating critical instruments like policy analysis, action plans/plan of action, handbooks, manuals, protocols, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), checklists and guidelines.

¹ Govt. of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development. "Report of the Committee on Prostitution, Child Prostitutes and Children of Prostitutes & Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitative of Women and Children." Report of the Committee on Prostitution, Child Prostitutes and Children of Prostitutes & Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitative of Women and Children, 1998.

Prerana's pioneering efforts in the Post Rescue domain

In 1996, on the night of February 5, the Mumbai police raided several brothels in Mumbai and 'rescued' around 456 'minors'. The youngest among them was 14 years old while the oldest was 30 years old. This rescue operation was handled in an unorganized, unprofessional manner causing considerable distress to the 'rescued' girls. In this operation, Prerana identified numerous gaps and lacunae in conducting the 'raid' and rescue, and in the handling of the girls after the rescue.

Three years later, in yet another mass raid, Mumbai Police rescued 99 minor girls. This time, Prerana was comparatively better prepared and provided them comprehensive victim assistance services, legal assistance and representation, as well as rehabilitation avenues. Since the mass raid and rescue operation of 1999 in Mumbai, Prerana started working closely and consistently with minor girls rescued from commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. Prerana coined the term 'Post Rescue Operation'(PRO) to represent a domain in the anti-trafficking interventions and nurtured this field with observations, analyses and ground level experiences.

PRO involves a series of positive interventions, provisions and measures to help the rescued victim in her journey, starting immediately after the rescue to the point of economic rehabilitation and social reintegration. PRO also covers the physical and mental recovery of the victim from the traumatizing experience of being trafficked and sexually exploited.

In the early 2000s, the situation with respect to PRO, in the country was appalling. Over the past two decades, however a well-informed civil society movement has generated impressive knowledge and experience around this unexplored and highly neglected domain of social intervention. The civil society movement started with a focus around a few areas on the PRO front like prosecution in the court, victim's testimony, its relative impact on conviction, post rescue psycho-social care, vocational training, etc. Today, its focus is steadily shifting to victim-centric assistance, trauma informed care and services, away from being limited to the realm of the criminal justice system.

Absence of formal PRO intervention adversely impacted the success rate in investigation and prosecution. Universally, it is admitted today that the victim's co-operation is indispensable for the success of investigation. Very often, delays in filing chargesheets, dismissal of cases, discharge of the accused and acquittal, happen largely when the victim's co-operation is not ensured in the processes of investigation and prosecution. In the same way, wherever victims' participation has been ensured, the success rate for investigation and prosecution has improved remarkably. The investment in rehabilitation and reintegration of the victims is found underutilised or wastefully duplicated in the absence of a professionally managed and executed post rescue assistance to the victims.

Rescue is merely the first step in restoring the freedom and dignity of a victim in danger and captivity, which in this case would be from the custody of the perpetrators of organized prostitution. While working with the rehabilitation homes for rescued minors since 2000, Prerana came across the hard-hitting reality that the infrastructural and managerial conditions in the Shelter Home were subhuman, anti-child, and hostile. Certain urgent and insurmountable difficulties in immediately responding to the situation of the rescued girls, especially caused by the subhuman conditions in the state-run Home for the girls, compelled Prerana to take recourse to the Mumbai High Court seeking its urgent intervention. That was Prerana's first Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in India in the anti-trafficking domain that revived Anti-Human Trafficking initiatives in India. The PIL is used even today by organizations as a strong advocacy and reform tool.

Among the several reliefs that the above PIL provided in the area of PRO, there was one of unparalleled significance - the setting up of a Guidance & Monitoring Committee (GMC). The GMC is a joint body of the state government and the civil society organizations ordered by the Mumbai High Court in response to the petition by Prerana. The GMC was to monitor every aspect of the Government Home in Deonar, Mumbai from infrastructure to the quality of services. As a part of this PIL, Prerana was given an opportunity to make an inclusive group of civil society organisations (CSOs) who were willing to provide a variety of services to the rescued minor juvenile girls who had been placed in the state-run Home.

History of the customary/traditional practices of prostitution in India

The decade of 1999 to 2009 was marked by the mushrooming of new destinations for sex trafficking called the Dance Bars. They were becoming the new retailing outlets of sex trade operating behind the legitimacy of dance and entertainment activity attached to the liquor bars in the city of Mumbai. Like a wildfire, the Dance Bars soon mushroomed outside Mumbai too, reaching the neighboring, Thane, and Raigad districts.

Supposedly, on the suspicion that the Dance Bars were the pick-up points for sex trade or the brothels for soliciting, the police kept raiding them incessantly and each time, they rescued many Hindi speaking girls (the minors that were rescued were almost always between the age group of 14 -17) from the North-Western part of India. Distinct from the established red-light areas, a little better economically placed class of customers patronized the Dance Bars. There was one more speciality of the Dance Bars - the common socio-geographic background of the girls who were made to dance there.

Prerana looked into the profile and situation of the girls rescued from the Dance bars and came across the phenomenon of non-religious but caste based evil social customs of dedicating daughters into the sex trade. This was, in some ways, similar to what had already been prevalent as the temple based evil social custom of *Devadasi*, (the servants of the Gods) prevalent in South, West and East India.

Certain communities from several villages on the confluence of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh were notorious for the rampant practice of trafficking the girls in their families, young daughters and sisters into the sex trade. Earlier they used to be supplied to the infamous *Kothas* and *Mujra* Houses (houses of shadow entertainment) in the headquarters of the feudal powers like Lucknow, Kanpur, Gwalior, etc. A majority of the dancers were, in fact, hereditary professional performers from a range of tribes across India: **Deredar, Gandharva, Bancchadas, Nat, Rajnat, Bedia, Kanjar**, to name a few. These comprised of the old classical courtesans as well as other dancing girls. In these communities², barely any of the girls in the community would get an opportunity to get married and settle in a family life, provided someone could afford to pay a hefty bride price. Everyone in the community believed that the remaining girls were born to be prostitutes. Thus, they were the main breadwinners in the family. The men in the community saw it below their dignity to work as they were to live on the money earned from the prostitution of the girls in the family like their sisters and daughters. Hence, the men had no ostensible means of livelihood other than trafficking and pimping the girls and women in their family. The girls would solicit along the highways, and also be invited by other communities for group dance performances, which would also lead to their sexual exploitation.

² Jolly, Asit. "Sex as Trade and Tradition: For Bedia Families, Sex Is a Family Business Where Young Girls Engage in Prostitution with the Consent of the Community." *India Today*, 24 Oct. 2013, www.indiatoday.in/magazine/society-the-arts/story/20131028-sex-trade-and-tradition-family-business-bedia-families-768084-1999-11-30.

The Dance Bars in Mumbai offered new, open ended and lucrative openings to these communities to traffic the girls in their families and monitor their commercial sexual exploitation. The entire system was so well oiled that hardly anyone, be it the enforcement agencies, or the civil society anti-trafficking sector, felt that it was a form of human trafficking, or even that there was something wrong and violative in it.

As the post rescue scenario in Mumbai started gradually moving towards the establishment of rule of law, the minor girls started getting routinely rescued and produced before the Child Welfare Committees (CWC) of Mumbai. The CWC often invariably entrusted the Home Inquiry (now referred to as Social Investigation Report (SIR) required under the Juvenile Justice Act (Care and Protection); JJA-2015) of the girls to organisations like Prerana. In most of the cases, the families belonged to either Agra in Uttar Pradesh or districts like Sagar, Ratlam, Morena in Madhya Pradesh or Tonk and Alwar in the state of Rajasthan.

In face of public criticism and as the demand for the closure of the Dance Bars started gaining broader support from various quarters in the state of Maharashtra, the issue of institutionalized sex trafficking needed to have received prime attention. Unfortunately, neither the child protection groups nor the newly emerged anti trafficking groups addressed the issue in the states of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Madhya Pradesh (MP) and Rajasthan. On the contrary, one NGO, engaged in rural development in Rajasthan, when contacted by Prerana to seek its assistance in conducting the Social Investigation for a girl rescued from a Dance Bar, actually aggressively put a demand to restore the girl to the 'father'. There were no documents establishing the biological relationship between the girl and the man claiming to be her father. The NGO further on 'vouched' for the character of the person claiming to be the father, also vouching for the safety of the girl if handed over back to the community. In many cases, the men who come forward as the fathers are not related to the girls and the area. Instead, they are actually involved in exploiting the girl for their own gain.

The indifference and apathy of these groups, and the absence of anti-trafficking (or otherwise any kind of positive social intervention) in these communities to protect the girl child was a cause for concern. Around 2005, Prerana sensitized the young men in these communities, and the brothers of such girls and brought them together to understand the need to fight the evil custom. They were brought together once in Bhopal (capital city of the state of Madhya Pradesh) for a two-day workshop. Subsequently, their delegation also visited Prerana's field project in Kamathipura, Mumbai for an exposure-study tour. However, in absence of local follow up, the work could not progress beyond that. By 2005, the Dance Bars had also been shut in the state and the girls got dispersed away from Mumbai.

The sloppily articulated position of the State government to ban the Dance Bars from the state, failed repeatedly at every level when challenged in the court of law. Initially, the Dance Bars had to be given licenses to operate. Licensing allowed the flow of the girls from these communities to various places in Maharashtra like Mumbai, Thane and Raigad districts.

About the Community

There is a history of caste-based and racial oppression behind the degradation of women from these communities that needs to be taken into consideration while analyzing the current situation. In the nineteenth century, when the East India Company had forcibly taken over India for trade purposes, they came across several nagging and insurmountable problems of political rebellion and serious crimes along the otherwise promising trade routes. One particular problem called *Thuggee* (crookery) was the most tough to handle. As the recorded history goes in response to the request by the East India Company, and in order to make the trade routes safer for travel and commerce, the British around 1865 formed a special army and promulgated a draconian law called **The Criminal Tribes Act**.

The law declared several communities especially in north, north-western and western India as criminals by birth, having propensity to live by crime or as the law stated - "*addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences*". As per this law, a number of castes were "*notified*", and termed as "*hereditary criminals*". They were alienated from traditional sources of income, and also susceptible to a range of state-sanctioned abuses.

In the suppressive⁴ action that followed the formation of special army by the British forces, there occurred a large-scale massacre of the men from these communities. The remaining men were made to live under stricter control such as no permission to move from their hamlets, and daily attendance at the police station. As they were declared belonging to the 'criminal' tribes, the magistrates would casually send them to imprisonment merely on a suspicion and charge without a fair trial. This practice, it is said, made the women of these communities available for pleasure and labor to the powerful elites and dominant communities of the local villages. After Independence in 1951, this thoroughly inhuman and unjust law was repealed. However, the sexual exploitation of the women of these communities had by then become deeply institutionalized. From within the communities itself, strong vested interests that had become entrenched, wanted the system of sex trafficking for their own women to continue and flourish.

The Bedia were one of the communities that were notified under the Criminal Tribes Act. The Bedia community often refers to the sex trade as their *khandaani dhandha* (ancestral trade). There is a prevalence of sexualized caste-based labour in this community where the unmarried women run the household and support their families through their commercial sexual exploitation.

⁴ Prabhu, Maya. "The Indian Caste Where Wives Are Forced into Sex Work." Human Rights | Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, 28 Nov. 2016, www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/11/indian-caste-prostitution-hereditary-161122124031163.html.

Married women usually do not participate in the trade. At a young age, the family girls are asked to choose between prostitution and marriage, when they do not have the understanding of the consequences of either of the choices. More than a business, it is considered as an ancestral tradition where Bedia girls are given consent from the community to carry on the '*dhandhaa*' – prostitution

The men do not engage in any kind of wage based or even non-wage-based work for the major part of their lives. The women that are sold into dance bars and other entertainment sites, are also prostituted. They are the breadwinners, often feeding a family of huge numbers; the others in the family live on their earnings. A 2005 survey by the Research Centre for Women's Studies at SNDT Women's University and Forum Against Oppression of Women on women working in Dance Bars in Mumbai had indicated that nearly 42% of the bar dancers were from the Bedia community. Hence, even if these women migrate, their families negotiate their commercial sexual exploitation through dance bars, stage shows, etc. to support their families back home.

During most of the Home visits conducted by Prerana during the visit to the community, Prerana found most of the village men at home and though they do report that they have been gainfully engaged in some kind of work, they have not ever been able to give any verifiable evidence of their gainful engagement. These men are invariably found at home during the day.⁶

In a survey conducted by World Vision India in 2014 in seven Rajnat settlements, where the NGO worked – Bhojpura, Teelawala, Nandlalpura, Bandarsindri, Bargaon, Narayana and S. Dhaba (Ganji) – in Jaipur and Ajmer districts, found socio-cultural and economic reasons behind young women getting into commercial sex. Of the 170 households and 185 girls/women victims surveyed under this study, – mostly in the age group of 18-30 years – a majority simply follow the family tradition because of poor economic conditions.

5 Forum Against Oppression of Women & Research Centre for Women's Studies. Background and Working Conditions of Women Working as Dancers in Dance Bars. Mumbai: RCWS (SNDT University) and FAOW, 2006.
The study stated the composition of various communities in the dance bars -Bedia 16%, Rajput 4.6%, Raj-Nut 2.2%, Marwari 2.4%, Maratha 3.4%, OBC 5.4%, Brahmin 6%, Kayastha 3.2%, Thakur 7.2%, SC 5.8%, Others 14.6%, Nepal 1.2%, did not report caste 28%. The study showed that there were 42 percent (out of 500) women who were from 'traditional dancing/entertainment/sex work communities'

6 Dhar, Aarti. "Rajnat' Girls Unable to Quit Flesh Trade." The Hindu, The Hindu, 15 Mar. 2015, www.thehindu.com/news/national/rajnat-girls-unable-to-quit-flesh-trade/article6996658.ece.

Select Cases through Prerana's Post Rescue Intervention (from the North- Western communities)

1. Rescue from a Dance Bar in Mumbai Suburbs (Case 1)

In December 2015, 34 women were rescued from a dance bar in western suburbs of Mumbai. Four cases of minor girls were referred to Prerana under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2000. The Prerana Team interacted with these girls at the Government Home where they were temporarily placed at the time. As per the Order of the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) Mumbai city, the Team also conducted a social investigation to understand the socio-economic condition of the family. All four girls lived with their families in an extreme western suburb in Mumbai. After interacting with the families, a few common observations were:

- a) The family had no evidence of a sustainable and ostensible source of income. The mothers claimed to be working in beauty parlours. But when the Team would ask for more details on their place of work, they would falter. In cases where the mothers did give a name and address of the beauty parlours, after verification the case workers found out that they were not employed at the respective parlour.
- b) The families were living in well-furnished 1 to 2 BHK apartments and were paying a rent of about Rs. 8,000/- to 10,000/- per month. Often when the social workers met them, they claimed to be barely making the ends meet.
- c) In a few cases, the claimants who were seeking custody of the girls could not produce evidence (documents) of being related to the girls. However, the claimants often tried to legitimize the relationships using photographs.
- d) All the 4 claimants (who claimed to be mothers) asserted to have absolutely no idea about their daughters going to Dance Bars to earn money in spite of staying with them under the same roof.
- e) Three of the four girls in this case were originally from Uttar Pradesh and belonged to the Bedia community while one of them was from Rajasthan and belonged to the Nat community.

2. Congress House Rescue

Just as there are some areas infamous as the red-light districts, there are some buildings which have functioned as the resource centres and headquarters of sex trade in Mumbai. Two buildings among them received the maximum ill repute - Jamuna Mansion, and Congress House. Very often these places served as the first resting point for the trafficked girls. The traffickers would use Congress House as a rest house where they would stay on after dropping the trafficked girls.

Surprisingly, it was observed that as the raids and rescue operations in Mumbai gathered momentum, more and more girls from these communities working in the Dance Bars, started getting taken into custody. Keeping with the rule of law, they also started getting produced before the CWCs, depending upon their apparent age. This resulted in a new chapter in the PRO field. The traffickers who were mostly fathers, brothers, or mothers of these girls started quickly responding to the situation of raids and rescue. They were put in touch with the lawyers, coordinated from Congress House. The lawyers would adopt a few strategies and rely upon certain documents to circumvent the law and the procedures, as well as liaison with the prosecutors, magistrates, shelter authorities and the police. Very often on getting the news of their daughter's 'arrest' the mothers would come down to Mumbai armed with all the documents required to prove that the daughter was not a minor. The mothers would stay at the Congress House and visit their daughters in the courtroom to take their custody. Very often it was alleged that the Dance Bar owners and agents themselves used to bring the families and keep them in Congress House to get the custody of the girls. They would also arrange to file petitions in court to get the girls out in their possession faster as the girls used to fetch huge earnings to them when free to dance in their bars.

In a rescue conducted by the Nagpada Police Station in the year 2017, three apparent minor girls were rescued from Congress House, Grant Road. After the girls were presented in front of the Child Welfare Committee, the girls were referred to Prerana. When the social workers conducted a social investigation, it was observed that the mothers had moved to Mumbai from their respective villages after the rescue had been conducted, and were living out of a small room in Congress House. Even though the three of them were not related, the mothers were living together in the room knowing what the area was infamous for. While interacting with the mothers, initially they claimed to have no knowledge of what their daughters were involved in. However, over a period of time, when a sister of the rescued girls appeared, she disclosed to the Team that she was pregnant. On asking about the father of the child, the mother mentioned about the reckless behavior of men in this trade (meaning the sex trade). Subsequently, after (reading the Social Investigation Report) due inquiry, the CWC passed an Order for the children to be rehabilitated through a Children's Home.

3. Missing girl cases

In two cases that were referred to Prerana in 2016, the girls had run away from their house, where their family was forcing them to get into prostitution. When the families registered a missing complaint with the police, the case of forced commercial sexual exploitation of minors was brought to cognizance. These girls were from Agra, Uttar Pradesh and belonged to the Bedia community. The girls over a period of time confided in the social workers about their appalling condition when they were forced into prostitution by their families back home. Subsequently, a Care Plan was worked for the rehabilitation of the victims.

4. Rescue from a Dance Bar in Mumbai Suburbs (Case 2)

In the month of December 2017, 39 girls were rescued from a Dance Bar in Mumbai Suburbs by the Social Service Branch of the Mumbai Police. About 14 of them, apparently minors, were sent to the relevant Children's Home. After verifying their ages, seven minors (established through Age Verification) were referred to organizations working with the victims of commercial sexual exploitation for conducting Social Investigations and providing them socio-legal support. Prerana was referred five such cases. 4 children out of the 5 cases referred, belonged to Rajasthan.

After interacting with the girls at the home, it was gathered that women in their families (most of them spoke of their paternal aunts) had been inducted into the sex trade at a young age. They shared about the stories they had heard while growing up about their aunts dancing in Mumbai's Dance Bars. They spoke of it as a family custom. Following or accepting it seemed more of a lack of understanding of choice. While speaking to the girls, contact details of the next of kin were shared with the case workers. The parents, in most cases mothers had come down to Mumbai after their girls had been rescued. Three of them were located in Mira Road (western suburbs of Mumbai), one in Malad Malavani (a western suburb) and one in Chembur (a central suburb).

A home visit was planned to their respective residences in Mumbai to meet with the family here. After meeting a few family members in Mumbai, the need for understanding the socio-economic situation of the family and largely the community back in the village was felt. Thus, the Team decided to visit these districts back in Rajasthan to assess the current socio-economic standing of this community.



THE VISITS TO RAJASTHAN

About the Visits

To build a contemporary understanding of the Nat & Bedia community, the Team from Prerana (hereafter referred to as the Team) approached the study through casework interventions. Three districts across the state, where the community is currently dispersed were chosen through the cases. Once the districts and villages were shortlisted, Phagi - Bhojpura, Tonk – Siras, Ludhawai – Bharatpur, the girls (back at the child care institution) were asked to roughly map their addresses (*Enclosure 1*).

Local Childline was contacted in each district and the village details were shared with them. Due to previous experiences, and to maintain confidentiality, the Team ensured that complete case details were not shared with the Childline Team much in advance to the visit. On meeting the Childline Team in person, details of the cases were shared. In order to assess the situation better, the Team decided to approach the Child Welfare Committees (CWC) of the respective districts to understand the perspective and experiences of the child care authorities towards the issue. Through the local Childline, a meeting with the CWCs in the three districts was arranged.

Through these cases (referred by the CWC Mumbai), the Team was able to visit the communities and speak with a few people from and around the community, as well as assess the socio-economic condition of the communities. Through Childline, the Team visited a few other service providers in and around the districts to understand their experiences with this community in the past few years. Interaction with the community helped the Team to gauge the perspective of the community towards this traditional custom and the repercussions on the young girls within the communities. Detailed observations helped in building and strengthening an understanding of the community further.

The methodology was based on field observations, unstructured interviews with stakeholders and other knowledgeable persons, community visits, visits to various agencies, service providers etc. to gather information and to cross check the information gathered from different stakeholders.

Data of girls from Rajasthan

After due analysis of Prerana's database from 2016, during the interim period, Prerana approached Rescue Foundation, an organization that runs shelter facilities for rescued victims of sex trafficking in Maharashtra and Delhi. The following data represent the district wise distribution of the girls from Rajasthan placed in Rescue Foundation's various shelters in Maharashtra between 2013 and 2018.

Sr. No.	Name of the District	Number of Victim
1.	Bundi	32
2.	Tonk	16
3.	Dhaulpur	07
4.	Sawai Madhopur	07
5.	Bharatpur	06
6.	Kota	06
7.	Bhilwara	05
8.	Jaipur	02
9.	Ajmer	01
10.	Jodhpur	01
11.	Barakpur	01
12.	Nibchava	01
13.	Pidpada	01
	Total	86

Courtesy: Rescue Foundation



a. Visiting the Child Protection Authorities:

The Team interacted with three Child Welfare Committees (CWC) in three districts of Rajasthan: Jaipur, Tonk and Bharatpur.

The Team interacted with the following people from the Child Welfare Committees:

District	Name of the Person	Designation - Appointment
Jaipur	Ms. Nisha Parikh	Member of CWC, since Nov 2016
Jaipur	Mr. Alok Chaturvedi	Deputy Secretary, RSCPCR (State Commission for Protection of Child Rights)
Tonk	Mr. Ajay Kumar Ms. Anita Goyal	Members of CWC, since July 2017
Bharatpur	Ms. Saroj Lohia Mr. Sunder Singh	Chairperson, Member since Jan 2016

The Team interacted with the above Child Protection Authorities and discussed about the Nat and Bedia communities and their experiences in managing similar cases.

Highlights of the discussions:

1. While interacting with the Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), the Team requested them to share their experiences of cases of sex trafficking encountered by the Child Welfare Committees. Most of the CWCs were appointed around 2 years (on an average) ago. Since the time of their appointment, most of the CWCs had not come across such cases. Nonetheless, they did recognize the customary practice of selling girls into the sex trade, rampant among the Nat community and sometimes prevalent among the Kanjar community in Rajasthan. In one of the discussions with the CWC, they shared a case with the Team where a child who was sent to Mumbai by her family, was rescued and subsequently presented in front of the CWC in Rajasthan. However, recognising the sale of young daughters into the trade by the families in the name of custom or traditions as a form of human trafficking, appeared a little difficult for the authorities. The Team made a few quick attempts to discuss how this was a strong violation of the child's right and should be treated as one by the CWC.

2. Most of the CWCs recognized the existence of the custom of selling family girls into the sex trade within the Nat Community (in Tonk and outskirts of Jaipur), Kanjar community (in parts of Tonk and Alwar) and Bedia Community (in Bharatpur, closer to the Uttar Pradesh border).

3. While discussing the cases that the Team had been referred by the Mumbai CWC, the CWC stated that girls from these communities were often sent to big cities, like Mumbai to earn better income for the families. While interacting with the one of the local CWCs, the members spoke about how often families would sell their daughters for a considerable time period (much like a contract) to brothel keepers/managers in cities like Mumbai.

4. The Team also asked questions relevant to the child protection systems. While speaking on rehabilitation, it was felt that the understanding of the authorities was limited to keeping the child in a child care institution, in a secure environment but did not include restoring them back to families immediately after the rescue. Essential aspects like providing psycho-social care, or giving employability skills to empower an individual for a better and more informed future, were missing.

5. Since Childline was present in most of the meetings with the Child Welfare Committees, the aspect of Outreach as per Childline mandate was discussed. It was observed that since the districts allotted to Childline are geographically big, reaching out to smaller communities like the one visited by the Team, was a challenge. Their strategy for outreach was aimed at child labour, child marriage and child sexual maltreatment. The issue of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children through customary practices, did not seem to be anywhere on their radar.

6. The CWCs shared a few cases with the Team. One CWC discussed a case where during a rescue (within the Bedia colony) in the year 2017, two girls drowned and died due to the chaos and fear within the colony. Analyzing this particular case, the CWC pointed out a few shortcomings in the approach of the raid and the preparedness on the part of the police while dealing with the communities on such sensitive matters.

7. The Team also interacted with the CWCs to understand the Child Protection Systems in different districts. On asking about majority of the cases that approach the CWC, missing girls was on the top of the list, followed by labour/begging and sexual abuse cases.

b. Outreach to the Communities

The Team visited three colonies during this study which are situated in three different districts of Rajasthan.

1. Nato ki Basti, Bhojpura, Phagi
2. Nato ka Baas, Siras, Shyosingpura (*baas* means abode)
3. School (Bedia basti), Ludhawai, Bharatpur

While analyzing the address and subsequently after speaking with the communities, it was observed that these colonies were often called Nato ki basti or Nato ka baas within their respective villages to identify and separate them from the other villagers as Nats. Following observations were gathered while interacting with the communities:

1. Initially the community members and relatives of the girls were hesitant in interacting with the Team. However, once they started speaking with the Team, and the Team also started sharing about the process of rehabilitating the rescued girls, the relatives spoke about selling girls into the sex trade being customary in their caste. In one community particularly, the men pointed at older women in the families to convey that during their youth, they too were made to dance in the bars and earn for their families.
2. When the Team asked the community about their source of livelihood initially, most of them mentioned about working in agricultural sector or as daily wage labour. However, during most of these interactions, the men were spotted right in the communities during the daytime, not engaging in any productive livelihood activities. Once the Team was spotted speaking with a few relatives, most of the men in the colony would join and stand around to listen, and often join the conversation.
3. In most of these colonies that the Team visited, young adolescent girls could not be seen anywhere. In a colony in Phagi, which was close to the Highway, a few women were seated right at the entrance of these colonies (the locals identify them as women with loud makeup). The women present in these colonies were either very old or the ones bearing infants and small children.
4. The colonies were filled with young boys and men either playing cards or indulging in drinking alcohol in the middle of the day. While visiting the Bhojpura community, a group of young boys were found drinking at the local vendor shop, seated on jute cots. When the Team visiting the community approached the local vendor shop to confirm the address, the boys became vigilant. Similarly, in Shyosingpura, a group of young boys and a few men were found playing cards right by the street during the visit. When the Team asked them about this particular community dwelling, they refused to know or recognize this community. A few minutes later, while the Team was busy in conversing with the families, the same young boys and a few men huddled up and started to eavesdrop. A few men from the group started responding to a few questions that were addressed to the relatives.
5. While visiting the colonies in Bhojpura and in Ludhawai, the Team came across some well constructed houses. Most of them were well equipped with basic necessities. The houses in Bhojpura were pakka (well built) houses, well plastered and painted. A few of them were built on a relatively larger plot of land and painted with vibrant colours. In one of these communities, when the social workers asked, one of the relatives responded that when the girls earn good money in the cities, they are able to support the families back in the villages.

6. There was a common expression of contempt and stigma in the neighbouring villagers when the whereabouts of the Nat community were sought by the Team in all the three villages. While visiting the Nat Community settlement in the Bhojpura village, the Team approached a Government school close to the highway. Initially, the Team was welcomed by the school authorities and were offered a comfortable seat and refreshments (which the Team politely refused). However, as soon as the authorities, specifically the Principal of the school realized that the Team was looking to meet and know about the Nat community, suddenly they turned their backs and became hostile. The Team was asked to produce relevant papers for their line of questions that the Team was asking. The Team got a feeling that the school authorities became insecure thinking that the local evil custom might receive unnecessary attention. At the same time, they were scared about disclosing any relevant information relating to this community. Finally, the Team decided to leave the school and continue looking for the community in the village.

7. There were discrepancies in the facts stated by the relatives in the village and the girls (at the institution) and their respective families (in Mumbai). The most common being the duration for which the girl had been in Mumbai. Often when the Team asked this question, the relatives took quite some time to think and subsequently answered the question. Also, about the source of livelihood, the responses gathered from the communities in the villages varied from the responses provided by the families in Mumbai.

Recommendations (For immediate action)

1. After interacting with the Childline implementing partners in three different districts of Rajasthan, and discussing about their outreach strategies, it was observed that most of the implementing agencies are located in the nearest district/town. Rarely does the Childline Team reach such remote locations for outreach and often the issue of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children is not on their agenda during outreach. It would be a good strategy to prioritize a few villages, in the shortlisted districts and implement a common outreach model in these villages through Childline. Established programs of Childline like Open House could be used in order to achieve the objectives shortlisted for the outreach.

2. There is a need to involve the state UNICEF office to be able to work with the state machinery for sensitization and training of stakeholders, research and for impacting policy.

3. When the Team interacted with Childline and Child Welfare Committee members, it got to know that the cohort had met with each other only once since they were appointed. Strategies to combat such evil customary practices, and for post rescue interventions should be discussed and streamlined. Mumbai, being the destination for the commercial sexual exploitation of these young children could also be mobilized for rehabilitation of the victims, and for providing support for strategizing the follow-up.

4. A short exposure visit for some members of the Child Welfare Committees could be organized in collaboration with voluntary organizations and Child Protection authorities in Mumbai. Best practices of managing and handling cases, case tracking mechanisms with respect to victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking can be discussed with the visiting Team from Rajasthan.

5. Data from the past 5 years of CWC archives should be collected and analysed to identify the districts and villages in Rajasthan that are infamous for this customary practice. It would definitely serve as a better input for the outreach exercise.

6. The DCPU is supposed to implement and coordinate all child rights and child protection related activities at the district level. Specific functions of the DCPU also include contributing to effective implementation of child protection legislation, schemes and achievement of child protection goals laid down in the National Plan of Action for Children. Collaborations with the DCPU to strengthen the provisions and working of the Village Level Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) can be explored.

Enclosures

Mapping of areas by Girls at the Institution:

- **Sara and Sama (*name changed*)**

Address: *Nato Ka Mohalla*, Jaipur, Rajasthan.

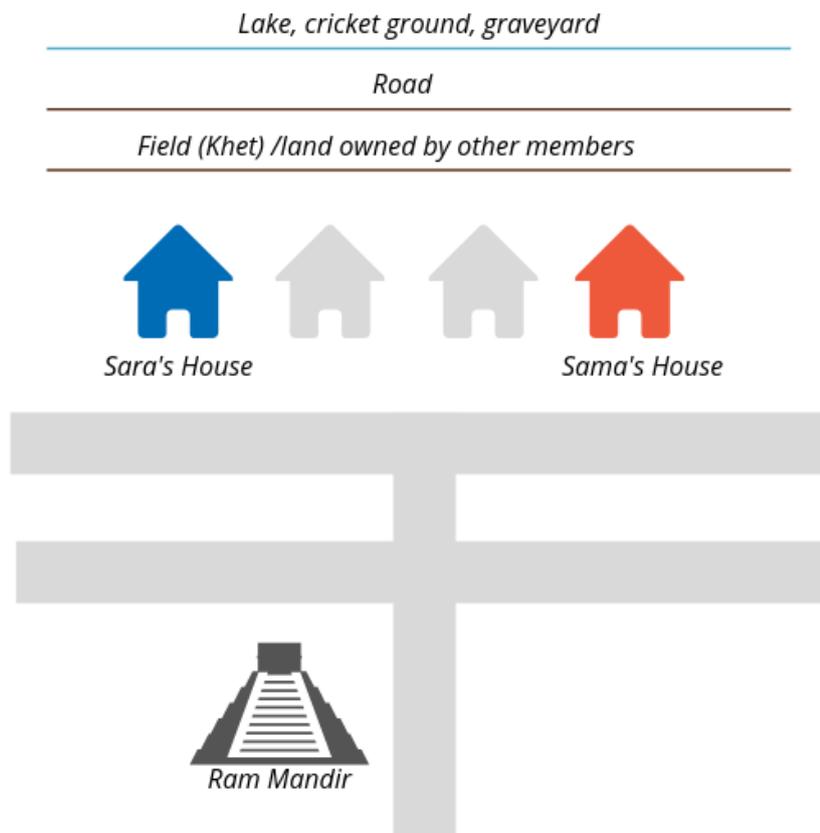
People Present at home (Sara): Alok (Father) and younger siblings.

People Present at home (Sama): Her paternal grandmother.

Red House (Sara): Ask anyone for Alok's house. 5-minute walk from Ram Mandir.

Surrounded by wall fencing and has a big gate.

Blue House (Sama): 3 shops near their house.

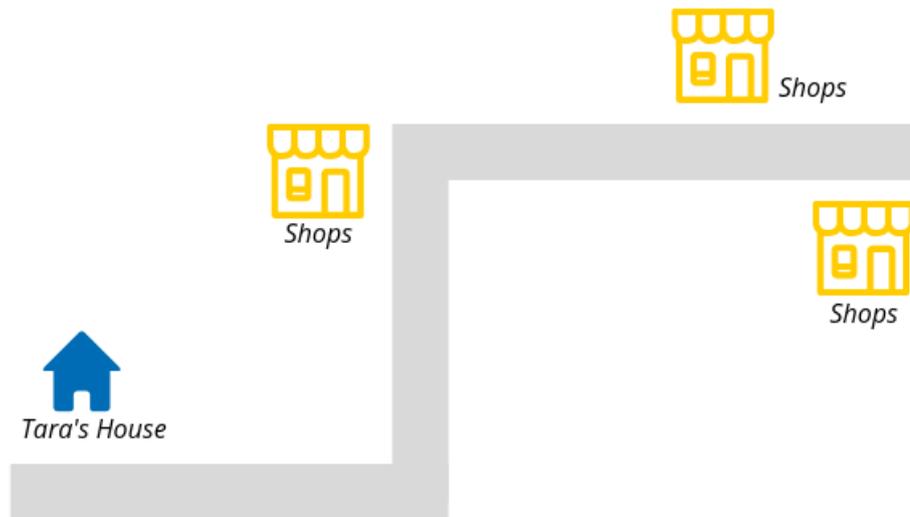


- **Tara Nat (name changed)**

Address: *Nato ka baas*, Tonk District, Rajasthan, 304021.

People Present at home: Her paternal uncles and their family are currently in the village.

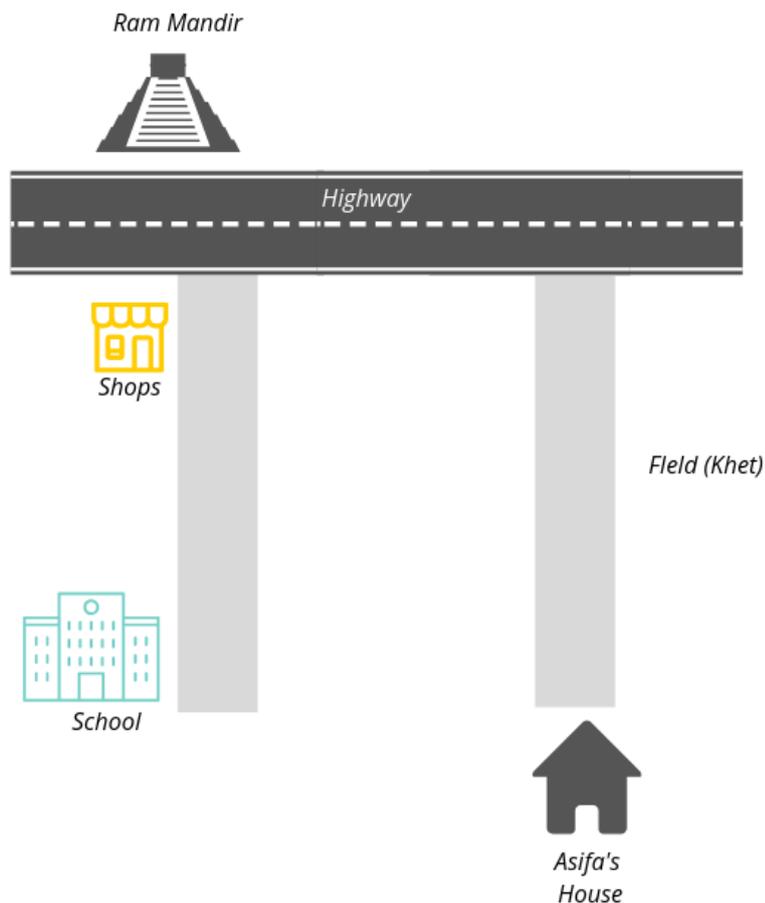
Blue House : surrounded by a number of houses.



- **Asifa (Name Changed)**

Address: Bharatpur, Rajasthan

People Present at Home: Her uncles live close to her house



Pictures



Visit to Community in Shyosingpura, Tonk



Visit to the community in Bhojpura, Jaipur



Meeting with Neighbours in Ludhawai, Bharatpur



Family Visit in Bhojpura, Jaipur



Meeting with Child Protection Authorities in Tonk



Meeting with Child Protection Authorities in Bharatpur



Rights. Choices. Dignity.