Sustaining Hope
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I would like to thank Tasleem Bano for organizing all my visits with the children. I would also like to thank Rukmini Banerji, Shailendra Kumar, and Madhav Chavan for encouraging the idea of reconnecting with the children that my brother, Chetan Narain, had met five years ago.
Pratham, an organization founded in 1994, aspires to eradicate illiteracy from the slums of India. All across the country, the organization has established balwadis, preschools that prepare young children for a more formal education and spark an early interest in learning. Founded in Mumbai, Pratham initially only reached out to the children in that city. Over the years, the Pratham movement has spread throughout the country. Today, it has touched the lives of over thirty million children and continues to grow. Five years ago, my brother visited the slums of Delhi and wrote about the lives of the children that he met. His report was called Hope Amidst Despair. How had they grown since then? What were their aspirations? What were their feelings on education? How had Pratham helped them? I thought that it would be interesting to reconnect with these children and find out.

At first, I felt nervous taking a trip to the slums of India because I had never experienced the poverty there. Every previous trip I had taken to India revolved around visiting family members, spending time at malls, watching movies, and eating at restaurants. Apart from a few glances from cars whizzing by poorer areas of Delhi, I had never witnessed the other side of India.

This time, I had a look into the harsh lives of the children from the slums. I quickly realized that these children did not have restaurants and malls on their minds. In fact, they sometimes struggled just to have a meal in the evenings. Amid all this struggle, education can easily take a backseat. The immediate demands of hunger and shelter often compel children to take on jobs at early age, especially when compared to the uncertain, more abstract benefits of education.

Yet Pratham has begun to change the game. Many of the children my brother interviewed were among the first generation in their families to attend school, often after a Pratham official convinced them to come. Five years ago, the children all said very positive things about Pratham and seemed to be well-positioned to get a good education. But five years can make a big difference, and I wanted to find out if the positive impact my brother discovered had stuck.

On the first day of my project, I met all of these children together. The meeting was organized by a smiling, pensive, scrutinizing lady called Tasleem Bano, the head of Pratham in the Trilokpuri area. Upon climbing up the steep stairs of the main Pratham office, which were flanked by two piles of cow dung in various stages of decay, I entered a small teaching room with walls covered in brown stains and a floor with cracked tiles. I took a step outside on the terrace, looked to my left and saw a telephone booth-sized room with a toilet built into the floor. Without hesitation, I headed back into the main room, where I saw an equally off-putting sight—a stained sink in the corner of the room.

When we were about to sit down to talk to Tasleem, I chose a seat in which the sink would be out of my sight. All of a sudden, four children walked in—a girl in an orange salwar kameez named Gulbakawili; a shorter girl in a black, westernized shirt named Swati; a small boy

in a black and purple shirt named Tapan; and another boy who I did not recognize who was presented to me as Naveen. The others did not show up—Asma had moved to a different place, Nisha had had an upset stomach. (The boy I did not recognize turned out to be the wrong Naveen. Fortunately, we tracked down the right one later.) My family and the four children moved into the small room, which had a table with a few chairs, an overhead fan, and two posters boasting the inspiring photographs and short biographies of the founders of Dell and Bharti Airtel. I had a small chat with all the children to introduce myself, and we worked out an interview schedule to meet them individually for the following week.

My adventure had begun.
Gulbakawili has finished twelfth class. She believes that Pratham taught her to persevere. Her favorite subjects are math and science but she is especially interested in political science. Pratham has motivated her to convince other children in her village to go to school. Gulbakawili used to faint frequently. She is getting married in September.
GULBAKAWILI, an eighteen year old girl who had just finished her last year of school, entered the room wearing an orange salwar kameez with a shiny blue top. A friendly girl with a nice smile, Gulbakawili had a soft, high-pitched voice that by the end of the interview I had heard a lot of. She was a talkative person, and responded to every question I asked with a flurry of words that would directly answer it, and then an anecdote to follow. She came with her mother, an even more soft-spoken woman with a calming smile.

Gulbakawili’s involvement with Pratham started when she was five, when she attended a Pratham balwadi for one year. Afterwards, her schooling lapsed until class five, and then continued uninterrupted at a series of government schools, most recently a place called Rajkiya Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya. After finishing that school a few months before I spoke to her, she gained admission to college to study political science. Yet her family had already planned her marriage during the Eid festival in September to a man named Nazim who owns a mobile phone store and fills gas tanks. Though marriage often means a forfeiture of educational and vocational freedom, both Gulbakawili and her mother insisted that the groom-to-be was as dedicated to Gulbakawili’s education as her own family.

What Gulbakawili found admirable about Pratham was that it not only provided her with an education, but it gave her interest in learning as well. She found the Pratham schoolteachers very loving and supportive and says that they instilled in her the ideal of perseverance—though success in school could often be difficult to come by among the many other responsibilities of people in the slums, including the daily quest to feed the family, the Pratham teachers told her never to give up.

Gulbakawili had early exposure to those sorts of difficulties. Her primary school, Nagar Nigam Vidyalaya, provided no desks or chairs, so children had to sit painfully on the ground. The classroom heat caused children to leave the class and cause all sorts of disturbances outside the classroom. On multiple occasions, Gulbakawili herself was tempted to leave the classroom, but remembered the lessons she’d picked up in the balwadi and decided not to. She valued education so much that she sat through the harsh and discomforting days of primary school. When she got to secondary school—the same Rajkiya Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya that she recently completed—things improved considerably. The new school had adequate supplies and a much more dedicated student body because, Gulbakawili said, only the students who truly wanted to learn passed primary school.

Five years ago, Gulbakawili named math and science as her favorite subjects. She was an exceptional student in school and outperformed many of her classmates. Her drawing teacher praised Gulbakawili’s strong artistic abilities despite the small amount of practice she had. Her math teacher said that Gulbakawili especially shined in her class because most children performed poorly in math. Yet when we interviewed her five years ago, she was unable to solve a simple
algebraic equation. This time, however, things had changed. She effortlessly demonstrated the expansion of the mathematical expression \((a + b)^2\) and gave an intuitive explanation for the result. She says that her teacher often asks her to explain concepts to the class, since her ability to teach sometimes surpasses that of her teacher. Though she loves math and science, Gulbakawili has difficulty in English. First of all, English classes did not start for children until they reached sixth class, so children had to make a difficult adjustment to a new subject. Furthermore, Gulbakawili has no scope to practice English at home, since almost no one in the slums knows it well.

Gulbakawili partly goes to school in order to accomplish what her parents could not. Gulbakawili’s mother initially opposed education. Believing it to be a distraction and a waste of time, she felt that Gulbakawili should learn to work properly. But after being convinced by a Pratham administrator, Gulbakawili’s mother started sending her kids to school. In fact, it now angers her mother when her younger children skip school, since she believes it will severely damage their ability to get a consistent job because laboring work is unpredictable. Gulbakawili said that education is becoming necessary even for those traditionally working-class jobs, however, noting that becoming a driver now requires at least a tenth grade education. That means education will only become more important as India grows, and that the children who fail to get it will fall even further behind.

Pratham has influenced Gulbakawili so much that she now herself spreads the benefits of education to others. She strives to encourage her neighbors to get an education. She tells them that even though she only started going to government school in fifth class, she still just managed to finish twelfth. If she can do it, she tells them, so can their children. Three or four others have entered school as a result of Gulbakawili.

Gulbakawili proved to be a very intelligent girl. Five years ago, she deemed math and science her favorite subjects, but she has now taken an interest to political sciences, which she reads about for fun even outside of school. Her intelligence and interest went as far as to know about the Cuban Missile Crisis, and how America’s John F. Kennedy and the Soviet Union’s Nikita Khrushchev “prevented World War III”. Gulbakawili’s efforts to read outside of school emphasize how much she enjoys learning.

Gulbakawili’s future husband, Nazim, supports her and tells her that if she cannot afford education, he will pay for her. Nazim has five brothers and four sisters, who, unlike most people in the slums, each maintain their own house, showing that Nazim’s family is quite rich. Nazim himself makes about 30,000 rupees a month, an enormous sum compared to what the average slum dweller gets. He lives in a village without electricity, however, and Gulbakawili is scared of moving to a place like that. Nazim, however, tells her not to worry—he will go and find a place to live in Delhi.

Gulbakawili herself has nine siblings, one of whom also went to Pratham. One of her brothers, Shahnawaz, became an engineer at Bhushan factory, which specializes in car parts. Ifraim finished school
after ninth class; he owns a phone store. Nisrat married at the age of 18. Qutubudin works at a market and resells suits. Chandbabu left school after finishing fifth class and now drives autorickshaws. Of all of Gulbakawili’s siblings, Chandbabu is the concern of the family because his job is not very steady because daily income can vary widely. Moreover, he does not even choose to drive autorickshaws every day, so not much routine goes into his daily life. Nizamuddin, on the other hand, went through Pratham programs and is currently earning his Bachelor of Science Degree. His achievement is something the uneducated mother and father could hardly have imagined when Nizamuddin was first born.

Gulbakawili’s mother praised Pratham as well. She believed that children will do well if they learn and that education means they can avoid worrying about whether they will get a job. She also noted a number of differences between educated and uneducated people. Educated people will have a much more polite and well-behaved style of speaking. For example, if an educated person encounters a person on the street who insults him, he will ignore it and walk away. However, if the same thing happened to an uneducated person, he will often swear back, leading to unnecessary fights. Educated people also have educated friends who visit each other and speak nicely. Non-educated people hang around with each other on the street and cause trouble for others and themselves. She went on to talk about her engineer son. He says that he wants to marry somebody educated who will teach her kids well. Even if an uneducated girl’s family offers him a car as a dowry, he would say no, which shows that he truly values education and that he wants the best for his children.

Gulbakawili’s favorite holiday is Independence Day because it represents a day both of happiness and sadness: Happiness because of the freedom of India, and sadness because of its partition. Her favorite movie is Veer Zaara, the love story of an Indian boy and a Pakistani girl separated for over 20 years. She now watches a serial called Pratigya.

Five years ago, Gulbakawili used to attach colored stones to bracelets and sell them, but has stopped ever since breaking her hand when. Gulbakawili would constantly faint. On one occasion, she landed on her hand with such force that it broke. Upon visiting the village doctor, she was told that she had an evil demon inside her. Unfortunately, this meant that Gulbakawili failed to get proper treatment for her hand and failed to realize that her fainting spells were more probably due to malnutrition. Clearly, however, Gulbakawili has a sharp mind and with the right resources, could do wondrous things.
Swati went to a Pratham Balwadi at the age of five. Her mother works for Pratham. She believes that Pratham gave her an edge over other students. She prefers percent grades to letter grades. She is one of the top students in her class. She enjoys English and wants to become fluent in it. During the summer, Swati attends tuition in English. After finishing school, Swati wants to do something that will make a difference to the world.
Swati walked into the room with a timid smile. She came in wearing the same Western and stylish black blouse that she wore on our first meeting. She had a pair of shiny, modern-looking earrings as well. Shockingly enough, she had braces—an expensive treatment not very common amongst children from the slums. Fifteen years of age and in eleventh class, Swati wants to join college and study further. Swati was shy. When asked an open-ended question, she would smile awkwardly, pause for a few seconds, and then give an ambiguous answer. We often had to prod her with additional questions in order to receive a substantial amount of information. Despite her reticence, Swati seemed like a pleasant person, and had a constant smile on her face.

Though not very talkative, Swati did have a number of interesting pastimes. She loved to dance to songs—western, hip-hop, and contemporary. Every day, she would turn on the TV and start dancing in front of it, but never in front of her parents, because of her bashfulness. Her favorite singer still remained a South Indian, Atif Aslam, and she loved his song “Kuch Is Tarah”.

Since Swati’s mother, a pleasant lady named Usha with dark circles under her eyes, teaches for Pratham, Swati has constant exposure to the importance of education. After all, her mother has worked for Pratham for about ten years, so Swati has a strong relationship with the organization and received a strong parental dedication to education. As a result, Pratham’s formal programs were not as significant to her as they were to many other students. In fact, almost everyone from Swati’s neighborhood goes to school. Swati’s siblings have already benefited from that encouragement—her older sister not only attended a Pratham school, but made it into a prestigious college, Delhi University, where she is earning a BA. Her younger brother is currently in tenth class. Swati’s father has a private job in the Okhla Industrial Area in the southeast of Delhi.

As a five year old, Swati went to a Pratham school for one year, which she liked very much, though she has now lost touch with the other children she studied with. She liked the school days there, which were filled with recitations of poems, short stories, and plays. She believes that Pratham helped her reach the top of her classes in the schools she attended after the balwadi by giving her an early edge over other students.

Swati’s success in her studies has consistently made her a notable student among her teachers. From classes one to five, Swati had to take exams at the end of each quarter. Though most students failed at least one of them, Swati passed every single one. Many of her teachers ranked her at the top of their classes. In fact, she is doing so well that she is in class eleven at the age of fifteen.

As a result of her excellence in studies, Swati does not like the new grading system initiated in her school, the same Rajkiya Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya attended by Gulbakawili. This school’s day runs form roughly 7 AM to 12:30 PM. Before this year, students would receive a percentage for a grade, but now they have been replaced by
letter grades, which Swati feels takes away any reason to rank children
and eliminate the ability of the top students in the class to distinguish
themselves, since a 98% is the same as a 93% under the new system.

Unlike Gulbakawili, Swati enjoys English the most of her four
classes. Swati loves reading the short stories from her English textbook
and completing exercises on them. Still, she did not know much Eng-
ish because she did not understand when I asked her what she liked
about school. But she was very passionate about it—even since she
started taking the language, she has always wanted to become fluent
in it, a goal she even had five years ago when we last interviewed her.
She started her eleventh class just a week before I spoke with her, so
could not say much about her about how her new class would help
her get closer to that goal. The first few weeks of the year are always
hectic in government schools because teachers do double duty, and
serve both in a teaching capacity and as admissions officers. Therefore,
teachers do not always have time to finish course-planning before the
school year begins.

Apart from learning English, Swati also hopes to accomplish
something big. She also wants to join a dance class, first taking solo les-
sons, and then joining a dance troupe. In fact, her dream job, if money
and parents allow, is a dancer and choreographer.

Swati likes her school, despite the large class size of about 100.
Benches do not provide enough seats for all children, so the staff puts
cotton mats on the ground if necessary. She finds all the teachers like-
able, especially because they take the time to answer any questions
she poses, unlike the teachers that many of the other children had.
Swati also appreciates the teachers’ diligence, who assign and check
homework each day. Swati’s homework takes her at most two and a
half hours, but usually just takes 30 minutes to an hour.

Though her Pratham school did not assign her as much home-
work, she still remembers her favorite play from her lessons there. It is
about a fish who lives happily and then gets scooped out of water by a
human and dies. The poem is as follows:

Machli jal ki rani hai
Jeevan us ka pani hai
Haath lagao, dar jayegi
Bahar nikalo, mar jayegi

The fish is the queen of water
Water is its life
If you touch it, it will get scared
If you take it out, it will die

During the summer, Swati attends tuition in English, especially in
grammar. This way, she gets special attention and picks up more Eng-
ish than she would just at school. At a center called “Sir Public School”,
Swati spends two months working hard to learn as much English as she
can. In her class of thirty, students must read passages in English and
translate them to Hindi. This additional tutoring costs 600 rupees per
month, ten times more expensive than the monthly fee of 60 rupees she pays to the government school.

For all her life, Swati has wanted to attend college after finishing her schooling. If she had to pick a college she would choose Delhi University, perhaps because she wants to follow in her sister’s impressive footsteps. Swati still does not know exactly what she wants to study, but she says she wants to do something that will make a difference to the world.

Swati believes that all children should go to school. Education is generally a good thing to have to get through life and is absolutely vital to get a good job. Even menial laborers often require a tenth grade education these days, she said. She said that one of the major reasons that children do not go to school is a shortage of money. The best way to combat this issue is through a combination of government and NGO (Non-Government Organization) support, she added. A recent government scheme, for example, tries to incentivize parents to send girls to school by offering them a monetary reward. If the girl attends school until she turns eighteen, the family gets 100,000 rupees. If she is unable to attend school till this age, she still gets the reward provided she gets married.

Additionally, many NGOs are close by, and do not charge too much money. They also offer an opportunity for at least a temporary education with their one or two year programs similar to those of vocational schools in the United States. Swati, in fact, has seen eighteen-year-old illiterate girls from her area attending local training schools. Though she says it is possible to convince someone to get an education, she believes that the ultimate decision to take it seriously comes from within. Laying an early foundation for education, such as that laid by Pratham, is therefore important.

After she completes her schoolwork, Swati often plays with her friends outside. A favorite game is Ice Water, similar to the American pastime Freeze Tag. Additionally, she also plays hide and seek with her friends. Then, after eating dinner, she spends some time dancing in front of the TV, usually watching MTV or Channel V, India’s two most popular music television channels.

Swati knows a few computer-related things, not common among Pratham kids. In fact she owns a computer herself and knows of Facebook as “some Internet site”. She has even watched some videos on YouTube. She has no Internet, however, so at home she can only play a handful of games on her computer. But some of her friends do have Internet, so she can enter cyberspace at their houses. She also enjoys watching Bollywood movies. Her favorite actress is Priyanka Chopra, and her favorite movie was Band Baaja Baaraat, a romantic comedy revolving around wedding planning. She watches movies on cable but only in the evenings since only the boring, old movies come during the day. Her desire to couple an active social life with a successful educational one takes its toll—she only gets six hours of sleep per night, going to bed between 11 PM and midnight, and awaking at 5:30 AM.
Tapan attended a Pratham Balwadi. He says he spent some of his best days there. He went to a private school from first class to sixth class. For seventh class and eighth class, Tapan attended a government school, which he did not like. Tapan has a sister who is married and a brother who is in ninth class. Tapan aspires to become a doctor. He enjoys puzzles and games.
Tapan, a thin boy of thirteen, currently attends eighth class at Rachna Public School, a private institution. He had hair matted down over his forehead, and came wearing the same purple-black-and-white checkered shirt he was wearing when I first met him two days earlier. He struck me a reserved and innocent young man—in other words, overwhelmingly normal.

Tapan attended a Pratham balwadi for one year at the age of five and spent the next five classes in Bal Vikas Vidyalaya, another private school. Unlike the previous two children, Tapan can afford a private school, which allows him access to smaller classes and better teachers. After attending private school for five years, he went back to a government school for classes six and seven because the private school he would be required to attend was too far and too expensive. For eighth class, he reverted to a closer private school catering to the higher classes. In this school, his class has 30 students, much smaller than the 100-person classes offered by government schools. He believes that this school boasts a higher quality of education than his government school, something hardly surprising since public schools can afford better teachers and smaller class sizes, and often have a better student body because they give a more difficult entrance exam.

Despite the allure of the private school, Tapan still loved his Pratham balwadi, claiming that he spent his best days there. He believed that Pratham taught him how to study properly, giving him the values of dedication and the willpower to work hard. In other words, it helped him through his first years of school and taught him how to succeed later on in life.

Tapan did not like his government school very much, partially because did not have many friends with him in his classes. After all, all of Tapan’s neighborhood friends went to his old private school, so not only did he become close friends with them in school, but he also grew up with them outside of it. Unfortunately for Tapan, all of these friends continued on to the school his family deemed too far away. The constant problems faced by all government school students still applied to Tapan: uncomfortable benches and a tiny classroom housing far more people than its builders had intended. The school had no available drinking water. The power in the school often went out, many times cancelling an entire day of classes. Furthermore, the fan in the room made the temperatures in the winter bearable, but the room often became too hot in the summers.

In Tapan’s particular classroom, about 8 feet wide and 10 feet long, two classes took place, with the children in one class facing one way and those in the other facing the opposite way. Whatever desks the room had were occupied by two people each. In total, the room hosted 49 children. Amid all the din in the room, Tapan often could not concentrate on his own teacher properly. As a result, the teacher would hit him. This happened quite frequently. Despite their methods of discipline, Tapan still said his teachers taught properly.

In Bal Vikas, Tapan’s old private school, on the other hand, Tapan’s
teachers were much better and never beat him. Very surprisingly, however, he got less homework in Bal Vikas than in the government school. But that disparity could simply be due to Tapan’s attending the private school in his easier younger classes. Now that he has come back to a private school, his eighth class work could cause Tapan much more difficulty than his government school.

As a result of the workload in the government school, Tapan learned much more from it than from Bal Vikas. In Math, Tapan learned big additions, multiplication, division, and decimals. In Hindi, Tapan read stories and practiced and improved his writing. Tapan even read English stories and did exercises to check whether he understood their meaning. Though he was taught plenty of English grammar, teachers did not focus much on English composition. In science, Tapan explored topics ranging from the ancient world of prehistoric humans to the process of photosynthesis. In his history class, Tapan even learned about historical buildings throughout India such as the Taj Mahal and Red Fort and the builder and emperor Shah Jahan.

Tapan and his father wanted to continue his private school education once Bal Vikas finished in class five. Unfortunately, they could not get a bus to take him to the nearest private school that offered classes six and seven, since they lived about an hour away, which was too far for the father’s liking. Yet his father did not want to send him to the government school in his area. Tapan had heard stories of the horrible measures that children in the government school took when they got into fights, resorting to violence that sometimes extended to knives. One particular story of a boy getting pushed into a canal and drowning as a result of all the fighting convinced Tapan’s father never to send Tapan to that government school. So Tapan spent two years in a different government school before he went back to the nearby Rachna Public School in class nine.

Despite the disparity in education between government schools and private ones, Tapan sees no difference between the students who attend them, both in intelligence and behavior. He does have more friends in private school and usually goes out with them in the evenings. As for the children that Pratham taught, Tapan says all of them are smart and intelligent as a result of “Pratham teaching properly.”

Tapan has two siblings, both of whom are elder to him. His sister Suman, 21 years old now, married in 2007 at the age of 18. She left school after fifth class and joined a Pratham school (makes no sense; could be the bridge program) to learn English. Tapan’s brother Daud, who is seventeen years old, currently studies in class 9 in a private school. Daud went to a Pratham school for his third and fourth class (also makes no sense; bridge program?). Unlike Tapan, however, Daud attended private school for classes six and seven. At that time, traffic in India was less dangerous than it is now so Daud had permission to bike to his school.

Tapan’s father works for the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). He makes sure that the water supply to flats is steady and safe. Tapan’s mother does not have a job but stays home. Tapan lives in a particularly well-educated neighborhood. Everybody in his area goes to school ex-
Tapan believes that if he studies, he will get a good job, much like Gulbakawili and Swati thought. It seems that children from Pratham schools share the similar belief that studying leads to success. Pratham’s ability to convince children of the link between education and future success and have them remember that link clearly even when much older points to the impact that it has on its children.

At 7 AM each morning, Tapan takes the bus to school. He comes back at 2 PM. When he gets home, he eats some food. At 4 PM, he goes for extra tuition for two hours for all his subjects. Here, he gets help with any homework that he has trouble with. At about 6:30 PM, Tapan often goes to play with his friends. They usually play cricket, a popular sport among Indians. After an hour, Tapan studies some more. At the end of his day, he watches TV for about 30 minutes to one hour. Tapan enjoys watching comedies, such as the Dabangg, a thriller-comedy about a corrupt police officer. He likes the actor Hrithik Roshan, and also enjoys singing. His favorite songs come from the 2007 comedy Om Shanti Om. Though he has no computer at home, he often visits some friends who do and plays for games.

Like Swati, Tapan has always wanted to go to college after school ends but he knows no college’s name. Unlike Swati, who had future plans to go to Delhi University, Tapan seemed oblivious about which colleges were available to him. He aspired to becoming a doctor.

When I presented Tapan with a few puzzles, a huge smile appeared on his face—he seemed to enjoy these sorts of riddles a lot. The first puzzle consisted of a man, a wolf, a goat, and a cabbage. The object was to have the man take all the animals to the other side of a river, one by one. However, when the man was on the boat, the wolf could not be left alone with the goat and the goat could not stay with the cabbage. Once he understood the question, he took just a minute to solve it.

Tapan also solved the four queens puzzle rather quickly. The goal of the puzzle was to put four queens on a chessboard in such a manner that no queen attacked any other queen. When I myself did the similar eight queens puzzle, I took about a half an hour to get it right. Tapan took a mere five minutes to solve it.
Asma moved from Trilokpuri to a much poorer neighborhood called Loni. She went to a Pratham school from first to fifth class. She went to a government school from sixth to eighth class. She went to a Government Secondary Public school from ninth to eleventh class. She did not attend twelfth class because she broke her hand and became embarrassed. She helps her mother make undershirts and sells them for a very low price. Her father has an incurable disease so he cannot work. Her mother, illiterate in Hindi, says that the most important thing that can be taught to somebody is the ability to speak to anybody despite their social status. Asma likes to draw and play computer games in her free time.
Asma, a giggly girl dressed in a teal-and-black full-sleeve salwar kameez on a hot, sunny Delhi afternoon, entered the room with her mother. At first glance, she appeared to be a bit shy, but she quickly turned to be a confident girl with strong opinions never afraid to speak her mind. She kept me on my toes by giggling every time I spoke Hindi, probably (I hope) because of my accent. She sported two giant silver stones on her earlobes, followed by two smaller earrings on her upper ear. Unlike the last few children I had interviewed, Asma spoke in a raspy, husky voice.

After Asma entered, her mother followed. A woman of old age dressed in a sari, she walked slowly and unsteadily into the room with cracked skin and a stern face. She was a woman who believed strongly in what she said, fearless to speak her mind and confident.

Four years ago, Asma moved from Trilokpuri, a “five-star” slum in East Delhi, to Loni, a much poorer neighborhood in the northern Indian state Uttar Pradesh that nonetheless offered better opportunities to work for her family. It also allowed them to purchase a larger home to house the family, which had seven children. In Delhi, Asma said she had a sufficient amount of water and electricity. She found everything in Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand, terrible. The infrastructure in Delhi is significantly better; roads and drainage systems are far superior there. Though their new home was only about 20 kilometers away, it took them a two-hour sojourn by autorickshaw and bus to make it to the Pratham office.

After her move, she went to Government Secondary Public School (GSPS) in Gokulpuri, a district in northeastern Delhi, from ninth class to eleventh class. At GSPS, unlike at many other schools, boys and girls studied at the same times and in the same classes. The boys frequently misbehaved, causing disruption and distraction in class and often even bothered girls. The teachers could not control the boys. Though Asma continued to go to school despite the difficulties, she broke her arm during eleventh class. As a result, Asma became very embarrassed and stopped going to school for six months, both because of the injury and the fear that it might require surgery. Writing became very difficult with the broken arm, and this became all too evident when exam time came. She missed the science exam and failed English because of her handicap and the days she missed at school. When she asked if she could retake her exams, the school refused without hesitation. Even Asma’s mother went to the school to plead with the staff to just give her the eight points by which she had missed the English cutoff or to allow her to retake the exam. They replied negatively, however, even stating that, “This happens in college, but it does not happen here,” showing the strictness of the Indian schooling system. Asma had the choice of repeating class eleven, which she chose not to do because her friends will have advanced to the twelfth class and the teachers have become terrible.

Although Asma’s arm healed in six months, she still has a visible protruding bone in her arm. She is too shy to even show the protrud-
ing bone, and wears full-sleeve garments all the time—hence the long-sleeve shirt she wore despite the sweltering heat. Even when her mother asked her to show us her injury, she coyly refused. Unfortunately, the broken arm had a larger effect on her life than just altering her wardrobe—it also put a full stop to her education.

When she was thirteen, Asma used to help her mother make undershirts and sell them for a very low price. She earned about twenty-five rupees for every twelve shirts she sold and made about seventy-five rupees a day. Asma’s mother had to support her family on her own because her husband caught an incurable disease. As a result, life was very tough for Asma. Once Asma began her education, she and her mother started to consider it her main priority. Whenever Asma attended a school-related event, her mother never stopped her. As the only family member receiving an education at that time, Asma dedicated her life to it. Though Asma did not pass eleventh class, she still plans to take the twelfth class exam “open”, similar to a GED in the United States.

Though Asma did not like GSPS, both the government school she went to from first class to fifth class and the government school she attended afterwards were good schools. The earlier school, however, had much smaller children, so they provided entertainment and friendliness. Asma also had nicer and more sympathetic teachers in the first government school. When she became older, she still made friends in her newer schools, but felt less comfortable talking to her teachers. Furthermore, the exams became more and more difficult as she became an older girl and the teachers stopped helping, and caring, as much.

In Asma’s first government school, she studied in an open hut with an aluminum roof. Because the school lacked desks, Asma had to sit on the ground even when it rained. Huts become messy during the rain so rain can become quite bothersome at times. Unlike Tapan’s school, however, Asma had a tank of water available in her school, so she could drink whenever thirsty. But with no bathroom available to her, Asma had to go somewhere behind the school. Though the teachers often disciplined the children, they never hit the children. The classes at this school had fewer children than in the government schools Asma attended later. At this school, Asma learned a number of things, not just strictly school lessons, but tips on how to live a good life. First of all, she learned to dress properly and keep herself clean. She learned the importance of going to school on time and studying hard. She was provided with information on what school would be like, which prepared her well for the years to come. She also learned that if she is nice, people will be nice to her. And finally, she learned the familiar Pratham mantra: If you learn, you can become anything—a doctor, a teacher, an engineer.

From classes six through eight, which she took in Rajkiya Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, she had different teachers for different subjects, each of which was taught daily for thirty minutes. Thankfully, Asma’s new school had enough benches for the 70 to 80 students in each of its classes. She said the quality of each government school depended heavily on the dedication of its principal. If he is nice and beneficent,
children come to a well-equipped school, but if not, the school becomes a terrible place that no one wants to go to. Regardless of the quality of the principal, periodic power outages plague all government schools. Asma’s teachers simply ignored these things and carried on with class. Much like Gulbakawili’s school, if children grew very hot and decided that they had had enough, they just left the room, and walked outside, causing disruption to class.

In her ninth class, which she took in government school in UP, Asma had fifty classmates, though, once again, not enough benches for everyone. Many classes went on at the same time in the same room, creating a ruckus in the room as teachers struggled to make themselves heard over other teachers, and children struggled to pick out the right voice. Asma had one teacher for math and one for every other subject. Though she had a strict one-hour period for math, the other teacher taught whatever she wanted whenever she wanted.

Asma loves to draw and she won a prize in her school for her art. She likes to draw cards and scenes of countryside, villages, and animals. When a scene catches her interest, she likes to study it and try to replicate it. When I asked her to draw something, however, she seemed shy to do so, but I just gave her a piece of paper and a pencil, and after a few minutes she started doodling and drew a scene of trees and small houses. Recently, Asma had created a Valentine’s Day card of a boy and girl inside a heart. When my father asked her what Valentine’s Day was, she paused for a long time and giggled a bit.

Education taught Asma to speak to people outside of the house and be confident about herself. She also realized that reading and writing are useful skills and learning them instead of working may pay dividends. Indeed, Asma and her mother pointed out several differences between educated and uneducated people. Their speaking style is different and much ruder, they don’t go anywhere useful and romp around the neighborhood, and they wear the same clothes all the time. Educated people, on the other hand, know the appropriate things to wear and say in different situations. The morals of educated families are often much stronger than those of uneducated ones, as well. Many parents simply smile and accept objects that their children bring home without asking any questions as to where they had got them. Asma’s mother emphatically disagreed.

“We are all very poor,” Asma’s mother said. But she added very forcefully, that her family will never accept stolen goods, no matter how much they will help them.

Though Asma’s mother never got the chance to learn reading or writing in Hindi, but she is able to do something far more important.

“I’m totally illiterate,” she said. “But put me in front of anybody anywhere, no matter how rich and powerful, and I can talk to them. This is the biggest lesson.”

Reading may be important, but Asma’s mother believes that the most important thing that can be taught to a child is the courage to speak to anybody from any rank of the social hierarchy. But Asma will not go to college when she finishes school. After working so hard to get so far in her life, she has completely given up after going two years
without school. Even if she does manage to finish her twelfth grade open, she is now looking to get married.

Asma has four other siblings, two of which also did Pratham. Shamina, 40 years old, has four kids of her own. She only finished her fifth class before her marriage. Aurangzeb, 30, has three kids and works to repair and install electric systems. He finished his tenth class. Twenty-six year-old Shane Jahan is earning a BA from home and participates in the family business of making clothes. Aas Muhammad, 24 years old, quit school after finishing sixth class and works in the auto repair business. Her two younger siblings, Shane Aalam and Shoaib Ali, both went through Pratham. The former dropped out in eight class, and is now learning to work in various odd jobs. Shoaib Ali, however, is a 15 year old in sixth class, a few years behind normal. Yet he is still trying to climb higher on the educational ladder.

Even if he manages to finish school, however, college is quite expensive for the family’s meager income, since it can cost in total anywhere between 50,000 and 100,000 rupees. Compared to the 100 rupee per month fee for the private school Shoaib Ali attends, and even the 300 rupee per session private tuition fee, college is prohibitively expensive. In fact, Shane Jahan left college because she could not pay the fees, and had to try to continue her degree from home.

Asma’s dream is to become a policewoman because she admires those who protect others, especially the soldiers who protect the borders of India. She would also not mind becoming a teacher because she loves to teach small children. In fact, she would work for Pratham.

In this new city, Asma noticed that most children do not go to school. In fact, for every ten children, only two receive an education. But smaller adolescents are starting to attend school in the area due to peer pressure. When Asma’s family moved into Loni, many children saw through them the benefits of education and decided that they too should receive one. Such is the influence of an educated person. As more and more children began going to school, more and more children feel pressured to attend, either by their friends, or, more importantly, because their parents see them in many ways lagging behind the children who do go to school. When, Asma went to school in an autorickshaw and dressed from head to toe in a smart, elegant uniform, she struck quite an impressive figure that began to show others more reason to attend school.

Asma believes that in addition to setting up Pratham centers in uneducated parts of India, Pratham should work hard to convince the parents of uneducated children to believe in the importance of education. Uneducated children may definitely want to go to school but their parents may disagree, telling them that they should work instead. To prevent this, Asma says that Pratham should launch a huge effort to make sure that the parents understand all the benefits of education so that they feel interested in sending their children to school.

Asma describes the lifestyle of Loni as a morbid one. Boys drink a lot even at a young age. Girls hang around in sordid areas of the neighborhood. In fact, so many suspicious people roam about the place that parents feel unsafe sending their children out of the house. If children
have to go out, most parents insist that children must tell them where they are going and go only there. Even so, most children disobey their parents and get drunk. Many parents are therefore wary of sending their children to school, since they have no idea where they will actually go after leaving the house.

Though some parents do send their children to school, the children themselves eventually have to choose whether they want to follow up with their education or not. Until fifth class, most children who attend school are fine with it. But once they reach fifth class, parents start to lose control over their children and can no longer convince them to go to school, or ensure that they will attend school even if they say they will. In fact, many older children tell their parents they will walk to school, and then often skip it in favor of roaming around the neighborhood and causing problems.

Asma and her family moved to a neighborhood much poorer than that of Trilokpuri, where little progress has been made in getting children to attend school. To encourage more children to go, Asma thinks parents should pay a lot of attention to newborn children and raise them from day one to value education. Also, parents should continue to escort children to school once they pass fifth class to at least push back the age of uncontrollable rebellion by a few more years. At home, parents should spend a lot of time with their children, helping with their homework and discussing what they learned in school, both so that children will find it harder to lie if they skip school, and so that they receive constant support for education at home, as well. Finally, schools should hold meetings with parents every month or two to update them on their children’s progress, for the same two reasons.

Despite the difficulties of educating people in the new neighborhood, Asma spares no words for parents who do not work hard to make education a part of their children’s lives.

“Only parents who are idiots don’t send their kids to school,” she said.

At home, Asma continues to stitch clothing every day for about six hours. In her spare time, she likes to draw, though she also owns a computer, which she uses to play games. Her older brother eventually wants to install Internet on the computer.

Asma, one of the more confident children of the six, was not afraid to speak her mind and she exchanged so much information with me that could be used to help Pratham improve.
Naveen is seventeen years old and attends a government school. He attended a private school from classes one to five but quit school for two years after suffering a severe car accident. Though he quit school for two years, Naveen still wanted to go back. He enjoys learning Hindi and Science at school. He would like to study to become a policeman or a doctor.
Sustaining Hope
A Car Crash

Ever since seeing all of the children that had come on Monday, I had imagined that a great sadness had overcome Naveen. Five years ago, Naveen apparently talked nonstop—more so than any other child. After seeing this new Naveen, an emaciated young man who barely spoke audibly, I wondered how such a talkative person could have turned into a quiet child with saddened eyes. I would find out in the next interview— which took place not in the Pratham office, but in Naveen’s own home.

Finally, I got a sense of the living quarters of slum families. While driving down to Naveen’s house, I saw the alleys of Trilokpuri, piled with all sorts of dirt and puddles of water. Flies swarmed all over the place and when I stepped out of the car, a putrid smell of sewage filled the air. It soon started to rain and as I walked to Naveen’s house, I took extra care to make sure I did not dirty my shoes by stepping on any gunk. Even after leaving the car, I could see the driver shaking in fear, probably wondering why we had taken him to the depths of such a place. Upon entering the house, I first noticed the large black stains on the pink colored walls of the house, signs of the dirt that built up due to a lack of resources to clean it. A small kitchen with stained steel glasses lay in one corner. Further into the house lay a small bed and a couch stuffed in a tiny room. Somebody lay sleeping on the bed and got up slowly once he heard our footsteps. A girl entered the room and introduced herself as Nisha. She did not recognize my brother nor did she look anything like the Nisha I had seen in pictures. We had been directed to somebody different. A second boy, Naveen, entered the room. He also looked different—not only from the pictures I had seen, but from the boy who had paid us a visit on Monday. Fortunately, this was the Naveen from five years ago, who now sported a flowing head of hair and an impressive beard.

A seventeen year old in tenth class, Naveen attends the public school, Rajkiya Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya. Naveen went to a Pratham balwadi until the age of five. Here, he spent some of his best days. In his Pratham school, Naveen mostly drew and solved puzzles. He really liked to draw. Pratham also made him read many books and short stories. The children in his class would have drawing competitions. Even if Naveen did not win, he enjoyed the competition because they kept him and the other children excited and motivated. Pratham sparked an interest in studying for Naveen, once again emphasizing the link between good education and a good future job.

When he turned five, he left Pratham, along with a few friends to go to a private school called Parson Public School. He attended and did well until class five, at which point he suffered a major accident. On the road outside his house, Naveen was the victim of a car crash. The crash left him a bloody mess with glass stuck all over his body, even in his head. As a result, Naveen quit school for two long years. Upon returning to education, he decided to resume it at a government school, the same one he attends now. Many of his friends went there, and he did not want to go back to his old school, where most of his friends were now two years ahead. The school is two kilometers away, and is either a
After spending two years out of school, Naveen still wanted to continue his education, a very bold thing to do. After a long period of inactivity, many people, including Asma, lose motivation and the urge to continue. Naveen, however, believed that school would benefit him very much in the long run and wanted to continue learning. He admirably does not give up and strives to have a good life, no matter what hardships may befall him, one of the tenets of Pratham’s early balwadi teachings.

Naveen enjoys studying Hindi and Science at school. The teachers teach well and tell engaging stories that keep him interested in what they have to say. In science, Naveen does a lot of labs and experiments with chemical reactions that also capture his interest. Once, they looked at ants through a magnifying glass, which Naveen liked.

Though all these learning experiences were enjoyable, Naveen still felt that his private school ultimately taught better than government school. The teachers behaved much more nicely and were more responsive to questions than those in government school. If children did not understand something, private school teachers would keep asking questions until they finally understood. In the government school on the other hand, the teachers grew impatient if bothered by too many questions and told inquisitive students to hire a private tutor. (Many times, these private tutors were the very same teachers the students had in government school.) In private school, Naveen never needed to hire a private tutor because the teachers taught well enough.

In the future, Naveen wants to do a course at a university and then move on to get a job. If he could become anything, he would study to be a policeman or a doctor. These two professions involve helping others and making life better for them. The people who work in this profession are also “good people”, which Naveen wants to be. He wants to make a difference in the world and bring about positive changes that will help others. Additionally, since he grew up living in a relatively poor place, he does not want to grow up to become a lowly laborer who cleans toilets, washes clothes, and receives little respect.

Just like everyone else I interviewed, Naveen found many differences between educated and uneducated individuals. Educated people talk nicely and are well-mannered. Those who do not go to school often jest about education, beat people up, and even intimidate the children who do go to school. They play separately, gamble, and cause trouble throughout the neighborhood. About 10 percent of Naveen’s neighborhood does not go to school, a low number relative to the rest of India. Intimidation has increased that number recently—some children who used to go to school but have now quit because of peer pressure. The reverse rarely happens. The children who go to school sometimes try to convince the uneducated people to come, but they make excuses and end things there.

In order to convince these children to come to school, Naveen says people should initially tell them that by getting an education, they will not become a lowly worker. A good career is a strong motivation for most people in the slums, and many will do anything they can to
prevent themselves from a poor one. Naveen suggested that the children be taken to school just for a day or two to show them what it is like. After that, they will make friends and want to stay in school.

One of the largest problems children in the slums face is that after failing even one class, they lose hope and drop out. They lose the motivation to stay in school because they fear failing again and the derision of those of their peers who did pass. Though their families tell them that they have failed not because they lack intelligence, but because they do not study enough, most children still make excuses, and offer to work instead, a prospect most of the poor families may find difficult to turn down.

Naveen offered an idea that could potentially solve this problem. Right now, end-of-year exams make up the almost all of the grade that a child receives for the year. Consequently, a poor performance or a sickness on the day of the exam can prevent even the most intelligent student from passing. If the teachers instead gave points throughout the year for smaller things such as attendance, class participation, homework, and quizzes, a child could pass a class even if he performs poorly on the exam. This way, children will have more motivation to study and stay focused and engaged throughout the year.

Currently, Naveen is in the middle of a two-month puja dedicated to Amar Singh Baba, whom his family believe is an avatar of the god Shiva. He and his uncle dedicate their two months to hours and hours of puja a day. Each day, Naveen does puja seven times a day and meditates for twenty minutes every two hours. He and his uncle believe that this puja will bring them peace and good fortunes. The puja does mean he will miss a few weeks of school, but since it is at the beginning of the year, he is not worried.

Naveen believes that schools should make every assignment count.
Nisha is in ninth class. From first class to eighth class, she attended a government school, which she did not like because of the lack of water and dearth of space on the benches. All her classes took place in one tiny room. Nisha likes her new government school much more. Unfortunately, all of her siblings went to private schools.
IN THE MIDDLE of our interview with Naveen, my father walked out of the room to look for the Nisha that my brother had interviewed five years ago. We realized that Naveen’s sister was not the Nisha he had met. After making a few inquiries, we found out that Nisha lived in the same neighborhood. Once we found her, the interview commenced. Nisha entered wearing a traditional blue salwar kameez with her hair tied back into a tight ponytail and had long and dangling earrings. I was told that Nisha had just been woken up, and sure enough, she sat on the bed, rubbing her slightly red eyes.

Currently, she studies in ninth class at Rajkiya Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya. She had recently quit her government school after eighth class. She likes the new school better because she learns more from the teacher. She did not like the new government school at all, however. Her classroom, and indeed the entire school, was one tiny, dirty room not much larger than the room we were interviewing in. Nisha had no access to water and could almost never find room on any of the benches the school provided. All her classes took place in that one room and several others classes took place there at the same time. Just like Tapan, she found it hard to listen to the teacher with all the excess noise in the room. All these tribulations gave Nisha a difficult time in her school, but the new government school was much better. Nisha suffered the curious misfortune of being the only one of her parents’ four children not to go to private school. She did not know why her parents had made this decision, but it did not seem to be based on age or gender: Nisha was a middle child, and her younger sister Neha studies in class five at a private school. Her older brother Robby is in class 11 at Bal Vikas, and her younger brother Nikhil studies in class six.

Though the old government school experience was not very pleasant, Nisha said the teachers there taught better than the new government schoolteachers, who were quite strict. She said she found it easier to speak to the old government school teachers and that they were happier to answer questions. Both teachers hit students, but the new government schoolteachers hit more. Nisha believes that hitting children will not make them behave any better, saying that it is “crazy and makes things worse”.

Not everyone in Nisha’s neighborhood goes to school. Some children work, but most children who do not attend school just stay at home and cause trouble. Though none of Nisha’s siblings work, Nisha’s father works in the government. When I heard “government” my ears perked up, but it turned out he worked as a jhaaru, a duster. Nisha’s mother does the housework at home.

Shy as she was, Nisha paused after almost every question and then gave a timid answer in return that conveyed little information. Of all the Pratham children, Nisha opened up the least. She was a quiet girl, just like she had been five years ago. Nonetheless, Pratham seems to have served Nisha and her family well. And Nisha says Pratham taught her the greatest lesson of all—no matter what people look like on the outside, she must look for the best in people.
Through the influence of Pratham, these six children have grown to love learning and education. As a result, five of these six children have either finished or still continue their educational journey after attending a Pratham balwadi. Pratham sparked an early interest for learning in all of these children at an early age. Had they not joined Pratham, they might have worked as jharus, or done some other work requiring manual labor. Although continuing their studies in government and private schools, most of the children agree that they spent their best days at their Pratham balwadis. They would not have learned to love education as much without Pratham. Pratham has left a long lasting memory in the minds of these children.

But while thoroughly praising the organization, some of these children had a few suggestions for Pratham. Though Pratham does well in convincing parents to send their children to school, Asma thought that Pratham should improve upon reaching out to them. After initially persuading the parents, Pratham could hold bimonthly meetings with them. In these meetings, Pratham can talk to children’s parents about their child’s performance in school and keep them interested in their child’s education. Then, parents can continue to help and support their children at home. With their parents’ support, children feel more reason to get an education.

Naveen, on the other hand suggested that Pratham change the way government schools grade children. Pratham has partnerships with some government schools in the area and have influence on these schools. Though Pratham balwadis do not grade student performance, Pratham does hold some influence in government schools. Rather than base a child’s performance solely on exams, Pratham could recommend spreading the grading out so that children earn points from doing homework, attending class and completing small quizzes throughout the course of the year. This way, students will not become discouraged if they happen to fail a final exam. Also, they become encouraged to show up to school for the entire year rather than just for exams. Making every assignment count not only helps these children feel less stressed about finals, but also encourages them to come to school much more often.

After interviewing these six children I learned about the poverty stricken side of India. I witnessed what these children had to go through every day and how education helped them. Upon learning about how much they valued education, I realized that I should not take education for granted. Education has given these children hope to succeed in life. Perhaps they can now pursue a different job that does not require manual labor. But without education, these children would have been like many others—children who hang around and cause trouble around the neighborhood. These six children even saw the differences between educated and uneducated people and now I see it as well. I would like to come back to see what Swati, Tapan, Naveen and Nisha do with five more years of education-instilled life.
For one week, I taught English to a group of girls. For four days, I had the girls reenact skits about daily things such as meeting people, school, movies, and weather. On the last day, the girls performed a play based on a story called Idgah. Everybody had heard of the story.
I sat anxiously in the car taking me to my destination in Trilokpuri, where I would teach a class of girls how to speak English. Upon arriving, I looked out of the car, and dirt roads, filled with puddles of murky water leftover from the rain surrounded me. As I stepped outside, a stench of sewage filled the air. Flies swarmed all around me from different directions and in the midst of them flew some mosquitoes that had taken a culinary liking to my arms and legs. I started walking through an alley and the stench grew stronger as the alley grew deeper. I looked on one side and saw a pile of bricks. The asymmetrical, low-leveled houses covered in ruptures, cracks and stains underscored the mood that pervaded the whole neighborhood. As I walked through the rundown alleys of Trilokpuri, I became scared of teaching English to children who barely knew basics. I could not figure out what to say for I had not practiced at all and didn’t know much Hindi, but my father wanted me to teach and speak all by myself. My fears, however, were alleviated when I entered a room of girls of ages 10 – 12. Knowing that I would teach girls younger than me made me feel better. Then they did something that comforted me even more. They greeted me by standing up and ecstatically shouting, “Good afternoon, sir!” This encouraged me to continue on by saying, “How are you today?” They all responded in unison, “I’m good.” They had all responded in English. I started to think that teaching them would not be too bad at all.

After my first introductions with the children, I asked for their names and ages. Some of the children spoke English very well while others stayed slightly timid at first. One particular girl, Astha, spoke very loudly, very clearly and stood out among all the other girls. If I gave her something to read, she would effortlessly breeze through the words on the page. She seemed eager to raise her hand to answer questions when asked.

I decided to teach by giving the girls a different skit to read each day, each one focusing on a different area of common English expression. They would read the skits the day before we went over them in class as homework, and then come in and act out the skit with the other girls in the class. Each line of the script consisted of three parts: the line in English and in the Latin alphabet, the line transliterated using Hindi characters, and the Hindi translation. This way, the girls would know both how to sound out each word and what each line meant, even if they didn’t know any English at all.

When asked to read, the girls concentrated very hard to try to make out the words written on the paper. Some of the kids read very well and could even make out Latin characters, though others preferred reading English in the Hindi script and read slightly slower. Overall, however, each girl read quite nicely and surprised me with how much they already knew about reading.

On the first day, we tackled a script about basic introductions—what is your name? How old are you? Where do you live? Afterwards, my father and I went on to teach the children the difference between “this” and “that.” To do this, we held up a purple pen and a black pen.
We held up the pen and asked each child to say “This pen is yours.” After successfully saying it, we would then hold up the purple pen and tell them to say, “That pen is yours.” Then we held the black pen towards the children and held the purple pen away from the children telling them to repeat what they said. At the end of class, I introduced the children to the next day’s skit and told them to read it at home. To my surprise, Astha already wanted to read it so I let her stand up and she sped through the entire passage, as all the other students looked at her with wondrous curiosity. After the end of the session, each child walked out of the room and said, “Have a nice afternoon, sir.” I felt like I had been with these children for a while; because of their eagerness to learn and become better, they strived as far as to even say goodbye without thinking. It all came naturally to them.

On the second day, I walked into the small room and the children were already sitting in a nice circle and waiting for me. Once again, they greeted me by standing up and I responded with “How are you?”, and class started from there. I had the first two girls read the scripts to each other. Most girls read much better this day than the preceding day. I saw much improvement in Nisha and Sadhna. In fact, Sadhna and Astha read the fastest out of the entire class. A girl named Anchal, on the other hand, was alert and engaged throughout the whole process, but she seemed to read slower this day than on Monday. Pooja and Poonam, two girls who always sat next to each other, could make out simple words quite quickly but had trouble pronouncing a few words. Poonam had a bit more trouble, and would often pronounce “a” in “gate” as “a” in “cat”. Soon, I started to figure out what the children had trouble with and if any child pronounced a word incorrectly, I would have each child attempt to say the word correctly until they each got it right. Many girls had trouble pronouncing “water”, incorrectly using the “a” sound from “apple”.

After the girls read the skit, this time about common school interactions, I asked them two questions about school, such as “What is your favorite subject?” and “Who is your favorite teacher?” Instead of responding with the lines in the script, the girls had to give their own opinions. This gave the girls practice with conversing interactively.

Then, my father and I set up some pieces of candy in a store-like fashion. We had each girl come up to us and asked them in English, “Which candy do you want?” Each girl would have to respond with, “I want [choice], please.” Then we would answer, “That is five rupees.” They accepted the offer but we stopped them from sitting down and told them to say something like, “Five rupees is not good. I want it for four rupees.” Then we would typically say, “Since you are a good girl, I will let you take it.” Most girls successfully bargained with my father, but a few shy girls, Sakshi and Mantisha, though they knew what to say, needed some help opening up. But in the end, everybody got candy. I was starting to look forward to coming and teaching these children for the remainder of the week.

Many people enjoy watching movies and have a lot to say about their favorite films and actors. I thought that giving the girls a more recreational skit on Wednesday would catch their interest more easily.
When I walked into the room, the girls greeted me once again and I began the class. This time, my brother was absent, so I had one fewer person to help me talk to these children. But by now, I felt like I had a much easier time communicating with the class. After each girl read the scripts to one another, I asked each of them “What is your favorite movie?” and “Who is your favorite actor?”; once again, they had to respond with their actual opinions. Many of the girls liked movies from the 1990s such as Hum Saath Saath Hai and Hum Aap Ke Hain Kaun and picked Salman Khan as their favorite actor. There was a new girl who had not come on Monday and Tuesday, named Gulabshah. She was by far the shyest girl of all, and chose to keep to herself unless directly asked a question. Unlike Astha, Pooja, or Anchal, Gulabshah was not as engaged and did not speak much.

After we finished the movie skit, we decided to give the girls something slightly more challenging this time. We asked the children to make sentences with certain words. For example, if I said “water”, the girls would have to make an English sentence with “water”. One of the words I gave them was “naughty”, and the girls started jokingly saying naught things about each other such as, “She beats people up!” and “She slapped me!” I now think back and realize that it was a good idea to say this word because I got to witness the girls’ thoughts about each other and how they made jokes, fooled around, and communicated with each other.

So far, the girls had talked about movies, school and meeting others. We had not touched upon the topic of weather, so for Thursday, I taught the girls how to talk about the temperature—whether it was cold or hot outside. This day, the girls read brilliantly from all the practice they had received from the past few days. Not a single one of the girls hesitated for long periods of time and each one of them was able to get through the whole script. Following the routine of the past few days, I asked each girl about the weather. Everyone said they liked cold weather because India boasts an uncomfortably hot and humid temperature for most of the year. I also like cold weather.

This day’s lesson primarily used the words “I like”. Because of its frequent usage, I decided to teach them more about sentences that use the phrase “I like”. I also wanted the girls to tell me why they liked cold weather. Some responded by saying “I like cold weather because there is cold water to drink”. Another girl disliked mosquitoes, an animal species that does not come out during the cold. I wrote down the reasons they gave on the board. One girl said that during cold weather, she liked eating pakodis, a warm Indian snack. I tried to write this down on the board, but realized that I could not write pakodi in English. I decided to write it in Hindi. When the girls saw this, they started clapping for me.

On the last day, I took with me a skit based on the story of “Idgah”, by Premchand. Among the people of India, Idgah is a commonly known story and I was going to spend today’s class having the children act out this play. When I arrived, I found that all of the girls had indeed heard of the story before. I first had them all read it in Hindi so that they knew what was going on in the play version I had written, and I then
assigned each girl a different role. As we read through the play, I alternated roles as the scenes changed, so that each girl had a chance to star in a variety of roles. In the first scene, two girls engaged in a conversation with longer sentences than they had ever experienced during this week. They often hesitated and stopped to examine difficult words such as “grain,” “joyous,” and “distraction.” One of the girls, Deepika, had a lengthy, six sentence monologue to read. Although she slipped a few times on some words, she read the monologue quite fluently. The second scene offered the girls experience with group conversation. With five different characters, the girls had to switch between lines quite quickly. But during this scene, the lines were not as long, which made them easier for the girls to say. Overall, however, the girls did a fine job performing the play, using expression, speaking loudly, and reading fluently. Furthermore, they seemed to enjoy reading the play because whenever I decided to assign new roles, all the girls would jump up and down, flapping their hands in the air to be picked to play a part. It surprised me that these girls could learn enough during the course of the week to read a whole play within two hours. This took the whole class time, but it put the children to the test of what they had learned in the past week.

At the end of the class, the children gave me a gift in colorful wrapping paper. Amazingly, they handed it to me together, which I thought was very nice of them. I had not spent long with these children, but I had a great experience with them in one week. Even in that short time, the girls learned an amazing amount of English. Through this experience, I learned that sharing knowledge is very exciting. By telling these girls what I knew about English, I got the opportunity to watch them grow each day of the week. But more amazingly, I learned that even though I did not know Hindi very well, I could still communicate with the girls and teach them English. So despite the fact that I could not decipher the girls’ language at times, I felt as if I could clearly understand their thoughts by teaching them.

In the future, perhaps the girls’ English teachers could hold sessions in which the teachers speak mostly, or entirely, in English. This would give the girls greater exposure to English and force them to speak with what they know, which is an important skill in real-life conversation. The teachers could introduce a wide variety of conversational topics for the girls. This would help them learn the vocabulary that they need to engage in common conversation that they seem to enjoy.

And it turned out that I really enjoyed my experience there as well. As I walked away from the classroom for the last time, I didn’t even notice the flies and mosquitoes that had so bothered me the first time. Instead, I smiled and took a long last look at the puddles, houses, and piles of bricks that I had so come to love.
**Sustaining Hope**

**Skits**

Below are the scripts used to teach English. The first skit is about meeting others for the first time. The second covers how to talk about school. The third discusses movies and actors. The fourth script explains weather. The final one is based on a famous Indian story called Idgah, by Premchand.

*The children's departing gift to me.*
Meeting for the First Time Skit

Basic Hellos

**Person 1**  
Hi!  
हाय!  
हाय!

**Person 2**  
Hello!  
हल्लो!  
नमस्ते!

**Person 1**  
What is your name?  
बाइट इज़ यूर नेम ?  
तुम्हारा नाम क्या है?

**Person 2**  
My name is Priya. What is your name?  
माय नेम इज़ प्रिया. बाइट इज़ यूर नेम?  
मेरा नाम प्रिया है. तुम्हारा नाम क्या है?

**Person 1**  
My name is Vidya.  
माय नेम इज़ विद्या.  
मेरा नाम विद्या है.

**Person 2**  
Nice to meet you.  
नाइस टू मीट यू.  
तुमसे मिलकर अच्छा लगा.

**Person 1**  
You, too. How old are you?  
यू टू. हाउ ऑल्ड आर यू?  
तुमसे भी. तुम्हारी उम्र क्या है?

**Person 2**  
I am 8 years old. How old are you?  
आई एम एट यीआर ऑल्ड. हाउ ऑल्ड आर यू?  
मैं आठ साल की हूं. तुम्हारी उम्र क्या है?

**Person 1**  
I am just 7 years old.  
आई एम जस्ट सेवन यीआर ऑल्ड.  
मैं सिर्फ़ सात साल की हूं.

**Person 2**  
Where do you live?  
व्हेयर डू यू लिव?  
तुम कहाँ रहती हो?
Person 1: I live in Trilokpuri. How about you?
Person 2: I live in front of Sanjay Lake.

Person 1: Which class are you in? I am in class four.
Person 2: I am in class five.

Person 1: Well, I have to go home now. It was nice to meet you!
Person 2: See you soon!

Person 1: Bye!
School Skit

In School

**Person 1** What is your favorite subject in school? 
बोट इज़ यॉर फेवराईट सब्जेक्ट इज़ स्कूल? 
स्कूल में तुम्हारा पसंदीदा विषय क्या है?

**Person 2** I like history. 
आय लाईक हिस्ट्री. 
मुझे इतिहास अच्छा लगता है.

**Person 1** My favorite subject is science. Why do you like history? 
माय फेवराईट सब्जेक्ट इज़ सायंस. ज्ञान हू यू लाईक हिस्ट्री? 
मेरा मनपसंद विषय विज्ञान है. तुम्हें इतिहास क्यों पसंद है?

**Person 2** I like it because I like learning about the past. 
आय लाईक इट बीकॉस आय लाईक लाइनिंग अबाउट द पास्ट. 
मुझे यह पसंद है क्योंकि मुझे अतीत के बारे में सीखना पसंद है.

**Person 1** Really? That's very interesting. I like science because we can do lots of experiments. 
रिली? द वीरी इन्टरेस्टिंग.आय लाईक सायंस बीकॉस बी कैन हू लाई एक्सपेरिमेंट्स.
अच्छा? यह बहुत विचारधार्म है. मुझे विज्ञान अच्छा लगता है क्योंकि हम बहुत सारे एक्सपेरिमेंट्स कर सकते हैं.

**Person 2** It is very hot. Do you get thirsty in school? 
इट इज़ वेरी हौट. हू यू गेट थर्स्टी इन स्कूल? 
बहुत गर्मी है. तुम्हें स्कूल में प्यास लगती है?
Person 1: Yes. In fact, I am thirsty now. Can I have some water?

Person 2: Of course! Let me put it in a cup for you.

Person 1: Thank you!

Person 2: How are your teachers in school?

Person 1: I really like my teachers. My favorite is my maths teacher. She is very kind. Who is your favorite teacher?

Person 2: I like my English teacher. He comes from America.

Person 1: I have to go to the bathroom. Where is the bathroom?
Person 2  The bathroom is behind this wall.
द बाथरूम इंज़ बीहाईंड दिस बाज़.
बाथरूम इंज़ दीवार के पीछे हैं.

Person 1  Thanks!
शेक्स
धन्यवाद.
At a Movie Store

**Customer** Hi! I would like to rent a movie.
हाय! आये बुड़ लाईड टू रेंट ए मूवी.
हाय! मैं एक फिल्म रेंट करना चाहती हूँ.

**Shopkeeper** Sure. I can help you. What kind of movie do you want?
शोर, आई कैल हेल्प यू. वाट काइड ऑफ़ मूवी हू जू वांट?
ज़ुइन, मैं आपकी मदद कर सकती हूं. आप किस तरह की फिल्म चाहते हैं?

**Customer** I like action films and romances.
आय लाइक एक्शन फिल्म एंड रोमेंस.
मुझे एक्शन और रोमांस फिल्में अच्छी लगती हैं.

**Shopkeeper** There are many movies like that! Who are your favorite actors?
इस तरह की बहुत सारी फिल्में हैं. आपके पसंदीदा अभिनेता कौन हैं?

**Customer** My favorite actor is Hrithik Roshan. My favorite actress is Priyanka Chopra.
माय फेवरिट एक्टर ह्रीतिक रोशन. माय फेवरिट एक्ट्रेस ह्रीतिक चोपड़ा.
मेरे पसंदीदा अभिनेता ह्रीतिक रोशन है. मेरी पसंदीदा अभिनेत्री प्रियांका चोपड़ा है.

**Shopkeeper** Really? I like him, too.
रीडी? आई लाईड हिम टू.
सच्ची? वह मुझे भी अच्छा लगता है.

**Customer** I don’t like Amitabh Bachchan.
आई डॉट लाईड अमिताभ बच्चन.
मुझे अमिताभ बच्चन पसंद नहीं है.

**Shopkeeper** You don’t like Amitabh? That is unusual.
यू डॉट लाईड अमिताभ? डैट इज अन्यूजूय्यल.
आप अमिताभ पसंद नहीं करते? यह असामान्य है.
Customer: Do you have the film, Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara?

Shopkeeper: No, that movie is still in theaters.

Customer: OK, then do you have the movie Dil Se?

Shopkeeper: No, that movie is too old.

Customer: What do you have then?

Shopkeeper: Because you like Hrithik and Priyanka, you might like the movie Krrish.

Customer: What kind of movie is it?

Shopkeeper: It is about a superhero, and it has both your favorite actors.

Customer: I'll take it!

Customer: Do you have the film, Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara?

Shopkeeper: No, that movie is still in theaters.

Customer: OK, then do you have the movie Dil Se?

Shopkeeper: No, that movie is too old.

Customer: What do you have then?

Shopkeeper: Because you like Hrithik and Priyanka, you might like the movie Krrish.

Customer: What kind of movie is it?

Shopkeeper: It is about a superhero, and it has both your favorite actors.
Shopkeeper  Very good. Thank you!
बैरी गूड. थैंक यू!
बहुत अच्छा. शुक्रिया!
Weather Skit

Weather

**Cold Girl**  I love the weather today. It is nice and cool. 
आय नब द बैद्र टूडे. इट इज़ नाइस एंड क्लूल.

**Warm Girl**  Do you like the cold weather? I don’t like it. 
हू यू लाइक द कोल्ड बैद्र? आय हू लाइक इट.

**Cold Girl**  Why do you dislike it? 
ब्लाइय हू यू डिलाइक इट?

**Warm Girl**  When it is cold, I have to put on many jackets to stay warm.
जब मीसम ठंडा होता है, मुझे बहुत सारे जेकेट गर्म रहने के लिए पहनने पड़ते हैं.

**Cold Girl**  But don’t you like to play in the snow? It is fun. 
बट डोंट यू लाइक टू प्ले इन द श्न? इट इज़ फ़न.

**Warm Girl**  Snow is very cold. It is difficult to walk through it. 
श्न इज़ बहुत कोल्ड. इट इज़ डिफिकल्ट टू वॉक थ्रू इट.

**Cold Girl**  OK, you are right. What kind of weather do you like? 
ओके, आय आर राइट. वाइट कैरिड जब बैद्र हू यू लाइक?

**Warm Girl**  Cold Girl: Why do you dislike it? 
Cold Girl: ब्लाइय हू यू डिलाइक इट?

**Cold Girl**  OK, you are right. What kind of weather do you like? 
ओके, आय आर राइट. वाइट कैरिड जब बैद्र हू यू लाइक?

**Cold Girl**  OK, you are right. What kind of weather do you like? 
ओके, आय आर राइट. वाइट कैरिड जब बैद्र हू यू लाइक?
Warm Girl  I like hot weather, when the sun comes out and illuminates the trees, the fields, and the grass.
آیہ لایک ہوٹ ہوٹ ہوندے، جب وہ صحن کمپ گراؤٹ اینڈ
ہلیمینیٹڈ ہوٹ ہوندے، ہوٹ فائبروٹ، اینڈ ہوٹ گراؤٹ.
سپھر گرم ہوے میسم پسند ہے، جب ہوٹ ہوئے نکال آتتا ہے،
ہور پہڈ، ہیتے اور ہوائے کو پڑھکھ دیتے ہے.

Cold Girl  Yes, but I sweat a lot when it is hot. It is hard to sleep.
یہ سی، ہور آیہ سےٹ ہوٹ آر لیٹ ہوئے اینڈ ہوٹ ہور. اینڈ ہوٹ
ہاروٹ ہوئے سلیپ.
ہور، لگ بھگ کبھی ہوئے گرم ہوئے ہے، بہت پسند
آتتا ہے. سیئن موزیکل ہوئے ہے.

Warm Girl  But we can have fun playing cricket outside. We cannot play cricket in the snow.
بٹ ہور ہیٹ ہوئے فن لیٹھنگ کرکٹ ایکٹسائنڈ. ہور
ہنڈیلٹ پنے اکٹسائنڈ انہے ہور ہوئے.
لئیکن ہوئے باھر کرکٹ کھلیتے ہیں. ہوم برک میں
کرکٹ نہیں کھلیتے ہیں.

Cold Girl  It is too hot to even think of going outside. I sit under the fan.
یہ ہوٹ ہوئے تھے ہور ہوئے ذیک ایج گوینگ
ئیکٹسائنڈ. یہ سیٹ ہنڈر ڈی ہوئے.
یتھی گرمی ہے، کہ باہر جانے کا سوچ بھی نہیں
سکتے. میں پنچے کے نچے بیٹھتی ہوئے.

Warm Girl  But you can just go into the shade. Just like that song Chaiyya Chaiyya.
بٹ یو ہیٹ جست غیٹ گیٹ ہنڈر ڈی شیڈ. جست لایک دیٹ
سیئن چھیئی چھیئی.
لئیکن آپ سیئن چھیئی میں ہیں کہ سکتے ہیں. ہور گانا
چھیئی چھیئی کی تاریخ.
Cold Girl  How about the rain? I love the rain.
बारिश के बारे में क्या ख्याल है? मुझे बारिश बहुत पसंद है.

Warm Girl  Me too! It waters all the fields. I like hot weather, but it is nice when the rain cools us down.
मी टू! इट बीट्ज़ आल द फील्ड्स. आई लाईक होट वैटर, बट हट इट नाइंस बैन द रेन क्लउज अम डाउन.
मुझे भी! सारे खेतों को पानी मिलता है. मुझे गरम मौसम पसंद है, लेकिन बारिश हमे ठंडक देती है, तो अच्छा लगता है.

Cold Girl  Great! We should both come out when it is raining and play.
ग्रेट! वी शुड बायल कम आऊट बैन हट हेट रेनिंग एंड प्ले.
अच्छा! जब बारिश होती है, तो हम दोनों को बाहर आकर खेलना चाहिए.

Warm Girl  Wonderful! Look! It is raining right now!
वॉन्डरफुल! लुक! इट हेट रेनिंग राइट नोउ!
कमाल है! देखो! अभी बारिश होने लगी!

Cold Girl  Let's go and play!
लेट्स गो एंड प्ले!
चलो, खेलते हैं.
Hamid is a boy of nine years old who does not have a mother or father. He lives with his grandmother.

Hamid नी साल का एक लड़का है जिसके माँ या पिता नहीं है. वह अपनी दादी के साथ रहता है. उनके पास ज़्यादा पैसे नहीं है.

Hamid and Amina (crying).

Hamid और अमीना (रो रही है).

Hamid - What’s wrong Amma? The fair is today and everyone will have a joyous time. So why do you cry?

Amina - I haven’t a single grain in this house and I just don’t know what to do! Every child will come back home with their pockets full of toys and sweets.

Hamid - I care nothing for toys. They are a waste of time.
Amina - But all children will go to the fair with their parents and the crowd is very large. What will I do if anything happened to you?

पर सारे बच्चे अपने माँ बाप के साथ मेला जाएंगे और बहुत मोड़ होगी. तुम्हें कुछ हो गया, तो मैं क्या करूंगी?

Hamid - Do not fear Amma; I will come back before anybody else. You should not worry about me.

डरो मत अम्मा. मैं सबसे पहले बापस आऊंगा. मेरी फ़िक्र मत किया करो.

Amina - It takes three miles to walk to the fair and how can you possibly do that when you have no shoes? You will get blisters! But if I go with you, then who will cook food? I cannot afford to buy anything so I need to go to borrow from others.

मेला तीन मील दूर है और तुम बिना जुतों के कैसे चलोगे? तुम्हें छाले हो जाएंगे! मैं जाऊंगी, तो खाना कौन बनाएंगा? मैं कोई सामान नहीं खरीद सकती तो दूसरों से उधार लेना पड़ेगा.

Hamid - I am really looking forward to the fair! A few blisters cannot possibly stop me!
Amina - Go and have fun. But be careful.

Hamid - OK.

Hamid - Mehmood, Mohsin, Nooray, Sammi! How are you?

Mehmood - Oh Hamid! Why aren’t you doing anything?

Nooray - Yes, you should take a round on the merry-go-round.

Sammi - Or ride the camels. They are a lot of fun.
Mohsin - Hold on. He cannot do anything because he only has three paise!

Hamid - Let's go, buy some sweets.

Mehmood - Hamid, look at our toys. This is a policeman. He will guard my house.

Mohsin - And my water carrier will bring me water day and night.

Nooray - My lawyer will fight court cases for me.

Sammi - My washer woman will wash my clothes.

Hamid - What are the use of all of these toys? They are made of mud and if you drop them once, they will break.

Mohsin (To friends) - It’s not worth talking to him. Let’s go, buy some sweets.
Mohsin (Later) - Hamid, eat my rewri. It is wonderful!

हमीद, मेरी रेबड़ी खा. बहुत अच्छी है.

(Hamid reaches out, Mohsin pulls back and inserts the rewri into his mouth, everybody but Hamid laughs)

(हमीद ने बाहर बढ़ाया है. मोहसिन पीछे बीच कर रेबड़ी अपने मुख में डाल लेता है. हमीद के अलावा सब हंसते है.)

Mohsin - I am sorry Hamid. Here, take another one. This time I really mean it.

हमीद, माफ़ कर. एक और ले. इस बार देरूगा.

Sammi - Do not listen to him. He is full of tricks. Have a gulabjaman.

उसकी बात मत सुन. वह शरारती है. यह गुलाब जामुन ले.

Hamid - No, sweets are bad for your health!

नहीं, मिठाई सेहत के लिए अच्छी नहीं है.

(Hamid enters a metal shop)

(हमीद एक धातु की दुकान में प्रवेश करता है)

Hamid (to himself) - If I buy Amma a chimta, she will be so happy. Everyday, when she makes chapatis, her hand burns. She will run to all the houses in the neighborhood and show them that her grandson has brought her a chimta from the fair.

आप बैंग अम्मा के लिए चिमटा खरीदा, वह बहुत खुश होंगी. रोज़ रोटी बनाते बक्त, उनका हाथ जलता है. बहु घर घर में
Shopkeeper - Why do you eye that chimta. Don’t waste your money on things that are of no use to a child like you.

Hamid - Will you sell the chimta to me or not? How much is it?

Shopkeeper - Six paise.

Hamid - Tell me the real price.

Shopkeeper - Fine, four paise. Take it or leave it.

Hamid - How about three? (Very boldly)

Shopkeeper - If you desire the chimta so much, you may take it.

Hamid - Thank you!

(The fair is ending and Mohsin and his friends have
bought many toys and sweets. They laugh at Hamid’s chimta.)

(मेला ख़त्म हो रहा है और मोहसिन और दोस्तों ने कई खिलोने और मिठाई खायी हैं. वह हमीद के चिमटे पर हँसते हैं.)

Mohsin - What are you going to do with a useless piece of metal like that?

इस बेकार लोहे की चीज़ का तुम क्या करोगे.

Hamid (Threw chimta to ground) - Throw your water carrier to the ground and all his bones will break.

अपना पानी बाला ज़मीन पर पटको, सारी हड़ियाँ टूट जाएंगी.

Mohsin - Are you saying that your chimta is a toy?

क्या तुम कह रहे हो कि तुम्हारा चिमटा खिलोना है?

Hamid - It is as much of a toy as your toys. If I put it on my shoulder, it becomes a gun. If I put it in my hand, I act like a magician. I can break your toys with one swing of my chimta.

जैसे तुम्हारे खिलोने हैं वैसा ही. कंधे पर रखो बनेंगे बन गयी.
हाथ मे लें, मे जाहूसर बन गया. एक बार चिमटा घुमाया,
तुम्हारे सारे खिलोने टूट जायेंगे.

Mohsin - Your chimta cannot carry water.

तुम्हारा चिमटा पानी नहीं ला सकता.

Hamid - One swing of my chimta and your water carrier will run into the house and spill all of his water.

एक बार चिमटा घुमाया तो तुम्हारा पानी बाला घर में भाग जाएगा और सारा पानी गिर जायेगा.
Nooray - If your chimta gets arrested, he will beg for my lawyer’s help.

अगर तुम्हारा चिमटा पकड़ा गया, तो मेरे वकील फिर मदत मांगेगा।

Hamid - Nobody will arrest my chimta.

मेरे चिमटे को कोई नहीं पकड़ेगा।

Mehmood - My policeman will.

मेरा सिपाही पकड़ेगा।

Hamid - Tell your policeman to come fight my chimta. He will run and hide.

अपने सिपाही से कही आकर मेरे चिमटे से लड़े। वह भाग कर छुप जाएगा।

Mohsin - Everyday, your chimta burns its nose in the fire.

तुम्हारा चिमटा रोज़ अपनी नाक आग में जलाता है।

Hamid - Only the brave jump into fire. Tell your water carrier to go into the fire, he will burn to death.

आग में सिर्फ बहादुर कूदते हैं। अपने पानी बाले को कही आग में जाए, वह जल के मर जाएगा।

Nooray - My lawyer sits on a chair and table while your chimta lies on the kitchen floor.

मेरा वकील मेज़ कुर्सी पर बैठता है, तुम्हारा चिमटा रसोई की जमीन पर पड़ा रहता है।

Hamid - My chimta will knock your lawyer off his
(The boys are in shock for they have been defeated)

Mohsin - Let me see your chimta; You can hold my water carrier.

Hamid - I was only joking. Your toys are much better than this useless piece of iron.

Sammi - I will give you my washerwoman for the chimta.

Hamid - No. I will not trade.

Sammi - My mother will shower me with a thousand curses when she sees what useless things I have bought.

Nooray - my mother will give me a thousand beatings.

मेरा चिमटा तुम्हारे बकील को कुर्सी से गिरा देगा।

(Mohsin - Let me see your chimta; You can hold my water carrier.)

(लड़के समर्थे में हैं क्योंकि वे हार गए हैं)

Hamid - I was only joking. Your toys are much better than this useless piece of iron.

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(मोहन - मैं तुम्हारे चिमटे को देखने में अपनी धोबी देंगा।)
(Hamid arrives home)

(हामिद घर आया)

Amina - Hamid! How are you?

हमीद! कैसा है?

Hamid - Wonderful! Look what I have brought you!

व्रजया! देखो मे तुम्हारे लिए क्या लाया.

Amina (angrily) - You silly boy! You go to the fair for three hours and find nothing but a chimta? You waste all your money on something you cannot even play with!

अरे बुद्धि! तू तीन घंटे मे रहा पर तुझे इस चिमटे के अन्दर कुछ नहीं मिला? तूने सारा पैसा ऐसी चीज़ पर बर्बाद कर दिया, जिससे तू खेल भी नहीं सकता.

Hamid - …But you burn your fingers when you make chapatis. That is why I bought it for you.

पर रोज़ जब तुम रोटी बनाती हो तो तुम्हारी वेंगलियाँ जलती हैं. इसलिए मैंने यह तुम्हारे लिए खरीदा.

Amina (crying and hugging Hamid) - Oh my son. You thought of your old grandmother all this time, even though all the other kids were eating sweets and playing. A thousand blessings be upon you. Your father and mother would be so proud of you.

अरे मेरा बेटा. सारे बच्चे मिठाई खा रहे थे और खेल रहे थे, और तू अपनी बुढ़ी दादी के बारे में सोच रहा था. तेरे लिए हृज़ार दुआएं. तेरे अम्मी-अब्बा कितने खुश होते.
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