

## The risk of being 13

Bhojpur. 6.14 a.m.

*“When you are born and survive as a girl, you have already taken a risk. I take risks every day by not thinking about the future, by thinking I will come back to school tomorrow to read stories with my friends, I take risks because I know anyone at anytime could stop me.”* Anshu, age 13

Bhojpur is waking up to tinkling cow bells and a sleepy farmer is walking towards his cattle. His unhurried footsteps are no match for the pair of flip-flops that fly past him, school bag spilling open, papers fluttering and a white dupatta struggling to escape - waving in the wake of a running girl.

6.15 a.m. Anshu is late for her coaching class. She knows her teacher must have already begun talking about the rise of the grand Mughal empire and she doesn't want to miss it. Once, with her family, she had travelled to Delhi where she saw fort ruins, they were giant. The largest and oldest thing she had seen until then was the 200 year-old banyan tree that stood behind her school. Her mind is wandering again, slowing her down she scolds herself. She has to focus on running. But harvest season has begun so she has to help around her house. Help her mother and her aunts bring in the grain, help her brothers pack it into big sacks and store it around the house. She has been asked to stay back from school and help - not just today, but many days.

Anshu's father lives in Jaipur and so she's been left in charge of being responsible and taking action - adding weight and force to her thirteen years. Several years ago, when her family had decided to move from Madhya Pradesh to Bihar, Anshu had been separated from her family at the Patna railway station. In the whirl of sounds, smells, people, and suitcases, she remembers being afraid realizing what loss was. However, with measured footsteps she had found her way to the railway officer's chambers and waited patiently until her father came to get her. Once she realized that she could take care of herself she realized she did not need to be afraid. Thoughts are distracting her, she knows her classmates will have moved on to Humayun after learning about Babur. Her teacher understand that girls are expected to miss school and help at home, that's why they were usually late for class or did not turn up at all. But Anshu thinks maybe he does not understand that some girls really do want to come to school to learn new things. If girls can't tell their parents they want to go to school - perhaps teachers could try? Parents might listen to them.

She nods to Doctor Uncle who is swiftly walking in the opposite direction. He must be late too. He usually opens his door to patients at 6 a.m. every morning. Harvest season is slowing everyone down. There are five doctors in the village now. Two years ago there were none and everyone had to take a bullock cart and two buses to reach the nearest hospital. Anshu still wants to become a doctor. She always feels needed when she is able to help relieve other people's fears and worries. For reasons she does not understand, she wants to treat bones. Bones that break so easily while you run and bones that are the building block of everything we do. She wonders if doctors who treat bones could also be interested in the Mughal Empire. Maybe she can study about the bones of the emperors - there are actually people who do that. Archaeologists they are called. But they cannot cure people.

Anshu has been reading stories about people who do unbelievable things - like a man who builds bridges in South India, a woman who makes solar lamps, and a boy who opened a tribal medicine centre. She reads these stories on Saturdays when she goes to school for skill story school. This is the only day of school she really likes, her teacher says he likes it too. Saturday is three days away.

Anshu runs the last ten steps to her coaching class catching her flying dupatta. As much as she wants to see the world, she loves her village and her people. She will go to Patna and maybe even Delhi to study, but she will come back to home. There are five doctors here already, but she could be the next one - she'll be the only doctor who will build a hospital and will treat bones and tell stories of Mughal emperors. But her big dream depends on tomorrow. If her family will let her go back to school. Her dream for every tomorrow to go to school school is the risk she takes every day.

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**Our School story** is based on a true event that took place in the desert of Rajasthan, it's a story about six girls who decided to make sure their school would not close after Grade 8, they were determined to extend their school to Grade 10.

Our School story shows six girl protagonists using their entrepreneurial skills to convince their parents and school authorities to open the school for more grades. First, the girls identify a problem: our school closes after Grade 8. Second, they build a team, using their leadership, motivation and communication skills they get every girl to agree: yes we want our school to add two new grades so we don't have to drop out. They believe in themselves, are confident and use their negotiation skills in a unique way: they decide to tell their parents that everyone else's parents have agreed to let them go to school until Grade 10. It's a secret the girls promise to keep, and do. Once everyone's parents say YES, the girls present the list of signatures to the headmaster, who has no choice, but to say YES too.

Anshu, like over 55,000 girls in schools in Bihar, wants to go to school. She wants to complete Grade 10 and go further. She thinks she is alone in her dream, but she's not.

Next year we're telling Anshu's story in the schools program, with the hope, that one story, can have a ripple effect to inspire 55,000 girls to convince their parents to let them stay in school and not drop out to get married.

Negotiation skills in India, for girls, often mean getting a large number of people together to say YES, which means you have to be a good, persistent and clear communicator. Negotiating alone is hard, together, it takes longer, but can have a wide-reaching effect, not just for one girl but for every girl where you live. Every time a girl makes a change in her life, when she dares, she makes a change for every girl who will walk after her in her community, school and family.

15% of 21,422 girls across nine districts, told us that when they complete their education they'd like to become doctors, just like Anshu. But if you drop out of school, becoming a doctor is impossible. Even if you stay in school, it's a long shot. Entrepreneurial and employability skills that kids explore every Saturday at school, are motivational skills for mobility: when you are persistent, know how to search for information and identify problems, you can problem-solve to make your career dreams come true.

Right now most girls don't understand what you have to do to become a doctor, how much it costs to complete your education and how long it takes - they don't have a sense of their family finances or a financial plan for their education.

If girls don't wish to be doctors, then they wish to do what everyone thinks is the only series of jobs out there: 15% say they'd like to become engineers and 16% police officers. We're looking for more, what interests us in the data is that 21% of girls want to be bank officers - a new career that popped up on our data chart this year. We have a skills story about Manjeri who applies for a loan to start a bicycle renting business. The skills challenge with the story is that girls are asked to go the bank and interview the bank manager. Did girls find out about the chance to become a bank manager, here?. What we're banking and building on is that there's a tiny light of 4% of girls who want to have their own business, and another out-there 2% who want to drive trains. As soon as skills for girls creates a tipping point for new careers for women - when there are women train drivers and small enterprises across Bihar led by women, we'll be the first to let you know.

To reach make their school and career dreams come true, over 20,000 girls told us they need support, just like Anshu, not only to go to school but support, as young women, to be able to work - they can't do it alone. 41% of

girls said to be able to work, women would need someone else to help manage the family and 22% said they'd need additional help with child care. 12% said their future husbands would have to be supportive and 13% said they'd need to see other women working, women role models where they live to be able to be allowed to work too.

This year we released a new graphic novel, Archana's Leaf Plate enterprise, into our schools program, it's a true story of a young woman who makes over 100,000 leaf plates every quarter and has created 85 jobs for women. It's a true role model story that girls will read even if Archana is not yet walking in their villages in real life.

Be! Fund began working in Bihar this year, providing risk capital to young women to start sustainable enterprises and become role models for girls. By this time next year, there will be over 10 new hero role models for girls in Bihar, and girl journalists will be enabled to go meet and interview them, while we'll work hard to design these stories into curricula to be read as part of Saturday school.

### **Infographic:**

**What kind of jobs you want to do, 15% of girls want to be doctors**

**Time** - what **support** do girls need to go to school + women to work