



Little Girls, Big Achievement: A Swaraj Awareness Campaign in Bihar

In order to stand by a group of primary school girls who waged a unique public nonviolent campaign for a school for girls under the guidance of their teacher-mentor She Dilip Jha, Swaraj Peeth's Gandhi Shanti Sainik and member of Bihar Core Team, Rajiv Vora travelled to their village Dumarbanna in North Bihar district of Araria, right on the border with Nepal, stayed with them for three days, Conducted a two-day nonviolence discussion with reference to their struggle; and flagged off a Swaraj- library on Cycle. Though the credit goes to the girls and local citizen, it also shows how Swaraj dialogue and Hind Swaraj Campaign are inspiring people. Young girls did what elders could not and leaders did not.





Dumabanna is a village of Babuan Panchayat in Araria District of north Bihar, on the border with Nepal. One can walk up to Nepali



neighbours. Houses on both the side of the road, now broadened by the Border Road organization of GoI, look aesthetic outside and clean inside. In one compound there are several houses for one family; one living quarter, one kitchen, one store house, one for the cow/s. Kids are studious.



*A unique
ALL GIRLS CAMPAIGN*



Miss Neha(right) with a powerful poetic slogan coined by her :Koi Samasya Bada Nahi; Hara wahi jo lada nahi” “No problem is big; defeated is one who never fought”; and Priyanka (left) coined another very poetic slogan ”Yadi gyan ka Sagar Sukha hai; Tab Tak Manav Bhukha Hai” -“If the ocean of knowledge is dry, until humanity is starved”. Picture on the left shows team of girls that waged the campaign and undertook nonviolent action that built up confidence among girls in the three panchayat region; transformed popular awareness about girls’ education; and, made the Department of Education and the political leadership yield finally. Granting the up-gradation of one school in their vicinity may have an exemplar effect on one thousand such cases in Bihar where girls drop out because there is no school in the travel safe distance beyond standard 8th. Local media carried front page top stories and gave full coverage for several days. Neha and her team were facilitated specially by Prabat Khabar group in a public function at Bhagalpur; and, by local public bodies similarly in

Girls Rise for Education:

One young girl, 15 , ninth standard, Neha's determination, leadership supported and guided by her teacher-mentor, Shri Dilip Jha created an unprecedented example in Dumanbanna village of Babuan Panchayat, Narpatganj block of North Bihar's Araria District . Dilip Jha, is senior Gandhi Shanti Sainik of Swaraj Peeth's Hind Swaraj Campaign and Kumari Neha has organized and leads Hind Swaraj Kishori Samuh of Basmatiya Block/

Neha, an exceptionally bright girl of 15, whose small collection of books includes 30 abridged biographies, a couple of Gandhi's books, The Gita, the Quarran, Gorky's "Mother", Rajneesh and Tolstoy, studies in standard 9th, teaches mathematics to students of 10th, has her mentor in Sh Dilip Jha, a social reformer. who settled in this village about a decade back. He earns his bread by teaching children, spending two-third of his modest earnings on Gandhian community work. He has rid the area of cross-border crimes and works for Hindu-Muslim unity. He covers three *panchayat* (local self-government unit) areas, about a population of 35000 in six small and big villages. Hindu-Muslim ratio is almost 60-40.

Facing resistance, not from parents but other family members, to her going for 9th class study at a thirty kilometre far school; refused any facility to travel that much distance, Neha , one winter morning was crying inconsolably. Sh Dilip Jha, living not far from her house went over and tried to console her. "I could study further if school was nearer, why we girls have no facility close by?" she complained to her mentor. Dilipjee encouraged her " why don't you make an application?" " I will, if I can." She got up, washed her face and that very afternoon she called a meeting of her friends, drafted a petition. At this point Dilipjee told the group their petition will bear strength if it is signed by many more girls like them. For the next ten days this group of girls of 12 to 15 years of age would get out in the morning in a group, walk over to other villages, meet girls of their age, and convince them about the cause in order to get their signature. They had to talk to their parents too. In ten days they gathered 631 signatures, who joined the campaign; talked to hundreds of families, Hindus and Muslims; responded to their questions and to general lack of awareness and at times resistance to girls' education.

" A literate daughter makes a society literate because she brightens up two families; one of her parents' another of her in-laws".



Tunni answering journalists

On 29th December, 2012 they organized a meeting of all the girls joined by many citizen and parents, brought out a rally in Basmatiya, where they were demanding the up-gradation of existing middle-school, which is up to 8th standard only. The three Panchayats around it have no school beyond that. One can continue studies if one travels 30 Km, because the school ten km away in village Birpur would not admit these girls as Birpur falls in another District. Forbesganj. the birth place of great literary figure of India, late Fanishwarnath Renu of *Tisri Kasam* fame, is 30 Km away. Thus, Girls from this area drop out after passing out 8th.



Journalists in the class with Balika-samuh. 21 April 2013.. Rajiv Conducted a 2-day Nonviolence education. (Above) Seema answering journalists

On 10th January 2012 thirty of them went to the District Education Officer in Forbesganj to offer a day's nonviolent peaceful sit-in with a petition signed by more than 600 girls. They had no money to pay for the transport. The group made an appeal for five rupees

contribution to all the girls, which all of them contributed. Concerned citizens constituted a Citizens' Group across all political shades.

People willingly joined keeping their local politics asides. Mozaumil Ansari, a youthful Mukhiya, gave away all Rs 200 he had in his pocket at the time the girls met him as they launched fund raising, their enthusiasm soared. The girls told me " people are not against good things, some one has to take the initiative."

Girls met their Member of Parliament, Member of the State assembly and many an officials. They would talk to them in a manner children of that age talk to their elders. " Uncle...unty...bhaiya.." Dismayed by the determination and collective action by girls of this age, their firm politeness and readiness to suffer extreme cold weather; going hungry for the hole day, walking miles every day to different villages to meet and convince parents and girls unknown to them, suffer their awkward questions and at time rejection..

.A District official advised this group they should attend their classes rather than bunk the school to come over all the way to him! One of them replied " Uncle, we are absenting from our classes for a few days so that many girls deprived of education facility can get it" " But, what you are doing is something politicians should be doing"

" Off course, but then they should have done it long back. They did not feel what we sufer." Their Member of Parliament offered the girls sweets and snacks, made them sit down in her house. The girls politely refused to take anything. " We will bring you sweet and will exchange and eat with you once the work is done..."



*Discussing issues with Rajiv Vora, 21Apr 2013
He was with them 19-22 April 2013*

The Group, they named it as “ Balika-Samuh” (Girls’ Team) , planned an another public protest meeting with all the 600 odd girls and a demonstration for 16th April, to be followed by Satyagraha, distributed pamphlets, elicited support from all the quarters.

Prior to that they made a peaceful demonstration on 11th April 2013 before the Dy. Chief Minister , Sh Modi who was holding a public meeting in a near-by small town. He noticed them, called

them, and received their petition and papers. The local MP and MLA present on the dais talked the girls and promised them to up-grade the school by May 2013. With this promise, girls came back, suspended the 16th April demonstration.

During all these actions Dilip Jha and his colleagues would watch from afar, let the girls do their campaign and talking. He would call us in Delhi all most every evening. Rajiv Vora travelled to Dumabanna to stand by them. As a result Media got in action and press gave full support. During Rajiv/s visit, April 17 to 22rd, all the papers of the region carry front page stories; continued for a couple of days. It helped a lot in public awareness. Media said this was an example which can set a trend.

Hind Swaraj Brought the Change: In the story of Sh Dilip Jha wrote: “I got attracted to Gandhian movement in 1992.. For the next five years I travelled through out the country, visited most of the Gandhian institution worth the name, spent months in many; studied and watched the Gandhian movement and institutions closely and finally joined the Sarvodaya fraternity. However, my mind did not find peace, a question continued to trouble me: why in spite of such a big number of people and so many institutions and organizations the Sarvodaya movement has no impact today?



After much observation and thinking I realized that the present Gandhian Sarvodaya movement has lost its spirit mainly due to organizational and institutional vested interests rather than the thought dominating the movement. As a result I lost my interest. Hopelessness and frustration led me to inaction. I lost my concern. In 2010 some friends

informed me of the Hind Swaraj campaign of Swaraj Peeth Trust. What I heard made me curious. I expressed my desire to see Sh Rajiv Vora, who came down to my village Dumarbanna, on 27 Dec. 2010 while travelling in Bihar. He talked about why we should take up Hind Swaraj today to a gathering of about fifty people including the youth and school girls. His talk on Hind Swaraj brought hope to our state of hopelessness. For the first time I saw that without an exception the eyes of each one of us lighted up. I found my answer.



Swaraj Dialogue, 27 Dec 2010, Rajiv Vora



I started a study circle with youth, both girls and boys, where we would study Hind Swaraj and other good literature of great people.... I have been since attending Hind Swaraj camps in Dharamsala and Delhi organized by Swaraj Peeth....”

Both Neha and Dilipjee attended four day Hind Swaraj and Nonviolence Training programme in March 2013.

Dilipjee and Neha are members of the Bihar Core Team of Swaraj Peeth. All Core Team Members are brought once a year for four day training and study session..



The Latest: Protest Against Rapes and Liquor:

On Sunday 27th April 70 girls took out a procession with play cards and banners throughout six villages in solidarity with the sexually assaulted girls. They linked it with free flowing liquor. Women came out in big numbers every where in support of the protesting girls. Dilpji told us on the phone on 25th that the girls discussed in their meeting the spate of heinous rapes. They said since most of the rapists were drunk, people must rise against liquor if they wish to stop this barbarity. These girls therefore wrote play cards from morning till lunch time and then took out the procession, which concluded in a prayer meeting in their school in Dumabanna.

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