

Nonviolent Engagement for Mitigation of Violence and Fear in Tribal Region of Bihar and Jharkhand: An Experiment in Swaraj Dialogue and Gandhi Shanti Sena



Nonviolence too needs investment. Had we invested in nonviolence – the ‘science of soul,’ in the words of Mahatma Gandhi, in the similar way as we have in the science of violence, war and weapons, we would have seen similarly progressed in the direction of just and harmonious order. Democracy grows proportionate to the growth of nonviolence. Growth of nonviolence is evident in the manner people resolve dissent; differences of opinions, interests and vision; and, conflicts.

Introduction

Insurgency affected tribal areas and J &K are testing our inner corrective resources and growth of democracy. It is easy to extol the virtues of nonviolence and condemn violence; but unless experiments are conducted in nonviolent ways of violence prevention, mere condemnation doesn't help. From the stand point of violence prevention there is a challenge of stopping the youth from turning to violent militancy.

After Hind Swaraj Centenary International Conference in 2009, SP undertook experiment in the above areas. Under Hind Swaraj Campaign it has, until March 2013,

1. Conducted Swaraj Dialogues in 19 places in Bihar and Jharkhand : Patna, Muzffarpur, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Narhi, Supaul, Shahara, Peerpanti, Madhepura, Dumarbanna, Basmatiya, Zhazha, Jamui, Chakai, Lilavaran Bajra, and Chandan block in Bihar; and, Ranchi, Godda and Deoghar in Jharkhand
2. Formed
 - ◆ citizens' groups; and
 - ◆ youth peace cadres
- 3 Core team of 22 senior/ experienced workers/youth leaders / Shanti Sainiks
- 4 52 peace volunteers in insurgency affected tribal district of Banka, Bihar
- 5 More than a hundred and thirty are enlisted for training in nonviolence to become peace cadres in Bihar; and thirty in Jharkhand.
- 6 Each Swaraj dialogue attracts ten to fifteen good volunteers or peace and nonviolence
- 7 There are a number of invitations pending for Swaraj Dialogue

Why A Gandhian Dialogue on Nonviolence?

Every citizen aspires to be a functional and honourable part of the larger nation. He/she aspires to see an authentic reflection of his/her image in the image of the nation. Our



problems of disaffection, insurgencies and the politics of identity have in the main arisen out of the need to hold on to economic, cultural and spiritual self identity, negotiate identity, and resolve conflicts among varied, competing and often conflicting claims of ethnic, religious and national identities. These are set, almost programmed, into a conflict mode rather than in a mode of resolution; much less in a mode of symbiotic harmony. Mahatma Gandhi showed us the way of reinterpreting these identities and thus resolving the conflict.

Hind Swaraj, the greatest dialogue of modern times on Freedom, Selfhood, Self rule and nonviolence, was written by Mahatma Gandhi for redefining freedom;

and by that Gandhi transformed violent militancy into a nonviolent struggle and galvanized the entire nation.

Since about 2000 we are rediscovering the power of Hind Swaraj by conducting series of one day Swaraj Dialogues followed by 3 to 5 days Hind Swaraj discourse-cum-study camps among diverse groups of people including the youth, in different parts of India. (for full account of the experience, see “Process Documentation, Swaraj Peeth Trust 2007)

The law Gandhi taught us is the law of ends and means. Good or moral ends cannot be achieved without using good, moral means. Hence, conflicts must be resolved within the Gandhian framework of truth, nonviolence and love. These were the value-imperatives for the resolution of any conflict, mitigating violence and fear. It is within this perspective that Gandhi Shanti Sena is situated. When we speak of Shanti Sena, it is in the image of a peace militia -- taking the issue of peace- peace keeping and peace building- with the discipline of a ‘Sena’-an army.

Experiment in Nonviolence in Tribal area of Banka and Jamui in Bihar



Rajiv Vora talking to people from ten *panchayats* in the hilly area of Chandan block of Banka, Bihar on 26 Nov 2012. Sarvoday leader Smt Sarala Bahen, and Santosh of Gram Bharati –Simultala accompanied Rajiv. Bhuvaneshwar Turi, the organizer, standing at the back.

Outsiders do
Dry land, no
inundated and
employment;
the youth in
come to sell
ideology; as
Faiths, all
all ideologies,
deep when I
a brother, and
and true sons



not enter this area.
water, forest
aggressed; no
culture in danger,
unrest. "I have not
Gandhi or any
we respect all
Gods, so I respect
but it hurts me
see brother killing
when the trustees
and daughters of

nature - mother earth- are not allowed to protect their mother. I have come as a brother, to share your sorrows, anguish and fears, to listen to you and make friends with you and bring more friends for you who should stand by you; .not leave you alone to defend yourselves and the mother earth beneath your feet...No one loves the nation as much as the one who loves the soil beneath his/her feet. Does any one love the soil beneath one's feet as much as a farmer, a tribal does?!"



After the meeting with the youth on 26 Nov 2012, following the public meeting, 11 bright young men were sent to attend a two-day Swaraj-dialogue on nonviolence and Self-rule

Meeting was called by Bhuvaneshwar Turi, a well known youth leader, at his residence in village Bagro, who organized the public meeting earlier that day.



A Two-day preliminary dialogue on violence, nonviolence and democracy was held by Swarajpeeth at Grmbharati, Simultala on 28-29 Nov. 2012 with more 42 participants from different one-day Swaraj Dialogues. A group of 11 came from



the above. One of the former leader said “had we heard this language, we would not have taken to the gun. Show us the way, we are with you.”



They had many questions, sharp, political in essence but born of hard experience. They wanted to record it in order to take it back. Many others like him have been since part of the Hind Swaraj Campaign in this area. Twenty one enlisted for a further four-day Hind Swaraj and Nonviolence Camp in order



to be youth peace and nonviolence cadres or community level nonviolent peace builders and peace keepers.

“WOULD SOME ONE EVER VISIT US?”



In the third week of February 2013 Rajiv with companions Santosh and Sanjiv was again in the violence affected, out-of-bound areas in Jamui and Banka Dist of Bihar. Savitri Devi, from Chakai in Jamui Dst, who participated in a four day Hind Swaraj camp in Delhi in March 2012, had expressed her wish that someday I would visit her village. She described in one sentence the state of life in her village.

“Our village is visited only by Maoists and the police. At night Maoists come, and at day time it is the police. Others don’t come ever” She was in disbelief when Rajiv Vora went to her village on 18th February 2013 with S. Her village, Sikatiya, is deep in Jungle, about ten km from the block HQ Chakai





Men in this area have either taken to gun or fled since there is no employment, no agriculture because there is no water. A sarvodaya worker, Shivanadbhai Jha had built a big centre in village Ghormo close to Chakai, known as Ghorm Ashram, which is now in a desolate, dilapidated state.

However, there were some young men in the village. Clean streets and very aesthesia houses in spite of sever water. Sparkling faces of women, bright eyes, washed, oiled and well set plaited hair give you an impression of a very cultured people. When they spoke, not a sentence was dis-arranged, mal-formed or garbled. A young man, Nirmal, amazed me when for ten minutes he spoke, unlike the 'educated' city youth, without breaking a sentence or an overlap. Each well formed sentence followed the other as he explained what he liked about them. The only well in the village had hardly any water. Life is extremely hard and the youth is desperate. Savitri told the experience in her assembly of her study camp in Hind Swaraj



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Delhi in March 2012 and how this visit of Rajiv Vora made her and them hopeful. She is associated with Ghormo Ashram of Grambharti, which had long back worked in this area, dug wells which have dried out long back.

Nonviolent Conversion in the Tribal Region, Lilavaran Bajr of Bihar



On 19th and 20 February 2013 seventy two tribal youth from several villages of the Chandana block cam for a two-day first ever of its kind Camp to discuss with Rajiv Vora their issues and to learn what he has to say to them. Lilavaran Bajra is an interior village with a school. After an intense discussion a group of

twenty eight bright, energetic youth emerged who said they would like to work for the spread this type of thinking in this area and undertake issues that concern people through the methods of nonviolence. The group has increased since. “Master Saheb”

Surendra Pandit (in blue pullover with a muffler), who wields considerable influence on the youth of the region, is seen below



standing with Rajiv(in grey Jacket)



Media said this was most unique event in the region. **Prabhat Khabar** (No 2 in Bihar, 1 in Jharkhand with circulation of 700,000) wrote *Nonviolence in the Militancy affected Lilavaran Bajra*” *“Make Satyagrha your Weapon, not the Gun”* the head line said

Nonviolent Conflict Resolution in Tribal Dist of Banka, Bihar
17th March 2013, Village Bagro, Block Chandan, District Banka, and Bihar:



Swaraj Peeth received a phone call at late evening of 17th March from Bhuvaneshwar Turi, Bhola Prasad Yadav and Sudam Besra from Bagro village in Chandan block of Banka district of Bihar informing how they resolved that very evening a very contentious issue of common land “*by putting in practice what we learnt in nonviolence training camp in Delhi (8-11 March 2013) about Swaraj (Self-rule) and nonviolence...*”

In Hind Swaraj Nonviolence in Delhi, 8th to Savitri Devi memorandum assembly our visit in graphically picture of presence and area, answering



and educating shibir 11th March came with a from the village convened after February. She presented the Maoist their rule in her all questions

from seasoned social workers and social scientist Prof Parth Nath Mukherjee (former VC Tata School of Social Sciences, Mumbai). Bhola Yadav and Bhuvneshwar Turi , with a history of militancy behind them, thread bear explained how Maoists gained ground, respectability, recruitment and legitimacy of their rule over people. Maoists resist introduction of machines to the exclusion of human labour available and idle in abundance; they resolve inter-personal, family, community and other disputes including land disputes. Savitri told us, “When they stay in our homes, they participate in common household chorus like cleaning, cooking, repairs, construction, agriculture etc.” Their verdicts are consensual, with the full participation of all from the concerned village. Meetings are held at night. Men and women sit separately. They take care of smallest matters like where should women ease themselves and where should men. They respect women.



Women feel safe and protected. They use violence after giving three chances to reform or obey the verdict. Saviri said she would prefer to go to them rather than to the police. "Police dishonour and punish the innocent, one and all. They have no regard for us, they are corrupt, and have no commitment to justice."

All other participants from tribal area confirmed what she and Bhuvaneshwar narrated. Bhuvaneshwar is dalit, and Saviri a Santhal. Where democracy has not reached, or it is denied, the rule of fear and violence has gained credibility and popularity, because it delivers justice, punishes exploiters.

The vicious cycle: Anti-militancy operations often cause slowing down the armed revolutionaries. Some surrender. There have been good police officers too, though rarely, but such examples do exist, who have used methods of dialogue and persuasion rather than of violent repression. As soon as armed revolutionaries go down, the "dabang" people; the land, forest mine and such mafias have their sway under political patronage. Many villages have disappeared due to inundation of forest. When people lose their natural habitat, thrown out, they lose their culture in the struggle for survival. Culture shrinks with the shrinkage of natural habitat and natural resource base. In response to the domination of mafias and the 'dubang', a new crop of armed revolutionary then rise in resistance. When resistance become stronger it is met with counter-insurgency operations. Counter-violence is let loose on the area under the influence of 'revolutionaries'. ...The cycle goes on. Bhuvaneshwar, Bhola, Savitri and others from Banka-jamui tribal area feel very strongly after participating in dialogues on nonviolence and swaraj that this cycle can be broken if their dignity can be protected and issues can be resolved through nonviolence.

Bhuvaneshwar asked plainly "who would stand by us if and when we are in trouble?" But he himself explained why he thinks this campaign appeals them. the purpose of Hind Swaraj Campaign is to motivate society to stand by us." They want to propagate nonviolence in their area, establish swarajpeeth units in each of the villages in their area, in the hope that isolation and alienation from the rest of the society ends (see attached folder – Hind Swaraj Abhiyan, Bihar and Jharkhand). They want to try the ways of Gandhi and of nonviolence; they will feel confident if others stand by them. Indrajeet Tiwari from Godda, Jharkhand, and a former journalist explained how the internal disintegration and disharmony keeps communities' weak from within, affecting their ability of self-correction. Nonviolence means here therefore mobilizing empathy of the larger civil society, which must care for the marginalized. A very bright, articulate tribal youth leader said on the second day of Hind Swaraj reading " *Maine rat bhar manthan kiya hai. Main samza hun ki aap hamara man uthana chahte hai*" "I contemplated the whole night after hearing you on Swaraj, read Hind Swaraj. We had not know Gandhiji like this. You want to lift our moral, our real strength" Each one echoed his plea that this message should reach their youth. Later he told Sanjiv Pranav "I got what I was searching." Similar were sentiments expressed by many after two days dialogue in the midst of them, at Lilavaran Bajra village on 19-20 February. Two journalists sent by Prabhat Khabar were stopped and seriously cautioned by locals as they were entering this area. Very clearly, these simple hearted people need love and care by rest of the

society besides, a way of thought, interpretation of their reality, a vision which is inclusive.

Concrete Issue: water Scarcity/ Water Management

Extreme water scarcity is a common problem and popular issue at the top of the mind of this contiguous tribal area covering parts of Banka and Jamui Districts of Bihar; and, Godda, Deoghar and Dumka of Jharkhand is in spite of the fact that according to a report Jharkhand has 26 times more water than its need. Even after sixty five years of independence this most basic need is not met. Outset of summer is dreaded the most. Animals will die out of thirst and humans will suffer too. There are hand pumps installed, but, if the only hand pump in Savitri's village that we visited in February is any example, standing right in the middle of a street, it had no water; it was in disuse, an obstacle than a facility.

Shri Indajeet Tiwari suggested that traditionally the people of this area met both drinking water and irrigation needs by managing rain water from rain fed rivers, which are almost everywhere. They had developed what is known in this area as *dandh or 'Pyne system'*. It is the same story of destruction of traditional by the environmentally ignorant modern irrigation engineering. It was suggested that Swaraj peeth should take up an initial survey in order to establish basic data and facts about possibility of meeting water needs by reclaiming what people of this area know and can do. It was made clear that the way of nonviolence necessitates building a dialogue on this issue among assembly of all the *Gramsabhas* of the area, administration and political leadership responsible for welfare and development. Assembly of *Gramsabhas* is a precondition. Rather than an NGO undertaking a project, it has to be *gramsabhas*, which is by all means rural civil society, and local administration. Any other needs for proficiencies or expertise should be mobilized from rest of the society. Swarajpeeth is trying to create such a support system of Shanti Mitras from among the 'educated' class. They should stand by the suffering masses if there are hurdles, which there would be many, in developing a constructive consultation/ dialogue among the main parties for fulfilling their most basic need as a matter of urgency and priority.

The dialogue on Hind Swaraj and Nonviolence will continue in the areas of the participants in the Hind Swaraj shibir. Now we have a good core group of tribal, dalit, women, non-tribal social workers, intellectuals, journalists and academics volunteers engaged in spread and propagation of the thought, vision and methods of nonviolent transformation of violence. Twenty nine in tribal region of Banka and Jamui; senior experienced people in Gadda. Deoghr and Dumka in Jharkhand; Patna, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Supaul, Araria, Madhepura, Pirpainti, Saharsa.

Mobilizing Civil Society Support



The people of Bihar and Jharkhand, of the then undivided Bihar, have not once but three times, just in one century, burnt themselves in order to lighten up, transform and shape Indian national conscious, raise it from slumber so that India can face the challenges that came on its path. Early last century Champaran Satyagraha of Mahatma Gandhi, his inaugural nonviolent action in India, transformed the very nature of national freedom struggle, brought the plight of the peasant to the forefront. Immediately after independence, Bhoodan was a most unique social experiment of love-force and compassion.

Whereas, over a smallest piece of land people shed blood; even the Mahabharata was created because of Kaurav King Duryodhan's refusal to give away even an inch of land to the Pandavas; landholders in thousands gave away ownership over part of their land so that the landless can live a life of dignity. 24 hundred thousand acres of land was donated. Under the leadership of Acharya Vinoba Bhave. The people of this misunderstood land showed how high they, ordinary human being, can morally rise. Last but not the least; when Indian democracy faced its biggest challenge of survival in nineteen seventies, it was once more the same Bihar which came to the rescue of the nation under the leadership of Jaiprakash Narayan. Rest of India's experience with Bihar has been liberating, though it is hardly recognized.

It is in this land of what is now Jharkhand and Bihar that a part of its people, who are under distress and desperation feel that only the gun can protect them. It is a sorry state of a society that the pain in one part of it is not felt by the other parts of the same body. People of Bihar and Jharkhand, who have uplifted national awareness at major turning points and steered the nation on the course of righting the wrong through moral means today need to rise for none but themselves. It is a call of Jharkhand to Jharkhandis and Bihar to Biharis; it is a call to respond with moral means to their own pain and alienation within. Vital difference can be made if the disconnected parts of the society are reconnected; if the people in distress and desperation find rest of the society sensitive to their plight and ready to stand by them when in need; when they extend their brotherly and sisterly hand to their less fortunate brethren and mobilize social awareness on the path of seeking justice for the deprived and the dejected, for reduction of violence through mobilization of nonviolence.



Swarajpeeth's is thus engaged an experiment in

1) Sensitizing the educated, the youth and every section of society in general in order to-

- Re-connect with the disconnected, deprived and the dejected, spare some time and resources to go to them, listen to them, talk to them, understand them, build brotherly/sisterly relationship.
- Mobilize voluntary intellectual, professional and other recourses in their service.
- Become the voice of the voiceless; stand by them when in need; make them feel protected by social goodwill and concern and active support at times of need.
- Develop a methodology of mobilizing social affection, which can be called, in other words, spiritualizing social action.

2) Build cadres of Gandhi Shanti Sainiks or peace keepers for intervention in the times of social need, disharmony, tension and violence. We already enlisted 31 Shanti Sainiks who participated in two levels of non-violence training. Another batch of 23 is arriving in Delhi for four day training in the second week of March. A group of 50 energetic tribal youth, many of them with a leadership back ground and earlier militant training will be gathering for a two day meeting with Rajiv Vora in one of the villages in the deep forest area of Banka district.

Entering into third year of present Partnership with Oxfam India Swaraj peeth envisages the next phase as explained here.



Every next phase will have carry forward and a necessary overlap of the earlier while taking a step ahead in terms of programme development; consolidation and re-enforcement of the gains of the earlier and initiation and opening up of new windows.

Thus:

- 1) Citizens' support groups in Patna, Dabhanga, Madhubani, Narhi, Supoul, Araria, Madhepura, Saharsa Jhaza, Pirpainti-Bhagalpur, Godda, Dumka, Deoghar and Ranchi will be consolidated through those who have joined and those who have enlisted to join what we call Hind Swaraj campaign. (These are Shanti Mitra for support to the nonviolent transformation process in Tribal area Banka and Jamui in Bihar and Godda, Deoghar and Dumka of Jharkhand. There can be some addition if special consideration is required for any other region.
- 2) Extension, education and training of the ones who can be categorized according to following

a) Swaraj Peeth core team of Shanti Mitra (thirteen) These well qualified (according to the qualifications of a Gandhi Shanti Sainik as stipulated in Swaraj Peeth's Training Manual for Shanti Sena) and experienced and senior people. Another 7 from Madhubani, 6 from Darbhanga, 2 from ha-ha, 1 from Pirpainti who are experienced and senior people will be inducted to this group after a combined 3 day Shibir on Hind Swaraj. They have been part of Swaraj Samvad in their respective place and since have continued their association and interest in this work

b) The second raw of Shanti Mitra, who have attended Hind Swaraj and Nonviolence camp or are qualified and volunteered to be part of this second tier group. (22 from all places where Swaraj Samvad is conducted)

c) 28 Tribal youth who have volunteered to work in their own village/Panchayats after their participation in two-day Swaraj and Nonviolence dialogues; one in Simultala, Jamui (November 28-29, 2012), and one in Lilawaran-Bajra, thana Suiya, Banka (19-20 February 2013)

Besides these, there are more than a hundred who are waiting to be trained and involved in the campaign; They are backlog of earlier Swaraj Samvad meetings in 2010-11. We are not considering them at present. Member's o the core team will devise plans to involve first locally and then bring from among them selected ones for further training.

3) In the Tribal area

a) Special Hind Swaraj Vichar Shibir with 28 enlisted candidates of Shanti Mitra- volunteers (mentioned above)

b) One-day and Two-day Swaraj Samvad youth meetings (Jamui-Banka area of Bihar; and in Gadda, Dumka, Deoghar of Jharkhand. A contiguous area) To be organized by already involved youth from the region.

Issue Based Activities:

Water Scarcity:

a) Survey of water resources and system of local/traditional management techniques in Jamui (Pojha Panchayats) and Banka (Belhar and Katoria Panchayat)

b) Consultations with and among *gramsabhas*

c) Consultation/dialogue between *gramsabha* representatives and relevant government dept and political leadership., as required

Land Issue:

a) Survey in selected area of the actual, on ground status of Bhoodan land and on paper status.

- b)** In cases of discrepancy between the two, appropriate dialogue with Bhoodan Board; and, action in line with principles and methods of nonviolence for rectification and justice.