

Buds on Boulders

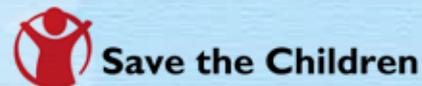


PRAYATN
Struggle for a Dawn of Change

Buds on Boulders

A compilation of community initiatives
on
Child Right Protection

A joint initiative
of



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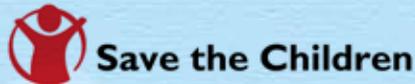
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Disclaimer: The book contains descriptions from different villages wherein the organisation is working. The names used in the book are imaginary having no connection with anybody dead or alive. The stories described are an effort to attract attention of larger masses towards issues of children and exploring different ways of working on them.

Acknowledgement

Rajasthan has a glorious heritage in the field of mines and minerals. Important minerals with which the name of this State is intimately associated are that of nonferrous metals (lead, zinc and copper) and ferrous minerals such as tungsten and a number of industrial minerals. The minerals found in Rajasthan account for more than 70 per cent of India's total production. Mining is also the second largest employment sector after agriculture in the state. However, it has a darker side also. More than 95% of mining activity in Rajasthan is in the hands of unorganized sector. Of the workforce engaged in mining 37% are women and 15% are children.

Dholpur remained an industrially backward district. It mainly depended on agriculture and only a few cottage industries are in existence. Quarrying of building stone is the only activity which provided employment to the comparatively large number of persons. In heavy mining areas of Dholpur, children of all ages are ever present in substantial numbers and are actively involved in numerous tasks related to mine work and processes. Labour in mining processes carries numerous risks for children and for adults. These include exposure to dangerous blasting processes, weather conditions specially working in summers, contaminated water, long working hours, seasonal and night work, and handling heavy and sometimes dangerous equipment.

Prayagn's decade long experience of working with children in this area reveals that children are engaged with mining work and processes but are concentrated in those which did not require greater physical strength. Children work throughout the year and the average age of children entering work in the mining sector is 12. They also work long hours, on average just over eight hours a day. Mining, and its related activities, are seen as easier ways to

acquire money and to learn a career. There is also a considerable number of children who have lost at least one parent, indicating a degree of vulnerability that may have influenced their entry into work.

Prayatn's work with children in this area has been based on child rights programming. The organisation started its work in mining focusing rights of children in the year 2006 with the support of Save the Children (Initially directly from SCF, Finland and later Save the Children, Bal Raksha Bharat). The working on the issues of children initially focused four broader rights areas including Right to Survival, Development, Protection and Participation which at later stages focused on inclusive quality education and child protection. The project provided a broader space for learning along with the rigorous efforts from the team as well as from Save the Children. The project initiated with awareness building in the community and through its learning could develop community based systems and mechanisms to cater the hard core issues of protection like child marriage, child labour, child abuse and violence against children. The organisation takes this opportunity to extend warm thanks to Finland Government, Ministry of foreign affairs, Finland and Save the Children Finland for extending support and opportunity to work on the issue, which could turned into a successful model for child protection and inclusive quality education. We are especially thankful to the then team of Save the Children Finland, Mr. Parul Soni, then Country Director (Presently Executive Director Earnest and Young Pvt. Ltd.), under whose able leadership the project could groom and maintained its motivation in difficult circumstances. We would like to extend special thanks to Mukesh Lath, Regional Manager, whose regular guidance and quality inputs gave new directions to the project for success. We would also like to extend warm thanks to Mr. Rajiv Nagpal, then Programme Manager (Presently Regional Manager, Plan India), whose regular support and guidance not only made things happening but also encouraged the team to perform to the optimum level. Involvement of Nitu, needs a special mention here who took the charge of the project very actively and aggressively. We are thankful to her for her special contribution in giving new dimensions to the project. The whole document and

acknowledgement would be incomplete without acknowledging the participation and support of the community members who not only owned the process but also performed to the optimum level.

We take this opportunity to especially thanks the beginners of this project Mr. Enem Praween, Ms. Veena Pancholi, Ms. Bharti Verma, Ms. Rakhi Sharma, Ms. Mamta Kushwaha who are no more with us but their remarkable contribution took the initiative to this level. We would also like to extend our warm thanks to Mr. Ramkhiladi Poswal, Mr. Sandeep Singh, Mr. Devendra Pal Singh who were also a part of the beginning team and also enjoyed the satisfaction of developing a community based model for protection of children's right.



Malay Kumar
Chief Executive

Background

Extreme poverty, and constrained access to right based entitlements together determine the status and condition of children in Dholpur. Dholpur, is also among the districts having a most adverse sex ratio in the state. The practice of female infanticide, sex selective abortion and strong preference for a male child in most communities has been seen as factors contributing to this imbalance. Child marriage also continues to be serious problem in the district. The situation is particularly adverse for the children who born in poverty. These children face further inequalities in access to crucial resources, leading to exclusion and marginalization. A considerable number of children in the district are in child labour category and those who are in schools, can no way in a better situation. There are huge variation in terms of retention, learning levels and drop -out rates in the state. There are also reported cases of child trafficking and child migration for seasonal work in nearby cities and states. In Dholpur, involvement of children in mining work and processes is significant. It is also important to note that a significant part of mining is “illegal” in the state. Given that most of the mining and quarrying in the District is carried out on informal sites leaving very little space for legal intervention related to the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act.

Prayatn, in 2003 initiated a child centered development process in 90 villages of Dholpur district. In all these villages the incidence of child poverty was high. Particularly the issues such as child labour, child marriage and high dropout rates in primary school grades were rampant. The core approach of the project has been to build community's capacity to demand for their rights and entitlements. There was also a focus of developing a facilitating external environment thereby working closely with institutions of

accountability such as school, health department, Panchayati Raj Institutions and Police. Like any other social issue, it was not an easy task to sensitize the community on the rights of the child. Challenging the phenomenon of child work was also a great difficulty. There was always a circular discussion on issues of why children do not go to school.... because of poor quality of schools or apathy of parents. The mechanisms of local control such as School Management and Development Committees (SDMCs) or Village Health and Sanitation Committees (VHSCs) were dysfunctional. There was no mechanism to discuss issues of Child Marriage. Dholpur, an eastern district of Rajasthan is among the poorest districts. Dholpur is among the poorest districts of the state of Rajasthan. The health indicators of the obviously match the poor health indicators of the state of Rajasthan. Dholpur is not only one of the remotest but also one of the most difficult places to live in Rajasthan. Notorious for being a hide out for dacoits for its proximity to the Chambal ravines, the district is also poor in terms of infrastructure. Besides, the district is also known for its stone mines. The red stone of Dholpur (popularly known as red stone) has been a popular building material since ages. The historical red fort of Delhi is made of Dholpur stone. Communities in general have a significant dependency on mining work and processes for their livelihoods. However, the mines do have a darker side. You will also find a good number of young age children involved in mining work and processes.

The Initiative

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989, supports child participation as a basic right. Children have the right to be heard and considered in decisions affecting them, and the right to access to information, freedom of belief and freedom of association. The CRC further states that child rights have to be handled by adults, depending on the age of the child 'in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child'. In partnership with Save the Children Finland and Bal Raksha Bharat, Prayatn is implementing a project aiming at developing community based systems to ensure

Inclusive Quality Education and Child Protection. The project is being implemented in 90 villages of Dholpur district in the state of Rajasthan in India.

Rights-based and needs-based approaches: A rights-based approach is useful in particular at the macro level whereas the needs approach is more helpful at the community level. The advantage of a rights-based compared to a needs-based approach is that one can identify duty-bearers: people or institutions with the responsibility towards the rights-holders. Identification of different stakeholders and understanding their stake in the process facilitates the use of constitutional spaces to bring about change in lives of right holders.

Child participation: Child participation is defined as 'a process of active, meaningful and all-inclusive involvement of children in influencing decisions and issues affecting their lives'. Good practices of child participation begin with real attentive listening to children rather than with applying 'blue print' participatory techniques. Child – adult interaction is the first area to gain for child participation. Child participation is an ongoing process. It does not need to be perfect from the start, but needs a gradual process to get children prepared. Child participation is considered essential for a successful child-centered community development process.

Children's participation

Recognizing children as the main actors in the process of making a reducing their problems, Prayatn started its work by facilitating formation of Bal Manchs (BM). The BM members encourage other children to join. A BM which have a membership of 25 to 50 children who gather to discuss problems that they face at home, in the village, or in school. The children's clubs provide a venue for children to share their feelings and support each other. The BMs have been provided with capacity building inputs and platforms for participation in discussion matter for them. BM holds monthly meetings to share the

progress and decide for a roadmap for the future. The monthly meetings also provide an opportunity to its members for expression, entertainment, education and engagement with broader development processes. Initially the BM meetings used to be facilitated by Prayatn's team member. Now there is a good number of BM where this responsibility has been taken over by young leaders. Though there is no conscious effort made by the team, in some of these BM there is now an institutional structure with specifically defined roles of office bearers. The BMs have contributed a lot in terms of creating a child friendly environment in respective villages. There are also a good number of cases where the BM as a group has provided peer support to children to overcome their problems.

Nevertheless, the BMs are a part of an external environment full of adults and their institutions. Since beginning there is clarity that the children should not "replace" the role of an adult. There are mechanisms that ensure that the problem being indentified by children is shared with adults. From this point the adults take care of the issue.

Children-led indicator development

At the beginning of the initiative Prayatn team went through training on method of child centered situation analysis. The brought a stress on ensuring that the situation is understood through eyes of a child. Learning from other experiences the process later termed child led indicator development process. The team along with children developed a list of indicators for the baseline assessment of the situation of children vis-à-vis children's rights, abuse, exploitation, and most importantly school environment. The BM members collected the data and ranked each of the indicators on a scale of 0-10. The indicators are reviewed by children on a periodic basis. For review the members of BM discuss the situation and try to analyze the change against each of the indicator and rank them afresh. At times there are new indicators added in the list. The ranking contributes in developing future course of action of the BM.

Bal Adhikar Manch

A Bal Adhikar Manch (BAM) is a forum of elderly members of the village. BAM as an institution is mandated to work on issues of the rights of the child and to ensure that a child friendly environment is established in the concerned village. BAM is having a membership of 15-20 people. The BAM has been provided with a number of inputs related to human and institutional capacity enhancement. Gradually BAM has emerging as a representative body of the village and have started taking up broader developmental issues such road, electricity and water. With the knowledge and skills gained, the BAM members have now been nominated to several village level committees responsible to ensure better implementation of child development programs. A number of community based systems and mechanisms have also been developed by BAM towards protection and promotion of the rights of the child. The BAM do have an operational linkage with the structures of local self governance i.e. the Panchayati Raj Institutions. This relationship helps the BAM to take forward the issues of children to the departments accountable for providing services to the child.

The BAM functions as a watchdog

There is a close coordination with BAM and BM. They work as an informal network to ensure that the rights of the child are protected in the village. Be it a case of child marriage, corporal punishment, domestic violence, child labor or school dropout children take primary responsibility to report the fact with BAM as soon as they get the information. The BAM then take up the issue further and raise the issue with concerned family of institution of accountability.

Village rules

The BAM has been developing village rules against child protection. Developing these rules has enabled the BAM members and relevant stakeholders to understand children's rights and laws better and protect them from abuse. While village rules help the people in the community to prevent abuse, there must be a strong commitment from the villagers to enforce them. There have been questions related to meet the expenses. At some villages the BAM have been able to institutionalize a common village fund.

1. Ensure that all children and adults know children's rights well.
2. Priorities the best interest of the child in the village agenda.
3. Promote children's right to go to school.
4. Never accept any form of child abuse and violation of children's' rights.
5. Take action to support and protect children from any kind of abuse thereby banning use of alcohol and gambling in the village.
6. Listen and consider children's voices.
7. Cooperate with all people, government institutions, and non-governmental organizations to help children to access needed services.

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Mahesh Back in School

It was a pleasant Sunday afternoon. Rekha was trying to match pace of her mother while returning home with her after some work in the farm. On the way, she saw her school mate who has been absent from school since last 4-5 months. The boy was grazing goats.

“Mahesh, why are you not coming to school?” Rekha asked.

“There is no one in my family who can go out and spend the entire day for grazing our goat. You know that milk is necessary for tea etc. at home and goat is the only source which we can afford, so I am required to graze them. That is why I am unable to come to school.” Mahesh replied.

Rekha’s mother didn’t notice that the girl has stopped for talking to Mahesh. She kept on moving until sometime when she looked back. She was getting late, so called the daughter to hurry up. Rekha stopped talking to Mahesh and went towards her mother.

Mahesh’s reply started bothering Rekha on her way. She thought, “In school and in Bal Manch we talk that every boy or girl should go to school. A list of children who were out-of-school was also prepared and presented to the Bal Adhikar Manch. Then all the enlisted children were enrolled in school. Everyone was happy that no child of the village is out-of-school. But Mahesh is grazing goat instead of going to school. He hasn’t told me the complete thing. Of course, milk is required for domestic use and therefore, goat or cow is needed. Correspondingly, there grazing is also required. But that doesn’t mean that one should leave studies for grazing them.”

Amidst this mix of thoughts, Rekha reached home. She decided that she will raise the issue in the Bal Manch meeting which is due on the next day itself and will ensure that Mahesh’s education does not get disturbed in this manner.

Rekha and Mahesh belong to Umrara ka Pura village. The village is a part of Kareem Pur Gram Panchayat and Dhaulpur tehsil and district. It is 16 km far from the district headquarter and is connected with a pucca road. The government primary school is located within the village. Jaataw and Kushwaha communities, numerically, dominate the village which hosts residences of 70 families. Agriculture is negligible in the village. Thus, labour in stone mines is the only source of livelihood in the village.

Monday is the day fixed for Bal Manch meeting. Rekha was excited because today she has an issue to speak out and discuss in the meeting. When the meeting began and agenda was being finalised, she pointed out the issue. Since the issue was very important, it was taken on priority. Rekha detailed out, "Mahesh is not attending school since last 4-5 months. He has left school and is grazing goat. I met with him yesterday. He says there is no one at his home to graze goats, therefore, he is grazing them instead of going to school." Rekha expressed her apprehension as well and suggested that his parents should be contacted.



Bal Manch decided to send Rekha, Rewati Sharan, Meena and Shankar to contact Mahesh's parents. They resolved that anyhow they will re-associate Mahesh with school.

All the four members went to Mahesh's home. Both the parents were there while Mahesh was out with his goats. When the issue was discussed, Rekha's apprehensions proved true. Parents wanted that Mahesh should study but he himself was not interested. Everyday

he used to avoid going to school by making one or the other excuse. When things didn't change, they ultimately directed him that if he is not interested in studies he should graze goats.

The four children, as per their understanding, explained about Bal Manch and Bal Adhikar Manch which have been constituted in the village. Parents were also aware of them. Therefore, they assured that they will send Mahesh to school again but requested the children to talk to Mahesh to help them in convincing him. Children assured parents that they will come again in the evening to meet Mahesh.

When Mahesh returned, parents told about coming of the Bal Manch children. Soon, the Bal Manch members also came again. They met with Mahesh explained him that education develops once understanding and that he wouldn't be getting this chance of education again in life. Anyone else can graze his goats but no one else can study in place of him. Mahesh started understanding the value of education and decided to make sincere efforts towards it.

Next day, the children got ready and came to Mahesh's house well before the school time and took him to school. Goats were taken by Mahesh's mother with her to farm.

Everyone became happy. Mahesh had started studying seriously. He started feeling more enjoyment in company of friends rather than that of goats. He became a Bal Manch member as well and, as such, his understanding on child rights and importance of education grew. Happiness and satisfaction of parents is obvious and does not need any mention.

Rekha was also happy because of her achievement. One day, when she saw a picture of goat in the book on environmental sciences a mischievous idea struck her mind. She asked Mahesh, "Tell me which is bigger, a goat or a book". Mahesh was aware of the answer.

Education First

Mirth in Vinesh's house was more than usual today. Her mother, Madhu Devi, was cleaning rice. On one of the stoves, pulses were being cooked, while on the other, water for steaming rice was being boiled. In front of the house, Vinesh's father Mangilal was sitting on a *dari* spread over a *charpaai*.

As soon as Vinesh returned from school, mother asked her to change and wear *odhni-lahanga* or sari. Vinesh became curious. She asked, "Why are so many preparations going on?"

"Today, your in-laws are coming for fixing up date of your Gauna," mother replied.

Vinesh became uncomfortable although she was aware that she has been married early when she was only 14 years old and Gauna was bound to happen. Gauna is a ritual which marks consummation of Hindu marriages and is more relevant in case of child marriages. Until this ritual is completed, the bride cannot be taken to in-laws house, nor can the bridegroom meet her.

Gauna is held only when the bride and the bridegroom become matured enough to handle responsibilities of married life. But Vinesh is not an adult yet. She is studying in class X only. She likes studies and wants to study further. Through her participation in meetings and other activities of Bal Manch, she had become aware that marriage of a girl before the age of 18 is illegal. But her marriage was held before that when she was absolutely unaware of what it all meant. Delay in Gauna was the only hope for her. What should she do now was the question that her stuck her up.

Vinesh is resident of village Soorajpura of the Gram Panchayat Basai Samanta. Soorajpura is a small village of 80 families most of which belong to either Jaataw or Kushwaha communities. It is located in Dhaulpur district about 3 km far from the Panchayat

headquarter and 8 km far from the district headquarter. Labour in red stone mines is the primary source of occupation followed by agricultural labour. Uneven and rocky terrain makes agriculture difficult in the region.

“I am just coming”, Vinesh said to her mother and left. She went to her friends of Bal Manch. All the available members gathered immediately and discussed. Vinesh said, “I want to continue my education at present. If Gauna is held, I will have to go to in-laws and my education will be left aside.”

Bal Manch members decided to meet available Bal Adhikar Manch members to act immediate to get Vinesh’s Gauna postponed.

Bal Adhikar Manch members had already decided that they will not allow any further child marriage in the village. Since Vinesh is not an adult yet, the Gauna also falls under the ambit of child marriage. They assured that they will talk with Vinesh’s father to delay the ceremony. If required, they will talk with Vinesh’s in-laws as well.

Seven members of Bal Adhikar Manch and several members of Bal Manch came with Vinesh to her house. Guests had not yet arrived. Discussion was held. Children too said that Vinesh wants to study further and they too want they she should study with them.

Both parents were shocked. Mother asked, “What will we say to Vinesh’s in-laws? Now Vinesh is theirs. How can we refuse them from taking her to their home?”

Two female members of Bal Adhikar Manch were also among those who had come to Vinesh’s house. They explained to Madhu Devi, “We are not saying that Vinesh should not go to in-laws or the in-laws should not take her. We are just saying that Vinesh will go to the in-laws but after completing 18 years of age.”

Mangilal and Madhu Devi turned positive but they were afraid that if the guests don’t agree or if the become angry, then what will happen?

The members consoled, “This is not a concern of you alone. We are with you. Vinesh is our daughter as well. Call us when the guests arrive. We will come and help.”

Guest arrived. Vinesh was afraid. She hesitatingly sat besides her mother. Bal Adhikar Manch members had also arrived by the time discussion on date of Gauna was initiated by the in-laws. Prem Singh, who is one of them, handled the situation carefully with a request, “Vinesh is studying at present and she is good at studies. Her age is not yet appropriate for handling post-marital responsibilities. If her Gauna is delayed till she becomes adult, it will be good for her as well as us.”

Other members also gave examples, cited collective decision of the villagers against child marriage and elaborated on needs of the present time. Everyone explained, “Marriage or Gauna of children before appropriate age is a punishable offence under law.”

Children too joined the discussion with request to let Vinesh continue her studies.

Had Mangilal alone made the request, In-laws might have refused, but when they say that representatives of the entire village and children requested, they gave their consent. After all, they too wanted happiness of their son.

Guests departed after lunch. Parents were mum but Vinesh could not stop herself from celebrating. She immediately joined the children’s party. She was happy to see that her in-laws are considerate and started feeling deeper respect for them. Other children too were also in the same mood. It was, after all, a great achievement for them because in rural atmosphere, whatever may be the claims, delaying child marriage or Gauna is not an easy job.

The feat had one more positive implication. It established that Bal Manch and Bal Adhikar Manch are not damaging the existing social set-up; instead, they are trying to make it stronger and more rational. This impression is going to help the forums a lot in getting support of other villagers in their mission of ensuring child rights.

Gram Kosh

Rains were playing the 'on-off' game for last three days. It was rainy season and the monsoon was in full-swing. Reaching road from the village had become difficult in this situation. The walkway had become muddy and slippery. Water had got accumulated here-and-there. Taking a vehicle was impossible. Even walking was difficult. Two overflowing streams on the way were the most difficult to cross.

Hore Ram and Phaguni Ram were going to Panchayat Samiti headquarter for some work. Both were holding a stick each in their hand to assess the depth of water-filled potholes as well as support wherever it was slippery. Somehow they reached to the last stream. Flow of water was fast. The bed of the stream was not visible. Both got down it with the guessing depth as per their idea of dry days. But soon they realized that their guess was wrong. It was more deep and uneven. They almost stumbled on a few steps. By the time they reached the other end more than half of their clothes had become wet. They breathed a sigh of relief after coming out, stood on a rock and then squeezed their clothes.

“What a pathetic life! We can't even walk properly. This village is a hell.” Both of them lit their bidis and breathed out their frustration while letting the smoke get in their gasping lungs.

This is the story of Ranpura, a village located in Gram Panchayat Chilachand, Panchayat Samiti Badi and District Dhaulpur. The village is 43 km far from Dhaulpur and 13 km far from Badi. It is located 3 km off the road from Badi-Sarmathura Road. The village is residence of 101 households of Thakur, Brahman, Jaataw, Gaud Brahman and Baniya communities. Labour is the prime source of occupation in the village besides agriculture and animal husbandry.

Hore Ram's frustration was still on. He said, “From last few days, a lot of meetings are taking place in the village, big-big talks take place - educate children, feed them properly,

don't discriminate between them, don't involve them in work, get them vaccinated, rush to hospital instead of trying home-based remedies or quacks if diseased, get delivery done in hospitals only and what not?"

"What is bad in these talks?" Phaguni Ram interrupted, "All these are related with betterment of our village and our children".

Hore Ram reacted, "Huh! Village doesn't even have a proper road and people are talking about development of children, development of village, blah, blah, blah. They are just playing politics. Nothing is going to change, my dear!"

Vehicle for Badi had arrived on the bus stand and both the men ascended. On the way, they were comparing the road to Badi and the walkway of their village. Comparison between the town and their village continued even when they reached Badi. The finished their work and returned, in the same way as they had gone - crossing the overflowing streams, water and mud.

Two boys were roaming in the village, next day, with a paper in hand. They reached Hore Ram and Phaguni Ram as well and showed them the paper. Upon reading the paper, Hore Ram passed it on to Phaguni Ram and commented with a smile, "Yet another meeting! Come, I will show you the game."



Phaguni Ram saw that it was a call for general meeting of the village and discussions were to be held for identifying problems of the village and preparing development plan for it. Both of them went to attend the meeting.

“Everyone knows the position of our village in terms of development” Ram Chahran ji initiated the discussion, “Our village is lacking in all the facilities. Be it school, road, had pump, electricity, treatment facilities, list out anyone and we will either not find them at all or if they are there, they are in very poor condition. Our village is very backward and we need to change it so that at least our children’s future is freed from hardships. Please suggest how we should go about it.”

Everyone spoke out about problems being faced by them. Hore Ram expressed his frustration about the poor roads. Women and children pointed out problems from their angle. But when Ram Charan ji intervened and asked for suggestions the gathering turned silent. Nobody had any clue, how to resolve these problems. Phaguni Ram intervened at this juncture. He said, “Mere good talks and speeches will not solve any problem. We will have to make hard efforts. We should give the complaints in written form to Gram Panchayat and block and district level authorities.”

Phaguni Ram’s suggestion hit a stumbling block when question two important questions arose - who will do the hard work and who will meet the expenses?

Ram Deena and Shashilata’s suggestion appeared rescuer in this situation, “Give the responsibility of doing all the hard work to 2-3 people and for expenses collect contribution from every family.”

Suggestion appeared useful and feasible but Surendra had some worries, “Collection of contribution is a good suggestion but it is not a matter of a day or two and paying/asking for contribution on day-to-day basis will be difficult. We will have to work out some proper and permanent solution.”

Angoori and Vimlesh were talking mutually. Vishram interrupted them and asked to share if they have any suggestion instead of talking mutually. Angoori said, “Why don’t we fix-up a monthly contribution from each of the families and make a small committee responsible for keeping accounts of expenditure? A date of contribution can also be fixed by when each family will deposit the contribution without being asked. The amount thus collected will be readily available for any immediate expenses. We should also decide necessary rules for this purpose.”

Angoori’s suggestion clicked to everyone. Everyone expressed his /her agreement. Immediately a committee was formed and the responsibility of making necessary rules and systems was assigned to it. The committee was directed to present draft rules for discussion and finalisation in the next general meeting which was fixed two days later.

When the next meeting was held, following rules were finalised:

1. Every household shall contribute Rs 20 per month in the village corpus
2. This corpus will be called ‘Gram Kosh’
3. Details of expenditure made will be submitted in the monthly general meeting
4. Loan for needs of children will also be issued to any family from this corpus. The loan will have to be repaid with nominal interest within pre-decided time limit.
5. The corpus will be used only for works related with village development and children

The village corpus was formed, the system worked and a lot of developmental works could be done. Gravel road from main road to the village and kharanja road within the streets of the village were constructed under NREGA. The primary school of the village was upgraded to upper primary level. Children got playing kit. Various activities were organised in school which resulted in improving quality of education schools. Petty issues started getting resolved very quickly. Self-employment to women is also under consideration.

All these developments reflect that people of Ranpura have discovered their path of development and marching on it with confidence and commitment. Village meetings are being held regularly and almost all people from all sections take part in the meeting. Women too participate equally in decisions pertaining to development. Accounts of contribution received and spent from the corpus are presented properly in every meeting. When needed, emergency meeting is organized and additional contribution is collected. Bal Manch children too participate in these meetings from time to time so that their point of view on related issues is understood and problems being faced by them are resolved. It doesn't appear that anybody will be able to stop the development of the village now. Hore Ram is also now satisfied.



Ray of Hope

Samoti, a resident of Reechhari village, was worried and sad for last many days. Cause of her worry was the simultaneous marriage of her two daughters. One of the daughters was 18 years old while the other was only 14. The widow of a mine labourer, Kalla Kushawaha, was aware that child marriage is not good for children and is illegal but she felt helpless because of her poor economic condition. She was not in position of affording the cost of traditional rituals twice. Date of marriage was fixed and her relatives and neighbours too were aware of the decision.

Soon children also became aware of the decision and the child marriage became a hot issue of discussion for them. Issue of Child Protection was in air in the village since year 2006 and Bal Manch and Bal Adhikar Manch had been discussing about it time and again. So when the next regular meeting of Bal Manch was held, children took the issue on their agenda. They decided that the child marriage should be avoided and Bal Adhikar Manch will be contacted for the purpose.

Village Reechhari is located in Chilachand Gram Panchayat of Bari Panchayat Samit of Dhaulpur district. The village is about 46 km far from the district headquarter and is 16 km far from the Panchayat headquarter. The village has 64 households in which families belonging to Rajput, Kushawaha and Brahmin communities reside. Agriculture and mine labour are the prime sources of livelihood for the villagers.

Today, when Bal Adhikar Manch meeting was organised, Bal Manch members were also present. Besides other subjects, the issue of child marriage of Samoti's daughters was also discussed. Consensus emerged on stopping the child marriage because it was illegal. Two members were delegated the responsibility of meeting with Samoti and ask her to stop the child marriage.

Both the members met with Samoti and requested her to stop the child marriage. Samoti agreed with the concerns shared by the members but put forward her own social and economic constraints. She urged, "Our social atmosphere does not allow keeping a girl unmarried for long. She has to be married. I am a poor widow. I cannot afford separate marriage of the two girls."

Situation was not simple. Reality was clashing with legality. On one pan of the balance, there was helplessness of a widow, and, on the other pan, violation of child rights was lying. Right judgment wasn't easy. The members thought for a while and the repeated their request with assurance that some way will be worked out to resolve the issue for her affordability.

Meeting of the Bal Adhikar Manch was called up again. Organisational volunteer was also present on the occasion. Detailed discussion was held and following resolutions were passed:

1. Child Marriage of Samoti's daughter has to be stopped
2. Alternative will be searched out to address poverty of Samoti and marriage of her daughters

Prayatn's local staff told the members that state government has a provision of providing economic aid of Rs 20,000 to widows for marriage of their daughters. The volunteer detailed that the provision is applicable in case of two daughters only and is not applicable if the daughter is less than 18 years of age at the time of marriage. Process of application and follow-up was also explained.

Members felt relieved and delighted upon knowing about the scheme. They immediately assigned the responsibility of seeking support of the organisational volunteer and getting all the formalities completed by Samoti, within time (before the marriage), to two of its members - Shri Ram Veer Kushawaha and Shri Uday Singh Parmar.

Both the members played the role assigned to them actively. They along with the organisational volunteer met with Samoti and explained her about the scheme. Samoti too felt delighted and relieved. It is needless to say that she decided to get only her elder married. All the formalities were duly completed and a little contribution was also collected from all the members to meet the expenses of the travelling to Bari or Dhaulpur for the purpose.

Committed efforts of the villagers resulted in timely sanctioning of the aid for Samoti's elder daughter. Everyone became happy. After all, they had discovered a new solution to the issue of child marriage. Marriage of elder daughter was concluded ceremonially and all the villagers blessed her as she was their own daughter.

Samoti was happy not only because her elder daughter had got married, but also because she now knew that she will be able to get government aid for marriage of her younger daughter as well. More importantly, she had realized that the entire village is standing besides her to take care of her daughters. She, therefore, decided that she will let her younger daughter complete her education and then only get her married.



Younger daughter was happy also because her child marriage had been averted and she will be able to continue her studies. She comes to Bal Manch meeting regularly, enjoys various games and activities and learns about various things simultaneously. She has developed fair understanding of child rights and is confident that her mother, her friends and community members will take every step to ensure that her rights are fulfilled. A ray of hope has enlightened her life.

Prevention is Better than Cure

Posters of Pulse Polio campaign were being pasted and slogans were being painted at prominent places in Roopaspur. ANM bahin ji from health department was the only known face for children who were curiously watching the entire exercise. As their curiosity grew they asked her why this was going on. She replied, "On the coming Sunday, all the children under 5 years of age will be given Polio drops. All of you are requested to support the programme so that no child is left out."

Children had heard about the campaign from their teacher as well. Therefore, they felt excited when ANM requested them to support. They accepted it in no time.

Roopaspur is a Kushwaha community dominated village which has 81 families and population of 524 persons. It is located 3 km far from its Panchayat headquarter Pachgaon and about 10-12 km from its district headquarter Dhaulpur. Agricultural labour and labour in red stone mines is the main source of occupation for the inhabitants of Roopaspur.

Children discussed about the campaign in their Bal Manch meeting and took responsibility of their own and a neighbouring family. They were aware that children who do not receive polio vaccination have high chances of becoming disabled. So they decided to ensure that every child receives polio drops on the Polio Sunday.



In today's meeting, Satish and Dharmendra were also present who themselves are suffering disability because of polio. They too helped in explaining the importance of polio vaccination. For this, they even mentioned miseries that are being faced by them. Children felt that something should be done to ease their problems. They decided that on the Polio Sunday only they will talk about this in detail.

In the meantime, the children were alert. They talked about these children with Prayatn team members who visited the village in this period. Prayatn staff informed that facilities of free treatment and government aid may be availed for them. They also told about the upcoming 'Prashaashan Gaon Ke Sang' camp in which various administrative works related with the village like drinking water, pension entitlements (widow pension, old age pension, disability pension), etc. will be speedily disposed. Villagers should participate in the camp and get their problems solved.

It was an important lead for children. In the evening, although it was not the regular meeting of the Bal Adhikar Manch, its urgent meeting was because only two days were remaining in the camp. Children wanted that government aid be availed for all the four children - Satish s/o Shri Kedar Singh, Suman d/o Shri Sarnam Singh, Dharmendra s/o Shri Babu Singh and Vinod s/o Shri Ramgopal. They revealed the entire matter in the meeting and, without wasting any time, sought support of the adults in availing entitlements of the disabled children through the camp.



Everyone was held the opinion that the children should be held. Vikram, Kamla, Kewal Singh, Sharada and Gyan Dei took the responsibility that they will talk about the matter in the Panchayat before the camp and will then take all the four children to it.

All the four Bal Adhikar Manch members met with Sarpanch on the next day. Sarpanch assured them and asked them to bring the children to the camp.

Next day, all the four Bal Adhikar Manch members, all the four disabled children and their fathers reached the venue of the camp along with other villagers. Since many villagers were going to the camp, a dedicated vehicle was hired. As such, disabled children did not face much inconvenience in coming to the camp.

As soon as the camp began, Bal Adhikar Manch members requested Sarpanch and other senior officials to resolve problem of the four children keeping their situation in mind. The request was accepted. All the four had brought their disability certificate with them. So when the officer from the Social Justice and Empowerment Department demanded certificate to attach with the application for their pension, they were able to produce immediately. Within negligible time their pensions were sanctioned.

At the end of the day when all the people reached back to their village, the four children shared the good news with all the children. All of them became happy. Bal Adhikar Manch and parents of the four children applauded the efforts of the Bal Manch. They said that timely awakening of the children resulted in the solution of the problem in such a short time.

Pulse Polio campaign also proved to be a great success because of the involvement of Bal Manch and Bal Adhikar Manch. No child in the village was left out on the first day itself.

Presently, the pension of the four children has started. They and their parents are feeling a lot of relief. They have been informed about other entitlements as well. Everyone is happy. They are feeling the pleasure of going hand-in-hand.

Copies or Cards?

Ram Naresh was getting ready for work. His wife, Saroj, while packing his lunch-box, reminded him, "Important grocery items and copies for children are to be brought today." Today was wage payment day and Saroj knew it.

In the evening when Ram Naresh returned, his eyes were red. Saroj is an intelligent woman. She immediately brought water and tea her tired husband. When Ram Naresh appeared relaxed and fresh she enquired about the grocery and children's copies.

"Couldn't bring" Ram Naresh replied.

"No issues. You must have been tired. Give me the money. I will myself bring them tomorrow."

By this time, children too had returned home. They were eagerly waiting for their new copies and were expecting them today. The excitement did not allow them to note the expressions on their parents' face. They looked around Ram Naresh and only upon failing to find any copy, Ranabeer, the eldest of them, asked for the copies.

None of the children were expecting the response that their father gave to Ranabeer. It was vigorous slap. When Saroj tried to stop him, he pushed her aside started beating and abusing her too. Cries of the children and abusive shouting drew attention of the neighbours who rushed in to know what is happening. Interference by other villagers forced Ram Naresh to control himself. As he calmed down, he revealed that he has lost his entire wage in gambling and then in liquor.

Ram Naresh is a labourer in stone mines that are located close to his village, Rehrai. Rehrai is a village of about 100 households, majority of which are of a scheduled caste - Jatav.

The village is located uphill in rocky terrain of Dhaulpur district about 39 km far from its block headquarter - Baseri. Agriculture is difficult in this terrain and mining of red stone is the only source of employment for the local labourers.

Gambling, betting and drinking are very common in the Rehrai and nearby villages. Labourers are heavily addicted to them and waste a large part of their wage, which could have helped them in paying for some of bare minimum needs of their family like food, on these evils. Shortage of money pushes children too to labour in the stone mines and exposes them to these addictions as well. In the environment of domestic disturbances and violence and non-fulfilment of basic needs is common, terms like child development, child rights, future of child etc. appear irrelevant.

When Micro-level planning was initiated with the Bal Adhikar Manch and other villagers of Rehrai gambling and emerged as the biggest problem which was adversely affecting children, families, as well as, overall development of the entire village. Upon detailed discussion and analysis, need of stopping these menaces was realized. Options were explored amidst all the arguments, 'mis-arguments' and blame-game. Complaining about the gamblers appeared to be the first option, but as the discussion continued, opinion emerged that preliminary effort should be made at village and community level. A suggestion appeared that 25 people, who represent all the streets/habitations, communities, women and children, should be given responsibility of preparing indigenous rules for checking the menace. The rules will be proposed in front of the entire village for detailed discussion and approval. The finalised rules will be applicable to the entire village.

Some of the villagers demanded reconsideration to the idea saying, "Village is our own, rules are our own and violators too are our own people. Action on violators may result in unexpected problems."

The idea made way through all the 'ifs and buts'. 25 people were selected and a day's time was given to them to come out with the rules. Timing and venue for the general meeting for approval of the rules was fixed and every man, woman and child was asked to attend it.

Next evening, the committee proposed following rules in the general meeting:

1. No villager shall indulge in gambling or betting within or outside the village;
2. If anybody is found gambling or betting a fine of Rs 1100 will be imposed upon him;
3. The amount of fine shall be deposited in a village corpus;
4. The amount so deposited will be used for village development;
5. If any violator does not pay fine, he will be ousted from the society and the village;
6. Person who gives proper information about incidence of gambling or betting will be awarded prize money of Rs 250

The copy of the above rules, signed by all the 25 members, was read aloud and explained to all the villagers and their consent was sought. Some people protested against the rules but the protests were overruled as the rules were for the betterment of the village and general opinion was in favour of them. Finally, it was declared that those who protest against the rules will also be eligible for punishment.

When community itself decides rules and commits itself to their implementation, violating them does not remain easy. Rehrai is today free of gambling and betting. Everybody is feeling relieved and benefitted after this freedom. Money is getting diverted to right purposes. Basic requirements of families are getting fulfilled. Violence on women and children has reduced drastically. Villagers are now considering ban on liquor as well. Word of change has spread in nearby villages as well and they too are giving thought to imposing similar rules in their own villages.

Next month on the payment day, Ram Naresh returned happily with bagful of grocery items, new copies and remaining amount. Children too were happy. Saroj commented, "Copies have won over cards." Everyone smiled.

The Path of Development

Mahesh was not in class from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. today. His teacher got annoyed and when he came back, asked him to justify.

“I was thirsty. Hand pump close to the school is not working. So I went to home. There, my mother asked me to do some work, therefore I got late” Mahesh told.

“This is not acceptable,” Mahesh’s explanation annoyed the teacher further. He commented, “Why don’t you ask your family members and villagers to get it repaired?”

When school concluded Mahesh met with his friends and talked about annoyance of the teacher. Non-functioning of hand pump and, thus, the problem of drinking water was troubling all the children. All the children were associated with Bal Manch. They decided to discuss the issue in their Bal Manch meeting.



In the evening when Bal Manch was held every member expressed concern over the issue. They decided to raise the issue in front of Bal Adhikar Manch. Mahesh and a few other friends were given the responsibility.

When Bal Adhikar Manch meeting was held, the representatives raised the issue. Bal Adhikar Manch discussed and decided to submit a complaint of the non-functional to the Gram Panchayat and Water Supply Department. Two members were assigned the responsibility.

This is an incidence of Roopaspur village which is located in Gram Panchayat Pachgaon. The village is located 10-12 km far from the district headquarter and its population is 524. There are 81 families almost all of which are of Kushawaha community. Besides agriculture labour in stone mines is the key source of livelihood for the villagers.

After waiting for a reasonable amount of time, children approached Bal Adhikar Manch again. The hand pump was not repaired. Meeting was called again. Actually, the designated members had not submitted the complaint. Their excuse was, "After all, it was the responsibility of the entire village. Then why only one or two persons, who are already loosing their wage for the day, should bear the cost? When meeting day-to-day requirements was difficult how could we afford additional expenses?"

The excuse was genuine. But what should be done now? Discussion was held to explore options. A suggestion emerged, "We are talking about problems of the entire village. This has certain cost implications. Why don't we form a corpus through family-wise contribution to meet these implications?"

It was a very useful suggestion. Everyone liked it. Two days time was given to everyone to think about it. Other villagers were also consulted. Then a general meeting of the village was organised. Intensive discussion was held on all the related aspects like how much amount should be collected per family, who should collect the contribution, should it be

a regular or need based contribution, who should keep it, who should be allowed to take decision on expenditure, etc. Following decisions were taken:

1. Initially, Rs 20 will be collected as contribution from each of the families.
2. The contribution should be handed over to Ramesh Singh and Vikram Singh within a week
3. Ramesh and Vikram will keep the contribution with them.
4. They will spend the collection only after decision by consensus in formal meeting
5. Money will be spent only on collective requirements of the village
6. If requirement of expenditure arises for benefit of a few families only, the decision of expenditure will be made collectively only
7. Ramesh and Vikram, both, shall maintain the details of expenditure made and present it in front of all in the meeting of the Bal Adhikar Manch.
8. After the expenditure of the total amount, which will be around Rs 1580, and corresponding submission of accounts, fresh contribution will be collected.

Contribution was collected. Delegation got ready and complaint was submitted to the Gram Panchayat and the Water Supply Department. In just a few days, the department sent a mechanic to the village and the hand pump was repaired. Rs 200 were spent in total in this process. Remaining Rs 1380 are remaining with the two people. A corpus has been created in the village.

Now the villagers are feeling that the system of village corpus is very useful and many other problems can be solved through it. They have now started understanding the meaning of organization. They have also learnt that if organization and society devices a common system, path of long-lasting development becomes easier.

When One Lamp Glows...

Sheetal Dei was cleansing utensils in front of her house, when Kamala saw her and stopped. Kamala was returning with her co-villager school-mates from the Government Upper Primary School which is located at the Panchayat headquarter Pachgaon. Both had met after a long time. They started talking.

“You are not coming to school now-a-days, what is the matter?” Kamala asked.

“My mother is not allowing me to go to school,” Sheetal replied sadly.

“But why she is not allowing you?” Kamala sought reason.

“She says, I have already studied till class V. What will I do by studying further? After all, I am not supposed to do any job. If I learn domestic work it will be useful in future. She too will get a helping hand. And how will I go out of village for further studies?” Sheetal’s sadness increased.

“Do all those who seek education get job?” Kamala questioned. She added, “Yesterday, in our Bal Manch meeting too, we had a discussion on this issue. We were told that elementary education is mandatory for all children and it is the responsibility of every family to ensure that children get education at least till class VIII. And this education is absolutely free.”

“Where is your mother?” Kamala asked Sheetal.

“She has gone to Karimpur for some work.”

“Okay! Then I am leaving at present. I will talk with her tomorrow.”

Kamala left for her home but the question that why Sheetal cannot go to other village for studies started bothering her. After all, she herself was going to nearby village for this purpose.

Next day, when Kamala was going to school, Kamod too joined her. Kamala narrated her entire discussion with Sheetal to Kamod. Kamod said, “This is not the scene with Sheetal alone. Day before yesterday, I met with Vijay. He too has left education after class V. I talked with him. He told that he likes studies but his parents are not supporting him. They say what he is going to do after studies when ultimately he has to work as labourer in stone mines or any other labour work. What is the sense in wasting so much of time? It is better to start working now itself. For some days, Vijay assisted his father but now he is not feeling interested in the work. Father has gone out for work and does not return daily. So he is almost idle and is spending the entire day uselessly”

Kamala and Kamod had reached school. School bell was ringing. They kept their school bags in their respective classes and joined the prayer.

Both these inspired children are of village Ninokhar. As indicated earlier, Ninokhar is a village in Gram Panchayat Pachgaon and is, as such, a part of District Dhaulpur. Its distance from Dhaulpur and Pachgaon is 10 km and 3 km respectively. The village has 77 families of Kushwaha community and agriculture and stone mine labour is the prime source of occupation.

In the last meeting of Bal Manch in Ninokhar, discussion was held on the issues of Right to Education and mainstreaming of out-of-school children into formal schools. Discussion of Kamod and Kamala, therefore, continued on the same lines even when they were returning from school. They themselves decided to take up responsibility of calling up Vijay and Sheetal to next Bal Manch meeting for discussion, and in the mean time, talking with their parents to know their opinion and convince them.

Kamala and Kamod met with family members of Vijay and Sheetal. Parents was same as quoted by the children. Both the Bal Manch members, therefore, gave examples of their own self and other children who are going to nearby villages for further studies. They explained that education definitely improves chances of getting chances of getting better jobs but its

objectives and benefits are not limited to enhancing employability alone. Education helps in developing children's understanding about life. They start understanding their own self and the environment in which they live. They also develop understanding and capacity so that they are able to handle their family related responsibilities that will fall upon them in future.

Kamala and Kamod also told that Education is every child's right. Disengaging a child who is less than 18 years old from education and engaging he/she in domestic or external work is illegal. Similarly, child marriage is also illegal. In both these situations, the violators can be punished even if they are their own parents.

Vijay's parents were aware that whatever Kamala and Kamod are saying is right, and, that the two children will not let them go unless they accept. Therefore, there was no sense in standing against them. Sheetal's parents were, however, adamant. Children were not interested in getting them punished. So, they just warned that if the parents don't agree, they will complain about it to the Bal Adhikar Manch members. Then members themselves will talk with the parents. Sheetal's parents felt that they can somehow entice children but facing elders will be difficult. Following what the children are saying was, therefore, the best option.

Kamala and Kamod became happy at their feat. And so did Sheetal and Vijay. Same evening, the meeting of Bal Manch was due. Sheetal and Vijay also joined the meeting and expressed that they had lost all hope of going to school again but efforts of Kamala and Kamod have made it possible. In this situation Kamala reiterated the objective of Bal Manch, "We gather here so that we are able to help each other."

Presently, Sheetal is studying in Class VI and Vijay Singh is studying in the upper primary schools at Pachgaon. They are going to school regularly. Seema, another girl of Ninokhar, has also gained courage and has taken admission in school after seeing Sheetal. Someone has rightly said, "When one lamp glows, it illuminates of path of many."

A Milestone

The environment in the house of Siyaram was full of cheer. Cleaning, painting, repairs etc. had made the small house shine like a newly constructed one. Every morning and evening, women were singing mangal geet (songs of blessing). Purchase of clothes, ornaments and other household items was taking place. Occasion was marriage of Siyaram and his elder brother. No one was bothered although Siyaram was not eligible for marriage. He was being married along with his brother so that cost of separate functions be avoided.

Marriage of Siyaram was happening in the village Nisore ka Pura which is located 10 km far from the district Dhaulpur on the Dhaulpur-Bharatpur route in Panchgaon Gram Panchayat. The village is inhabited by a population of about 500 which primarily includes Kushawaha and Brahmin communities. Agriculture and mining are prime sources of occupation.

Meeting of Bal Manch was taking place. All children were present. Agenda set for the meeting was being discussed. Rakesh, Siyaram's paternal cousin, raised the issue of child marriage of Siyaram. The issue was discussed and Bal Manch members decided to go to his house, talk with his family members and stop his child marriage.

Children followed the decision. Gathering of so many children was inquisitive for the family members. They thought that children probably have come to play with Siyaram or gossip with him. But when these children started asking for stopping marriage of Siyaram, everyone was



surprised. Nobody took them seriously and asked them to sugar their mouth with a piece of jaggery and leave. They were thinking that children do not know anything. Someone must have misled them. But children stood to their point. Ultimately, family members got annoyed and shouted at them, “Do whatever you want to do. Marriage will take place.”

But this too couldn't deter the children. They started raising slogans, “Stop Child Marriage, stop Child Marriage!”

They warned as well, “Stop Child Marriage, else, we will lodge complain against you in front of police or even District Collector.”

The family did not pay any attention to children's warning. They felt that the children do not know what they are saying. Complaining in front of police or the District Collector is, after all, not a game that children can play.



Next day, children called up Bal Manch meeting again. Prayatn's Process Facilitator was also present in the meeting, so additional help was available. A request addressed to Deputy Superintendent of Police (Dy.S.P.) , Dhaulpur, was drafted to stop child marriage of Siyaram. Essential details like name of the head of the family and name and age of the minor (Siyaram) were included. A copy was marked for delivery to District Collector Office. Maximum children of Bal Manch and other children as well signed the application. Responsibility of ensuring timely handing over of the application was given to 10 of them.

When the Dy.S.P. saw the application and met with the delegation he felt highly impressed by the responsible and organised action of children. He assured that quick action will be taken.

The Dy.S.P. kept his word. Police van was there in the village on the very next day. When a one of the Police Officer asked for Siyaram's house, everyone was shocked. Children showed them Siyaram's house. The officer called the head of the family and warned him to stop the child marriage immediately, else, all the family members and participating relatives and friends, even from the bridegroom side, and even the Pandit performing the rituals will be arrested.

Siyaram's family members were stunned. They immediately assured abidance and begged their pardon.

As the whole environment became tense, children felt afraid that after return of the policemen, Siyaram's family members and other villagers will scold or beat them for the complaint to police. They, therefore, collected all their courage and revealed their fear there itself in front of the officer. The officer, in response, instructed all the villagers not to threaten or harm any of the children. He appreciated their initiative and courage aloud and then left.

Children were happy. It was like winning a battle. They almost declared, "We have understood our rights and if anyone comes in between the path of their fulfilment, they complain about to police and other senior officials. Nobody should take us lightly."

Siyaram, who was silently watching all this, now came forward and expressed his intention of continuing education instead of getting married.

Villagers who saw or heard about the incidence were absolutely surprised at the daring act and awareness of the children. They had understood that child marriage will not be easy in Nisore ka Pura now. Following the children is better.

Nisre ka Pura is now free of child marriage. Awareness about child rights has increased. Initiative taken by Bal Manch children is proving to be a milestone in the history of the village.

Being Informed

Today, there was no special event. Still Sanstha wale bhaiya had come with seemingly well educated person. Some children and some elders collected. Santha wale bhaiya greeted them and introduced the other person to them. The other person was a medical expert.

When Kamala came to know that some 'doctor' has come with the Sanstha wale bhaiya, she came out of her house and wished him. Sanstha wale bhaiya too wished her and asked, "How are you Kamalaji?"

"I am alright but my wrist has swelled and is paining."

"What happened?"

"Day before yesterday, Nurse behenji had come and had immunized me."

Sansthawale bhaiya and his colleague could understand that Kamala is pregnant.

"Show me," the medically expert asked.

Kamla showed her wrist. It was swollen. A wart had developed around the spot of prick.

"How was the syringe applied?"

"No, it was applied without pulling up blouse from the wrist."

"Was the syringe new or sterilized by boiling?"

"No. She, in fact, used the same syringe for one more woman."

While the Kamla was telling her story, another woman came with her young child who was crying. He had similar wart on his hip and was feeling pain. He was not even allowing touching of the spot of prick.

The organisational staff had understood that vaccination is taking place but not in proper manner. The vaccine which is meant to save life has itself become a risk because of improper way of vaccination.

The story is of village Todpura, Panchayat Samiti Badi, District Dhaulpur. Todpura is 12 km far from Badi and is about 42 km far from Dhaulpur. It is located on the Badi-Sarmathura road. There are about 50-60 households in the village. Most of the population is of Thakur and Jaataw communities. Agricultural and mine labour are the prime sources of livelihood for the inhabitants.



The medically aware person explained the importance as well as the entire process of vaccination to the men, women and children who were present. He cautioned, “Every person should be vaccinated with a new syringe or a syringe which has been boiled in water for at least 20 minutes. Otherwise infections will develop in the manner similar to that of Kamla and the child. In extreme cases these infections can lead to deadly infections like tetanus.”

Thursday was the day fixed for visit to the village by the nurse. When she arrived, villagers received her with anger. The women and the guardians of the children who had been vaccinated started quarrelling. They were about to lodge a complaint against her at the sub-centre. Only two of them were of the opinion that talks should be held in cool atmosphere. Instead of quarrelling or complaining, effort should be made to resolve the problem that has occurred and ensure that the error is not repeated again.

The reason behind their stand was that this was not happening for first time in the village. On various occasions in the past, vaccine pricks had swelled and then got well. It must be some natural immunity because of which there were no severe repercussions. Others too started thinking the same way.

When talks were held in positive atmosphere, the nurse admitted her mistake and declared that if costs are incurred in the process, she will bear it. She saw all the women and children whom she had vaccinated and gave some medicines to them. She said she will come to see them next day as well.

Next day, the nurse brought some more medicines. All the patients were feeling better. She pledged that the mistake will not be repeated again. To remove all sorts of doubts, it was decided that the patients whose vaccine pricks have got suppurated will be shown to the Medical Officer at the Primary Health Centre. Nurse herself took them there and showed. Everything was safe. Everyone therefore felt relief. But, they had understood that incomplete information is dangerous especially when it is related with health. So, they decided that they will try to gather maximum correct information about all the issues related with them. Being cautious and informed is what being smart means.



Not Four but Forty

It was Ramkesh's day today. He had won all the games that were played today. His pockets were bulging today while pockets of Virendra, Dataram and Manoj had become empty. For playing again, Ramkesh lent 10 marbles to each of the three on the condition that next day they will return 12 in place of 10. All the four started playing again. All of them were absolutely engrossed in the game. Some goats were grazing nearby.

"It is good that we have left studying," one of them said as they were exchanging talks while playing.

"True," other replied, "waking up early to go to school, doing home-work, getting beatings from the teacher if home-work is not complete; we are now free from all these tensions. Now see how we are enjoying. Just take goats for grazing and then enjoy all the day."

Goat grazing and playing was the all that was in the routine of the four boys. They are resident of Khajoor ka Pura village of Kolua Gram Panchayat and Dhaulpur District. The village is 20 km far from the district headquarter. All-season road is available to cover three-fourths of this distance and both public, as well as, private transport facilities are available to cover this part. No alternates are, however, available for covering the remaining 5 km distance, which is absolutely unpaved and seasonal.

A total of 32 families and 275 people reside in the village all of whom are from Kushwaha community. Labour in red stone mines constitutes prime source of livelihood together with limited agriculture. Some families rear honey-bees also. The village has a primary school.

Today is Sunday. Yesterday, there was a Bal Manch meeting in which provisions of the Right to Education Act as well as scholarships available to children of all the age-groups were discussed. It was decided that children who are out-of-school will be identified. One

of the members pointed out that Ramkesh, Virendra, Dataram and Manoj are not coming to school these days. Another member said that he has heard that they are now-a-days grazing goats. Twenty three members were present in the meeting. Five of them took up the responsibility of going to the houses of the four to know why they are not coming to school.

Children also decided to enjoy the Sunday by roaming around the village and playing in the afternoon for about 2 to 3 hours. The five children of the investigation team were also supposed to join them after contacting the families of the four children.

On the set time, all the Bal Manch members collected under the neem tree outside the village. They were waiting for the five who had gone for family contact. When they came, everyone unanimously decided to play cricket. Before the beginning of the game, the five children shared their findings. They revealed, "Family members of all the four children want them to go to school but these children themselves don't go. They say that education in school is not good and they are unable to learn anything. All the four graze goats."

The children decided to play for sometime and then meet the four to talk with them. Teams were divided and the game began. Some children were playing while others were enjoying as spectators.

"Look! These appear to be the goats of the four. They must be around." One of the children who was among the spectators exclaimed pointed towards a distant herd that had just appeared.

Bal Manch members rushed towards the herd. Soon they could see the four children as well. They were playing marbles. When Ramkesh and his friends heard and saw the Bal Manch children coming towards them, they became curious to know how these children are here. As they came closer, they saw all the children who were playing cricket. Dataram turned all the goats towards them and soon all of them were enjoying cricket. Fours, sixes,

runs, catches, run-outs and what not was there in this village cricket to hoot and enjoy. Heat of the game defeated heat of the sun for those three hours.

After the game was over, everyone, including the four, sat down in the shade of the neem tree for sometime to relax. Soon one the Bal Manch members initiated talk with the four, "We were about to come to your houses after the game. It is good that you were here only. Why are you four not coming to school these days?"

The four tried to blame their parents but the five who met with their parents exposed their lie. None of the four had expected such an investigation about them. They had no option but to apologize and listen, else, they feared that their lie will be exposed in front of their parents. Bal Manch members at this juncture explained them how education is important. They also explained how and for what has Bal Manch been formed. Finally, everyone said only one-point, "All the four of you should get ready in time and come with us to school tomorrow onwards or else we will inform your parents that the real problem is not of school but the habit of playing marbles."

All the four got the point. It was not a matter of exposure of their lie but of development of their own self and the society. Next day, all of them got ready and went to school in time. Soon they found that in class they are not for but forty friends and after the classes they were still more.

Parents of the four children could not make how exactly the miracle has taken place but they could definitely make out that it is Bal Manch which is responsible for the change. They were thankful to them and wanted that their own children should live in their company. Association of these children with Bal Manch, in this situation, was obvious. The only concern, now, is that they should get good quality of education and a punishment free environment in the school.

Voicing Rights

As soon as the school bell rang, all students packed up their bags and left for their respective homes. Ram Veer, a student of Class VIII, went into every classroom to ensure that no child is left behind before locking them. Being a student of the senior most class of the school he had taken up this responsibility upon himself.

In one of the classrooms he found a child struggling to pack his bag with one hand while with other hand he was pressing his stomach. This was Raghu.

“What happened Raghu?” asked Ram Veer.

“My stomach is aching.” Raghu replied.

Ram Veer immediately went to a school teacher and told him about the condition of Raghu. But teacher’s response shocked him, “When the lunch is free, who follows any limit? Raghu must have eaten excessively. What else will then happen to such disgusting, ill-mannered children?”

Ram Veer thought, “*Maatsaab* is not at all concerned. Instead, he is scolding me and uttering out bad words for Raghu and all other children of the school. He is talking as if Middy Meal is a mercy that they are doing to us.”

Ram Veer went back to Raghu and packed his bag. Both came out of the room and Ram Veer locked it. He then handed over the keys to the school teacher and started for home. Ram Veer not only held the school bag of Raghu but also helped him in walking down. After leaving Raghu at home, Ram Veer left for his home.

“Why did Matsaab talk so rudely? Isn’t it his responsibility to pay personal attention to children and help them? Stomach ache has become a general suffering among school going children. Yesterday too, 2-3 boys and girls were complaining about diarrhoea.”

A lot of such questions and thoughts hit Ram Veer's mind by the time he reached his home. He placed his school bag at its place, changed his clothes, came out and went to the nearby hand pump to splash some water on his face and get fresh. There again, he saw Raghu. He was returning after defecating with an empty bottle in his hand. Ram Veer started priming the hand pump while Raghu washed his hands and then drank some water.

"How are you now?" Ram Veer asked.

"Better. All this has happened after the midday meal at school. Similar situation occurred a few days back but stomach ache was not so severe. So, I didn't tell about it to any body. Yesterday, Radha, Shanta and Charan Singh (imaginary names) were also complaining about similar problems. Radha, in fact, was vomiting. She was saying that after the midday meal she started feeling nausea and started vomiting. There was some strange smell in the midday meal."

Ram Veer and Raghu decided to talk about the issue with the Head Master.

Next day, when they approached the Head Master and narrated the entire scene, they were scolded in return, "What are you saying? You mean we are mixing something in your food? You people yourself don't take care of your eating habits and are now blaming the school. Get back to your classes!"

Village Jindapura is where all this happened. Gram Panchayat is Angai, Tehsil is Badi and District is Dhaulpur. Population is about 500 persons with majority of them belonging to Jaataw community. Some families of Rajpoot and Prajapat communities are also there. Mine labour is the prime source of occupation. Agriculture and animal husbandry are for namesake.

Both the poor children returned from the Head Master's room. School bell rang. All children sat down for lunch. Raghu and Ram Veer, however, went to the kitchen to see how the food is being cooked and kept. The scene was hard to digest - *chapattis* had been

kept on a small piece of newspaper. Half of them were burnt and had fallen in mud. The *bhagauna* full of cooked pulses was lying without any lid although there was a lot of dust flying around. A lot of smoke was also there within and around the kitchen. Both the boys could not take midday meal after seeing the scene.

In the evening, they took 2-3 more children of the Bal Manch with them and went out to meet members of the Bal Adhikar Manch. The entire situation was narrated.

“Oh no, now I realize why my children were complaining about stomach ache a few days back”, Vimlesh said shockingly, “I, instead, assumed that they must have eaten something from outside and, therefore, scolded them. I acted so foolishly on the occasion and that’s why they couldn’t gather courage to speak out truth in front of me.”

Vimlesh and Urmila decided that they will themselves visit the school next day and then talk with all the members of the Bal Adhikar Manch in the evening.

Both the women went to school when lunch was being cooked. They went straight to the kitchen. Today, it was their turn of getting the shock. They observed, discussed and came back.

Meeting was organised in the evening. In these last two days, the news about poor condition of midday meal in the local government school had spread to every household. Children were heard. Elders also said their bit. Some went to doctor while others tried some churnas, ajwain and other home based remedies. It was established that the arrangement of midday meal in the school is not at all good and strict word with the Head Master and teachers is required. The responsibility was assigned to Hariom, Sitaram, Vimla, Vimlesh and Ram Hetu.

Next afternoon, all these people went to school. Midday meal was in progress. Situation was absolutely the same. Chapattis were burnt or uncooked. Pulses too were not cooked properly. Ram Veer and Raghu also joined the village elders.

School staff members were sitting separately and taking their lunch. They were not paying any attention to the arrangement of the midday meal. But when they saw the villagers, they were surprised because a day before, few women had inspected the kitchen, and today, so many men and women had come together.

Villagers went closer to the teachers, greeted them and sat down on benches lying nearby. Raghu and Ram Veer stood besides them. Ram Hetu addressed the Head Master and detailed him about their purpose of visit. He and other villagers complained about the sufferings faced by children. Discussion on menu of the midday meal was also held while today itself it wasn't followed at all.

Teachers were not willing to accept their callousness but, when Vimlesh revealed shortcomings that she herself had personally observed, they had no counter argument. Vimlesh strongly commented, "Midday meal is not your mercy towards our children but a right of them."

"If you need our help in ensuring quality and menu of the midday meal, please let us know. Whatever is going on, is not right and is not acceptable. If there is some departmental problem, then let us know. We will contact the higher authorities." Sitaram's offer of help was not just an offer, it was a warning.

The Head Master and school teachers had no option. Next day itself, quality of midday meal improved. At least one of the Bal Adhikar Manch members used to remain present at the time of preparation and serving of the midday meal. Menu of the food was displayed, conspicuously, in front of the kitchen. Children too were vigilant. Their problem of diarrhoea had disappeared.

Teachers' behaviour also became balanced. They had understood that good quality midday meal is their duty. If someone is doing favour, it is the community and children. Teachers are at the receiving end. After all, these people are allowing an opportunity of employment of high dignity to them.

Food for... Mohan!

When school bell announced closure of the day, Mohan came to home rushing. Mother was standing outside.

“Why are you hurrying today? Everyday, you come very slowly, playing and enjoying with your friends, you don’t even respond to repeated calls. What has happened today?” Mother asked.

“Please give me something to eat, I am desperately hungry today” Mohan replied.

Mother was surprised again. The boy who usually does not take food in time, puts forward various excuses to avoid eating is today not even willing to wait for changing uniform. She asked, “Didn’t you take midday meal in school today?”

“I don’t want to eat the midday meal” Mohan was almost irritated.

“Why, what has happened?” Mother asked worryingly as she served food to her son.

Mohan almost swooped at food. When a few bites went down his throat and he gained a few calories, he spoke up, “Midday meal is absolutely disgusting. Kitchen remains dirty, utensils remain unclean, food is tasteless and only daal-roti is cooked everyday. Teachers have been complained about it but they scold us instead. We still used to manage, but today, all limits have been crossed! All roties were burnt and stinking. Daal too was full of gravel. We have decided that we will not take midday meal tomorrow onwards.”

This is story of Soorajpura village. Soorajpura is located in Puraani Chhaawani Gram Panchayat of Dhaulpur block & district. The village is 8 km far from Dhaulpur and 3 km far from Puraani Chhaawani. Jaataw and Kushwaha communities dominate the village which has about 80 households in total. Labour in agriculture and stone mines is the prime source of livelihood for them.

The word of boycott of midday meal by Mohan and his friends reached all children, women and men of the village. Mohan had revealed the decision in the Bal Manch meeting which was held two days later. All members shared his opinion that quality of midday meal in their school should be improved. They decided to seek intervention of Bal Adhikar Manch in the matter.

Children discussed the issue with members of the Bal Adhikar Manch. Out-of-turn meeting was called. Detailed discussion was held and children were heard. A committee of four members - Munni Devi, Prem Singh, Votan Singh and Uttam - was formed to have a serious talk with the Head Master.

Next day, all the members went to school and held talk with the Head Master. Head Master denied all accusations but then children were called. Children explained the situation in detail and showed dirty utensils and burnt rotis as well.

The Head Master was left with no excuse. He accepted and assured, "This will not be repeated next time onwards". The members then warned the Head Master that they are aware of the arrangements of the midday meal in government schools. They know that the school should have a weekly menu of midday meal prepared in consultation with children and displayed in the school prominently and legibly; it should have different items on different days so that monotonousity is avoided; a fruit should also be distributed at least once a week, etc.



Most of the members of Bal Adhikaar Manch are also members of the School Development and Management Committee. Therefore, when next meeting was held, they decided to strictly monitor the quality of midday meal being served in the school. For this, they formed a committee of four members and defined following responsibilities for them:

1. Check whether meal is nutritious and adequately cooked or not
2. Meal is being prepared as per the menu or not
3. Cleanliness is being maintained in every aspect - be it, food material, utensils, kitchen space etc. or not

They also decided that:

1. School faces any problem in this regard, Bal Adhikar Manch members will be ready to help
2. All the four members shall prepare a calendar of their visit for monitoring



As school staff saw that community members are monitoring midday meal on frequent basis, they felt pressure of improving it. Quality of midday meal improved and hygiene too started being maintained. Children started getting fresh and hot food as per the menu of their liking. Good quality delicious food is not only providing adequate nutrition to children who are coming to school, its temptingly spicy smell and appreciation is attracting even those who were not coming to school regularly. They have now become regular.

Every Problem... Solution!

Seema, Sulfi, Pooja and Kalpana are all friends. They are between 12 to 14 years of age. They have passed Class V from the primary school located within their village, Fonde ka Pura, but were not allowed to study thereafter. Their classmates have taken admission in the Class VI in the upper primary school which is located in the Panchayat headquarter, Vishnoda, which is about 2 km far from Fonde ka Pura. All the four girls are good at studies and wished to study further.

Fonde ka Pura is a small village of 40 families and its population is approximately 400. It is 15 km far from the District cum Tehsil headquarter Dhaulpur. All the families of the village belong to Jaataw community and are dependent on agricultural and stone mine labour for livelihood.

Though they were not studying, all these four girls had been participating in the Bal Manch activities with all the vigour. They used to attend all its meetings regularly and participated in various other in-village activities as well. But whenever discussion on education used to take place in the meetings, they used to get sad. One day, they came out with their pain openly, “We want to study further, but our parents don’t allow us.”

“Why? What do they say?” other members of the Bal Manch asked.

“They say that studying till Class V is enough. There is no use of studying further. After all, we are not going to do any job; we have to do domestic work only.” Seema replied.

Sulfi quoted what her parents say to her, “Now you are not so young that you should be playing with boys. You should rather learn household work because, eventually, you have to get married and go to other’s house and bear these responsibilities. You are grown up now. How can we send you outside alone? And within village, school is only upto Class V.” All the four said more or less the same thing.

Kalpana told, "I had tried to talk with my father. He asked me to talk to my mother. When mother came, father himself laid my request in front of her but she rejected the request entirely. She said that she will not send her to study further. When such a grown up girl will go with boys to other village and any mishap happens, what will they do? They will be ruined."

Everybody was stunned when they listened to the four girls. Kishore spoke, "When we 4-5 boys can go to other village for studying, then why can't these girls be sent with us? When we studied together here, we can also study together there. What difference will going to other village make between us?"

Everyone was in agreement with what Kishore said. They decided to talk with parents of all the four girls.

When this talk was going on, Shrikant Bhaiya from Prayatn had also come. Children narrated the entire discussion in front of him asked for his suggestion. He told, "First option, as you people have thought, is that we talk to family members of all the four girls and try to convince them to send the girls with you people. Second option is of their admission in the Kastoorba Gandhi Balika Vidyalay (KGBV) in Dhaulpur. This is a residential upper primary school run by government exclusively for girls. The facility is absolutely free and all the expenses born by the government."

Children liked idea of KGBV. They decided to call parents of all the four girls without wasting any time. Two members were sent to call them immediately. Only Seema's father, Ram Gopal ji, was available. Complete discussion was held with him. Even, Right to education was also discussed. After a long discussion, Ram Gopal ji agreed to go with Shrikant ji and see the facility of KGBV. A day was set for the purpose.

On the fixed day, Ram Gopal ji took Seema also together so that she also sees the facility and is able to give her opinion. The three met with the Coordinator. Shrikant ji requested her

to tell about and show the facilities of the regarding, education, residence, mess, security etc. Coordinator accepted the request.

Ram Gopal ji was absolutely convinced about the facilities of KGBV and immediately got Seema admitted there. Seema requested him to talk for admission of her three friends as well. Ram Gopal ji talked with Parbati, Lakhan Singh and Bhagwan Das. When he detailed the three about the facilities and said that he himself is convinced, the three gave their consent and asked him to take up the responsibility of admission.



Soon the four girls went to KGBV. As the word spread, 13 more girls from nearby villages also joined the KGBV. All of them were happy that because now they will be able to continue their education. Their parents are also happy upon seeing that future of their girls is getting secured. They visit the school on regular basis to see them. Girls too come back home and meet everyone whenever they get leave. They happily tell them the stories of their friends in the residential school. It is rightly said - every problem has a solution.

The Money Tree!

Bal Manch meeting was under progress. Decisions of the last meeting were being reviewed. The most important decision of the last meeting was of enlisting children who are in the school-going age but are not going to school. Rajesh and Dinesh informed that three children - Priyanka, Gopesh and Krishna Kumar - are not going to school. Bal Manch decided to contact these children, know their reason of being out-of-school and bring all of them in the next meeting for talking with them.

In the next meeting Priyanka, Gopesh and Krishna Kumar were present. After recap of last meeting and introduction of the purpose and way of working of Bal Manch, they were asked why they were not going to school.

“I want to study, my mother also wants me to study but my father does not send me to school,” Gopesh replied. He added, “Almost everyday, my father returns home drunk and starts abusing my mother. If I intervene, he starts abusing and beating me as well. When mother asks for money to meet household expenses, he shouts at her saying money does not grow on trees from where he may pluck and bring. One day, mother was saying that father indulges in gambling and betting as well. Some villager has told her. All of us remain aggrieved. In the evening, when his time of return nears, we get frightened. Villagers, too, comment upon us saying that our father is lying fallen there, abusing even those who just ask him to go home silently, etc. Others tease him or make fun of him.”

“Night before yester night, we were unable to sleep.” Gopesh’s story of helplessness and fear was not over yet. He continued, “He kept on abusing and started vomiting. We were unable to sleep for the entire night. In the morning, when mother started sweeping, entire house was stinking nauseatingly. Mother had no option except cleaning it with a cloth on her mouth. She somehow brought him out of the bed. I was almost trembling with fear

when I handed him a mug of water. No scene was created; probably the influence of liquor had subsided. When mother offered for tea, he refused and started smoking bidi on bed itself. He was coughing profusely. Mother somehow convinced him for a cup of tea. We were feeling bad and frightened although we have got habitual to this kind of scenes.”

Story of Priyanka and Krishna Kumar was also similar. Like Gopesh, they too were absolutely afflicted by the addictions of liquor and gambling of their fathers. Eyes of all the three children became wet with tears. Other children consoled them. They decided that they will take the issue to the elders and all the three will be taken to school. Towards the end of the discussion, children collectively sang a children’s song. Gopesh, Priyanka and Krishna Kumar also joined them. They felt that Bal Manch members will help them. The meeting concluded.

Soorajpura is a village in Gram Panchayat Chhaawani in Tehsil/District Dhaulpur. It is located on a pucca road 8 km far from the district headquarter. Basic amenities like road, electricity, water and primary school are present within the village. Few shops are also available for petty purchases. Most of the villagers belong to Jaataw or Kushwaha communities. Their chief occupation is labour in agriculture or stone mines.

Children of Sooraj pura have constituted a forum for themselves namely Bal Manch. The story presented above is of the same Bal Manch. A forum of adults to protect rights of children has also been constituted here and children were referring to the same for further action.

“In the next meeting, which is due on day after tomorrow, the issue of the three children will be discussed.” Members of the Bal Adhikar Manch gave this assurance to children when the children requested to do any thing to ensure that the three out-of-school children start going to school. They requested the children to bring the three to the meeting while committing that they themselves will call their parents for discussion.

The word got spread in the entire village. Meeting was held on the pre-decided day and time. Members of the Bal Manch brought Gopesh, Priyanka and Krishna Kumar with them. Their fathers had been informed but they hadn't come, so two members went again to bring them. Meanwhile, the three children were asked to express what they had been facing and feeling in front of all the children. Sensitive response of Bal Manch and Bal Adhikar Manch helped them in gaining necessary confidence and they expressed their pain.



The three fathers had come and taken their seat in the meantime. They were silent. Probably, the environment created by Bal Manch over the last few days had made them realize their mistake. Their unmanly behaviour that was under cover of the four walls of their house had got exposed in public and were being discussed in front of their own children.

Sarnaam Singh initiated the talk saying, "Children of only you three people are not going to school in the entire village. We want you to allow education of these children. Your bad habits are putting the future of these children under risk and this shameful for us because we are their guardians. If you can't bear the responsibility of these children, then let us know, we will take it up."

The indirect comment of the chairperson along with comments of other members made the three fathers feel ashamed and opened their eyes. They realised that they were playing with the life of their own children.

“Let these people themselves say what they have to say” Manohar Lal, who too was a senior member of Bal Adhikar Manch and listening to the entire discussion, suggested.

All the three fathers pledged to leave their bad habits and allow the children to go to school. But commitments of addicts are usually weak and give way in front of temptations. So to strengthen it, another comparatively young but committed member of Bal Adhikar Manch, challenged, “What is the guarantee that you will fulfil this pledge?”

“Take our pledge in writing with our signatures. If we repeat our mistake, you are free to take any action against us. And please consider us as a part of this Manch.” Eyes of Ram Kishan, Gopesh’s father, were turning bright from red.

Peer pressure showed its effect. All the three children were enrolled and they had started going to school happily. No news of any violation of pledge came from any of the houses. Abuse and violation against women and children reduced significantly. Everyone was feeling relief because of improvement in the environment of the village. Discussion on imposing complete ban on consumption of liquor and gambling in the entire village started taking place. Wastage of money stopped and saving and better usage of it started taking place.

A few days later, when Ram Kishan returned home from work, Gopesh asked him for money to buy necessary stationery. The father directed him to his mother and commented, “The Money Tree lies with her.” All of them laughed as the mother took out a five rupees coin from her little purse.

Dharmaveer Gets His Way

It was a nice Sunday morning. Dharmaveer thought that he should enjoy the time off with a dip and swim in the clear water of the old mine pit instead bathing with the water of the hand pump that he daily does. The pit had taken shape of a fresh water pond after the monsoon. The 11 years old boy took his time and then let his wet clothes to dry on nearby bushes.

A little away from the pit, a few adults and children were breaking larger stones into smaller pieces which are locally referred as gitti. Dharmaveer too went their after the bath and started talking with them. Children told that they are paid for the work. Dharmaveer became curious to know how these children work and earn. So, while talking with them, he also picked up a small hammer started breaking a stone. Amidst talking and working, he didn't realize that a lot of time has passed. When the other children saw the heap of gitti broken by him, they found it more than their own heap. They commented, "You have broken more gitti than us. We take 6 to 7 days to break a trolley full of gitti, but you will be able to do it within 3 to 4 days."

The appreciation caught Dharmaveer. Today was Sunday, so he kept on. In the evening when he was returning, the contractor, who was noticing him during the entire day, handed him a ten rupees note. Probably this was the way to attract children to this work.



By the time Dharmaveer reached home, he had already spent those ten rupees. He bought a pencil, an eraser, a chocolate and a pouch of gutkha. He liked this because for such expenses, he never used to get money from home.

On Monday, Dharmaveer went to school but he was not feeling interested in studies. Again and again, his mind was getting his mind was getting attracted towards the gitti work. Next day onwards, he started skipping school putting up various excuses and going to the work-site. The money that he used to get in return was used on food, clothes and other items of his liking and means of entertainment. He was enjoying this. But on one side he was loosing his studies and on the other side he was getting addiction of gutkha. Nobody noticed him.

Dharmaveer is a resident of village Rajai ka Pura, Gram Panchayat Vishnoda and Tehsil and District Dhaulpur. The village is 12 km far from district headquarter and approximately 3 km far from Gram Panchayat headquarter. There are 45 Jaataw community households in the village and population is about 350. Most of the families are dependent upon mine labour for livelihood.

Bal Manch meeting was going on. Discussion was on children who are irregular in school. Along with other children, name of Dharmaveer also appeared in the list of irregular children that was worked out. It was decided that the members will interact with the irregular children and their parents and they will be called in the next Bal Manch meeting. Objective will be to regularize them in school.

In the next meeting Dharmaveer was also present. Talks were held. Dharmaveer presented his viewpoint, "I don't like studies because parents do not give money for necessities. Gitti work is better. It fetches money. So whenever I am in need of money I go to the work site. Even after meeting expenses of education, I am left with some money which I can use for my enjoyment."

Children were aware that what Dharmaveer is talking about is a sort of child labour and is prohibited under law. They had been discussing about it from time to time. Bhaiya coming from the Sanstha had also explained ill-effects of it during discussions on child labour. Therefore, they explained Dharmaveer that the dust that is produced in the process of breaking stones results in various kinds of respiratory diseases which even result in untimely death of the labourer. In case of children, the risks involved are much higher. Eyes also get affected. Chances of accidents and corresponding injuries are also high. Contractor never comes for any rescue. He engages children just because they get ready to work at lesser rate as compared to adults for the same work. Further, they are not strong enough to protest.

Dharmaveer started understanding explanations presented by his friends. Then he understood the ill-effects of skipping school and chewing gutkha as well. He realized that he was committing a blunder and decided to leave it immediately. His friends too assured him that, if needed, they will help him in getting necessary money from his parents.

Dharmaveer immediately left going to the mines for work. He is now going to school regularly. He is studying in class VII. He is participating in Bal Manch activities as well. He still goes to the pit for bathing at times and talks with the adult and children who are working but does not get tempted to follow. Instead, he tries to understand the situation of them and tries to convince them for following his way of leaving child labour and going to school. He has got his way of life now.



Wake Up... Manoj!

A dashing boy, aged about 15 years, dressed in a new readymade black pant, yellow short and a red handkerchief wrapped around his neck, black sunglasses got down from a Jugaad on the stop at Konesa village. Before he could enter the village 2-3 children met him. They sat under the shade of a tree and started talking. The boy was Manoj who had just returned from Coimbatore. Those surrounding him were the children with whom he used to go to school before going to Coimbatore.

Manoj had come to the village after a long time. So his friends were interested in knowing his whereabouts. His dashing look was fascinating them. His talks about the about the big city were fascinating them further. Children, who had hardly been beyond Dhaulpur, were anxious to know about the life in a big city more than 2000 km far from their village.

“Would you like to have this?” While talking, Manoj took out a pouch from his pocket, tore it, emptied it on her palm and offered to his friends.

“No thanks! We don’t take Gutkha or tobacco in any other form.”

“Okay! As you wish”, Manoj placed the entire gutkha in his mouth and started chewing.

Friends ignored adult-like talking and consumption of gutkha by Manoj and continued talking to him. But when he took out a cigarette and started smoking, they could not ignore it. All of them were shocked. Manoj did not even touch gutkha or cigarette before going to Coimbatore. They still continued their talks.

“We will meet in the evening” Manoj finally bade his friends in style after sometime as he stood up and started walking towards his house. His friends were still in the state of shock.

Konesa is a small village in the Bhadasil Gram Panchayat of Tehsil and District Dhaulpur. It is located on Sarmathura-Karauli Road and is 6 km far from Sarmathura. Jaataw and Meena communities dominate the village. Some families of Rajpoot and Brahmin communities are also present. In total, there are 70 households. Agriculture is for name sake only. Most of the villagers are engaged in stone mines or they migrate to other places for marble grinding and cutting or other labour work.

A lot of poverty-stricken villagers, while migrating out for work, take their children with them to earn additional income. These children do earn money but money in hand in the age in which books should be handled, together with distance from families, pushes these children on the road of addictions from where taking a U-turn is very difficult. About 25-26 children in the age-group of 13 to 15 years had migrated from the village in this manner.

Manoj was among these children who had migrated for child labour. Poor economic condition of his family had forced him to switch over to work instead of going to school. And then, he too had fallen prey to temptations of 'adult like behaviour' and had started taking gutkha and cigarette.



Manoj was a member of Bal Manch before going to Coimbatore. So when he came to know that Bal Manch meeting is scheduled today, he thought of refreshing his memories and joined it. Today's issue was Child Protection. Dalveer, who had come from the Sanstha reminded them about the Right of Children to Protection.

“In our village the main issues of child protection is of child labour. A lot of children are involved in child labour because of which their studies are getting affected. The dust produced in this process is damaging their health.

They are getting addicted to ill-habits like smoking bidi or cigarette, chewing tobacco containing gutkha etc. As a whole, their life is getting ruined.” one of the members expressed his views on the issue. Other children too supported him and expressed concern over exploitation of children which is taking place in this manner. They called to take action on this issue.



These talks touched Manoj's heart. As if he was sleeping and somebody has shaken him awake, he stood up. It was like lord Hanuman standing up and readying to cross the entire sea in one jump after being awakened by *Jaamwant*. He declared, "I had lost the right way. My parents had not forced me to work; still, I went to Coimbatore with my friends. But now, I won't go back. I will restart my studies and try to associate my other friends as well with education. For this I will talk with them and their parents".

Manoj took out the pouch of gutkha and packet of cigarette remaining in his pocket and threw it out in front everyone. All the children clapped at Manoj's statement and action. They praised him and assured that they too will join him in this initiative.

Manoj left gutkha-cigarette thereafter, and started following his commitment. He and his friends, with their joint efforts, were able to free 7 children from child labour, readied 2 of them to appear in class VIII exams as private students and enrolled the remaining 5 in the regular schools. His and his friends are dedicatedly following their mission to make Konesa free of child labour.

This mission has not only affected children, it has influenced elders as well. They too have started supporting the mission. Now, instead of sending children for child labour, they keeping watch that every eligible child is being sent to school. They are also vigilantly ensuring that no child is falling in the trap of gutkha, bidi or cigarette. Bal Adhikar Manch has decided that no adult shall ask any child to bring these products nor will consume these in front of them. The change was obvious; after all, when Hanuman is awake no sea can remain unconquered.

More Fruits Ahead!

Today is Monday, the day fixed for Bal Manch meeting in Rajai ka Pura. Rajai ka Pura is a village in Vishnoda Gram Panchayat of tehsil and district Dhaulpur. The village is 12 km far from district headquarter and approximately 3 km far from Gram Panchayat headquarter. There are 45 Jaataw community households in the village most of whom are dependent upon mine labour for livelihood.

Rajesh, who is a class VIII student, had, yesterday, read about balanced diet in one of his books. The book said that fruits are an important component of children's food. But he and other children of his village rarely get chance to have them because fruits are neither cultivated nor bought and brought in the village. Rarely do they see fruits at home. So when he saw that *Bahin ji* who had come to facilitate the meeting, he thought that he should make use of the opportunity and ask her about it. He kept on waiting for his chance to speak up. When the agenda of the meeting was being finalized, he got this chance. He raised the issue. The Chairperson of the day, Shanta Kumari, accepted the request on Bal Manch's behalf, and asked Rajesh to raise it in detail on his turn that was decided on the basis of priorities.

When his turn came, Shanta asked Rajesh to present his point. Rajesh, at first, addressed the Chairperson, the Bahin ji and all the members of the Manch and then started with a question, "On several occasions in Bal Manch meeting, we have discussed that fruits are an important component of our balanced diet. I read about it in one book also, yesterday. But we get very few fruits and that too on festive occasions or when we get chance of going out to city. Then how the fulfilment of this requirement can take place?"

The question was obviously meant for the Bahin ji to answer. When indicated, she explained, "Fruits are definitely a very important component of children's food. We get

a lot of vitamins and minerals, which are essential for our growth and development, as well as, averting diseases, from fruits. We should try that we are able to consume at least one fruit every week. It is not necessary to bring them from city. Many fruits are available within our neighbourhood or nearby jungle can also serve this purpose. We are entitled to get a fruit once a week in the midday meal served at school as well”

“Fruit in school’s midday meal!” last statement of Bahin ji came as a surprise to the children, “But we never got it” they exclaimed.

Bahin ji immediately understood the scene. Fruit was not being served and children were not aware of the provision. She, therefore, detailed, “Under the Midday Meal Programme, minimal contents of the weekly menu of the midday meal are fixed, and a fruit at least once a week is a part of this menu. Which fruit has to be served can be decided as per local availability and liking of the children. Since it is not being served in your school, you need to talk about it with your Head Master, School Management Committee, as well as, Bal Adhikar Manch. It is your right!”

Bal Manch members followed the advice of the Bahin ji. Rajesh and Shanta took up the responsibility. They talked with Bal Adhikar Manch members. The Bal Adhikar Manch assigned the responsibility to two of its very active members - Lalaram ji and Ram Charan ji.



Next day, when Lalaram ji and Ram Charan ji started for school, Shiv Charan ji also joined them. All of them reached school and talked about the provision of midday meal and fruit as a part of it. Teachers were aware of the provision but hadn't arranged it yet. Seeing community awareness, they assured that the provision will be followed next week onwards. Lalaram ji, in the meantime, picked up a copy of the weekly midday meal menu and kept it in his pocket.

Lalaram ji and Shiv Charan ji kept close watch on the arrangement of the school. Not just upon fruit, they kept eye on complete midday meal, education in the school, timings of the school, as well as, its other activities. From time to time, they used to take feedback from children as well.

When the day of distribution of fruits arrived, Lalaram ji went out to see whether children have got fruits or not. The dustbin placed outside the school was full of peels of banana. Lalaramji understood in no time and straight-a-way went to his work.

After the school, Rajesh and other members of Bal Manch came to Lalaram ji's house and told him with joy, "Kaka , your talk has proved to be effective. Today we got bananas with food in the midday meal. Quality of food itself has also become much better."

Lalaramji started smiling upon seeing joy on the faces of children. He was, as if, saying, "Keep watching, there are more fruits ahead!"



Hand-Pump from Badi

Ram Vilas (imaginary name) went to Badi early today because of some urgent need. Amidst the early morning rush, he was getting late. So, he skipped breakfast and moved out. At Badi too, he abstained from the first meal of the day although he had started feeling hungry. He thought that the work will not take much of time and he will be able to enjoy home-made food. As soon as the work got over, he got in a Jeep and got down at the way to his village. With quick steps, he could reach the village in just 40 minutes.

Soon, Ram Vilas was in front of the door of his house. The door was locked. Ram Vilas asked whereabouts of his wife and daughter but none of the neighbours were sure. "They might have gone for fetching water", one of them said.

Ram Vilas started regretting over his mistake of skipping breakfast at home as well as at Badi, as his hunger turned unbearable. The fire of his stomach started heating his mind as well and he started feeling anger over his wife for going out in spite of knowing that he had gone out without having breakfast. Desperate husband kept on walking from this end to that in the veranda.

After a long time, his wife and daughter appeared coming from a distance. Both were carrying pots of water on their heads. While wife had balanced two filled earthen pots on her head and was carrying a bucket as well in her hand. Daughter was carrying a smaller pot on her head. Both were sweating.

Water was on the head of the mother and the daughter only. Husband's head was full of fire. As soon as they came close, he shouted, "I am dying out of hunger and you are sitting somewhere like a queen."

"There was no water in the house and the nearest hand pump is about one-and-a-half kilometres far. But you men are least concerned because this is not 'your' part of job. Then how could I have remained at house waiting for your arrival? Should I expect that you will

be bringing it from the hand pump at Badi? And by the way, who had stopped you from taking food in the morning even when it was ready?”

Ramvilas had no answer to these questions. He knew that he had been acting foolishly about food since morning. As his wife smiled at his cluelessness, helplessness replaced anger on his hungry face. Soon he recalled that the only hand pump of the village is lying damaged since last two months.

The incidence quoted above is of Chaudhary pura village. This village is situated in Chilachaund Gram Panchayat of Badi Panchayat Samiti of Dhaulpur district. The village is located 45 km far from the district headquarters and 15 km far from the Panchayat Samiti headquarters. The village is located 4 km south of Chilachaund which is located on the road connecting Badi and Sarmathura.

Chaudhary Pura is a small village of only 27 households who belong to either Meena or Jaataw communities. Mining labour is their prime source of livelihood. Little bit of agriculture is also there.



Ram Vilas was silent now. He had his stomach full. He had understood that his wife and children are facing a lot of problems in fetching water. Not only them, but also everyone else in the village was facing the problem of drinking water. He therefore, decided to talk about it with them in the evening.

A series of meetings were taking place in the village on regular since the formation of the Bal Adhikaar Manch. Issues related children are discussed in these meetings in general but the issue of water was pinching to everyone. And the village being small, collection of villagers did not take much time. Women, too, were present.

“Hand pump of our village is lying damaged since last two months but neither our government nor we have paid any attention to it,” Ram Vilas initiated the discussion with his viewpoint.

There was no second opinion on the issue so discussion straight-a-way turned to the direction of further action. A complaint was drafted seeking repair of the hand pump. It was addressed to the engineer of the Water Supply Department and a copy was marked for the Tehsildar. A contribution of Rs 5 was collected from each of the households to meet the related expenses.

Next morning, Ram Vilas and one more person, who were assigned the responsibility, left for Badi. Today, they had taken their breakfast before leaving because they were not sure how much time the process will take.

At Badi, they went to the office of the Water Supply Department and submitted the complaint. They met with a journalist as well and handed over a copy to him as well. All the three then went to the office of the Tehsildar. At both the offices, they received assurance that complaint will be followed-up promptly. By evening, they were back to their village.

As the process was followed properly, everyone was hopeful that the problem will be resolved soon. But prompt action by the department was a pleasant surprise for them. Hand pump mechanic was there in the village at the break of the very next day. With the help of the villagers, the hand pump was repaired within two hours. Ram Vilas called his wife for a cup of tea who didn't waste any time. Everyone was happy when the mechanic left.

“Hand pump from Badi is here, madam,” Ram Vilas commented with a smile upon his face when his wife handed over a glass of water to him. Smile doubled as she also reciprocated it. Daughter too had returned from her school and had seen water flowing from the hand pump by that time. She too became happy and started laughing with her parents when she heard comment from her father. After all, she too had gained freedom from the trouble of fetching water.

New Pinch!

As soon as the school bell of Government Primary School Mundpura declared lunch break, all the children rushed to the hand pump located within the school campus for quenching their thirst. Sitaram, a student of Class IV, was one of them. When he got his chance, bent down and raised his right hand to bring it in front of his mouth to ease drinking, he heard a sound from his underarm. The stitches of his shirt had got broken. Other children waiting for their turn at the hand pump also noticed and started laughing.

Before the end of the lunch break, the incidence became 'breaking news' for the entire school. It was a matter of fun for all the school children. They were pointing out at the broken stitches which were exposing a part of Sitaram's underarm, describing how it all happened and, then, laughing at the poor boy.

Sitaram felt very embarrassed because of the entire scene that was created. He knew that his present uniform had worn out a lot and had demanded a new one from his mother, not once but twice. She, however, did not respond to the demand. Sitaram felt that this embarrassment is all because of her.

When Sitaram reached home after the school hours, he was angry. He almost threw his school bag aside, took off his shirt, dropped it in front of the mother and spoke, "Tomorrow onwards, I am not going to school".

When Ram Dei, Sitaram's mother, saw the broken stitches of the shirt, it wasn't difficult for her to make out what was going on in the mind of her son. She assured, "My wage due under NREGA has not yet been paid. In fact, no one in the village has received his/her wage for last 3-4 months. As soon as I receive the wage, I will get a new uniform for you."

Sitaram and Ram Dei live in Mundpura village of Chilachaund Gram Panchayat which is located on the Bari-Sarmathura road about 45 km far from the district headquarter, Dhaulpur, and 15 km far from block headquarter, Bari.

Next day, all the children in Mundpura became aware of the fact that their parents, who have worked under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in the last few month, have not got their wages. They organised Bal Manch meeting and decided to submit a proposal to the Bal Adhikar Manch. Sita Ram is a member of Bal Manch while Ram Dei is member of Bal Adhikar Manch.

“Everyone is facing problems because of the non-payment of the due wages since last few months” the Chairperson of the Bal Adhikar Manch raised the issue and initiated the discussion after the setting up of the agenda meeting of the forum. “Reasons for the delay are unknown,” He continued, “We have been doing efforts at our level and have called Met for discussion. He hasn’t come yet.”

Met was from Mundpura itself. Sitaram and one of his friends, who were representing Bal Manch in the meeting, went to his house, immediately, and called him up. The Met came and narrated his side of the story. He said, “All the Mets of the Chilachaund Gram Panchayat are suffering. No one of them has got any payment till date.”



The Manch discussed the entire scenario. In the end, the Met was requested, “Please collect all such Mets and contact senior officials tomorrow itself. Then update us about the developments.”

After the meeting, the Met contacted all the other Mets personally and told them about the discussion. Everyone agreed to the idea. Next day, all of them collected at Chilachand and approached the district level office to submit written request for the resolution of the problem. Upon receiving assurance of speedy resolution, they returned and informed their respective villagers about it. Villagers decided to wait for a few days for materialization of the assurance.

But assurance proved to be assurance only. Nothing turned out even after 4 days. Meanwhile, the word of action, spread in other villages of the Panchayat - Reechhari, Chilachand, Ranapura, Halle ka Pura and Chaudaharypura - as well. The problem was prevailing in all of these. So, Bal Adhikar Manch members of all the villages met together and discussed about the issue. The collective decided to wait for another 4 days. If no progress is still made, villagers from all the villages will collectively give a dharana at the Panchayat headquarter.

The prior information of the dharana was given to the Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat who then passed it on to the block headquarter. Still nothing happened. On the fixed day, all the villagers reached the office of the Gram Panchayat and sat for dharana. The Secretary of the Gram Panchayat, immediately, informed about it to the Sarpanch, as well as, the block headquarter. At 4 p.m., the Sarpanch and the Secretary met with the villagers. Still nothing concrete turned out. The villagers decided to continue their dharana on the second day and asked the Secretary to call up the Programme Officer - NREGA, the Block Development Officer and the concerned Junior Engineer. The Secretary followed and communicated the request to all the officials.

Next day by 10 a.m. all the villagers had gathered again at the Panchayat headquarter. Everybody was waiting for the arrival of the senior officers. In the meantime, they discussed what further step they should take if no action is still taken. A suggestion came out that 10 representatives should be selected and sent to Bari for requesting action. If still the issue is not resolved all of them should go to Bari collectively.

At 3 p.m., a representative came from Bari headquarter came carrying complete payment of all the unpaid muster rolls. Payment of wage was made. Although the scheme provides for payment of additional compensation for delay in the

payment of wages, but expecting it at grass root level is very difficult. Receipt of complete wage without any token of corruption itself was enough. Villagers accepted it. Everyone returned with money and essential purchases in hand and happiness and pride on face. The same happiness and pride appeared on faces of the family members as well when the tangibles were handed over to them.

Ram Dei, upon return, went straight-a-way to the local shopkeeper and re-paid her debt. She purchased some ration and other necessary items as well and then went home. Next day, she took Sitaram to Chilachand, bought cloth for his uniform and gave it to tailor for stitching. A week later, Sitaram was in class, trying to protect himself. All his classmates were pinching him, "New Pinch!" But this time he wasn't embarrassed. He was shining with joy in a bright new dress.



Result Awaited

“Three children have failed, four children have to appear in supplementary examination and even those have passed haven’t got good marks! How is this possible? What has gone wrong?” Every child, as well as, adult in Dhannu ka Pura was extremely shocked to see the result of Class VIII. Dhannu ka Pura is a village in Dheemeri Gram Panchayat of Badi Panchayat Samiti of Dhaulpur district. It has 300 households of different communities. Agriculture and labour are the prime sources of livelihood in the village.

“I am unable to make out, Dinesh, how this has happened?” Ramesh was also in the state of shock. He had passed with III division while Dinesh would have to appear for supplementary exams.

“This was due,” Dinesh replied, “Tell me, has our school opened on time any day? Even if opened, have our teachers come on time? Whenever they come, they keep on gossiping outside even at class-time while we remain seated in the class. And see our science teacher; his ears always remain plugged with the earphone of his mobile. Does he ever have time to listen to us?”

“Gopal, you only tell who is responsible for our poor result - school teachers, we or our parents?” Dinesh asked Gopal who too had joined Ramesh and Dinesh when the talk began. Gopal was among those who had failed.



“You are asking who is responsible and how! It is obviously our teachers.” Ramesh interrupted, “How can we study if they don’t teach us? How will do homework if they don’t give us? Only they could have got our course completed. What could we do for this?”

Gopal was listening silently to Ramesh’s response. He now spoke with a sigh, “My friends, our fault was that when our teachers were not teaching us properly or when they were listening to songs, we didn’t complain about it to any body although so many times in our Bal Manch meeting we have discussed that children should tell to their teachers or elders if they feel something is good or bad. Even Bal Adhikar Manch members asked if we are facing any problem a lot of times but we never complained about irregularities of our school to them.”

As mentioned earlier, poor result was a matter deep concern not only for children but also for all elders of the village. They were feeling that they had not been serious towards the school although they were aware that behaviour of teachers towards children was not good. They knew that the teachers spend more time in gossiping and other works instead of teaching still they didn’t take any action. They decided to call Bal Adhikar Manch meeting immediately and discuss what action should they take now.

As the hot afternoon gave way to humid evening, all the Bal Adhikar Manch members as well as children collected and started discussing the issue. Gumaan Singh revealed, “One or two times I had been to the school during the foregone year. I saw and talked with teachers as well but I didn’t find their behaviour appropriate. They were feeling that we are nobody to ask anything from them.”

Others too held similar opinion about the teachers. As discussion slowly went towards what should be done now, decision not to let the same happen in the next session emerged.

In the month of July when summer vacations came to end and the upper primary school opened no change was observed in the behaviour of teachers. When Bal Adhikar Manch

members tried to talk they passed the entire blame of the poor result to children and their parents. They, therefore, decided to approach the Block Elementary Education Officer (BEEO).

When the members met the BEEO and complained about the irregularities of the school he assured that he will look into the matter immediately and take appropriate action.

On 9th of August, 2010, BEEO visited the school and the village. Villagers were waiting for the occasion and, therefore, gathered quickly in the school. It was almost like a big meeting. Villagers re-iterated all their complaints in front of the staff. The officer warned school staff not to play with the future of the children.

After a few days, villagers came to know that a few of the erring teachers had been transferred. Soon new teachers were deployed in their place. These new teachers were better. Remaining old teachers also got the lesson from BEEOs action and started teaching and behaving properly.

Now, the school is opening on scheduled time and all teachers are also coming and staying in school during the entire time. Bal Adhikar Manch members are keeping proper watch on the school. One or the other member visits school on regular basis. Teachers cooperate with them now. Quality of education is appearing to be better. Now everyone is waiting of this years result.



Say 'No' to Liquor, 'Yes' to Life

When screams of a woman and a few children shook the dusky streets of Milkan off, the village was busy in concluding the day - everyone was returning home, stoves were lit and darkness was beginning to engulf the entire village. The screams pierced ears and hearts of everyone. Within no time, source of the screams was recognized. It was Paatiram's house. His wife and children were crying.

Everyone rushed to Paatiram's house with fear of some mishap. As they entered the house, they found that Paatiram was stumbling, shouting, abusing and beating his wife and children. Everything became clear. Paatiram was absolutely drunk and was not within his ownself. He was abusing his wife and three children who had cautioned him against drinking.

Soon some people went back because the incidence that happened with Paatiram's family was not unusual for inhabitants of Milkan. This used to happen in almost every household in more or less the same way. Women and adolescent girls averted going out of house during late hours because of fear of facing indecent behaviour by any drunkards because eve-teasing, abusing, etc. were common for them. Even at home, the situation was not safe. Beating of women and children by these drunkards, as in the case of Paatiram, had become a daily affair. Education of children was also getting affected as a large part of meagre income of the family was being spent on liquor. For earning square meal, women and children were getting pushed to labour. Some people, however, stayed there and discussed.

Milkan is a small village of 88 households which is located 14 km far from the district headquarter of Dhaulpur. Barring 2 households, all the households are of Kushawaha community. Agriculture is very limited in the village and all the families depend upon labour in stone mines for their livelihood.

Prayatn started working on the issue of ensuring child rights in the region in 2006. Three years of community level institutional building processes - awareness generation, sensitization, organisation building and capacity enhancement - enabled people of Milkan to identify and analyse their needs. Together with education and protection of children, they recognized other hurdles as well that were hampering the development of the village.

Liquor addiction appeared to be the root cause of all problems in the village. Everyone wanted that the menace should be brought to end. A collective strategy was worked out. While some villagers supported it, others felt it unnecessary. Their contention was, "Why should we get into the brawl? The drunkard is spending from his own pocket; if something wrong happens, it is he only who will bear it."

To explain that the harm that drunkards do is not limited to their individual self but extends to the community as a whole and women and children in particular, and simultaneously, register protest against the menace in the minds of the villagers, a rally was organised in the village. Participants of the rally, which primarily included women and children, held up planks carrying messages and shouted slogans to make others aware of the ill-effects of liquor and mobilize joint action.

Next step was to submit a memorandum to the District Collector, Dhaulpur, to stop liquor in the village. A request was also submitted to the Excise Department because most of the sale of liquor in the village was taking place in illegal manner.



The collective action forced the district administration to take action. 15 people, who were associated with the sale were arrested but were released just two days later. These people started threatening those who complained. Again a complaint was submitted to the District Collector and the related ministry. This resulted in stopping up of sale of liquor for sometime.

A few days later, preparation and sale of liquor started again but secretly. The manufacturers and sellers of liquor misbehaved with village women. Prayatn's local field staffs were also threatened. But now the people were awake. They had analysed 9 corresponding deaths in the village and had understood the ill-effects of liquor well. They had also realised that organised proper action does pay.

Impact of the initiative was visible in neighbouring villages as well. People from Khor Pura, Nakat Pura, Masood Pur, Bhoot Pura, Seese ka Pura and Ramnagar villages, appreciated the initiative taken in Milkan and decided to join hands with then because they too were facing similar problem in their own villages. Along with seeking action from the district administration, they decided to take certain actions at their own level. All the people got together and resolved following action against to check alcoholism in their village:

1. If anyone manufactures liquor, the person will be penalized;
2. Penalty of Rs 2100 will be imposed upon person who is found selling liquor;
3. Penalty of Rs 1100 will be imposed upon person who is found buying or consuming liquor;
4. Any person who comes drunk from outside the village also will be imposed a penalty of Rs 1100;
5. Person who will inform about the above miscreants will be awarded Rs 500;
6. Any person who does no pay the penalty will face social boycott.

Everyone was happy because the most crucial problem had been brought under control. But one day, one person named Thakurdas, started preparing and selling liquor. Community, as soon as it came to know about the violation, immediately called up a meeting and asked Thakurdas to appear in front of it.

Thakurdas was adamant. He came to meeting, admitted preparation and sale of liquor but refused to pay the penalty. He and his clients misbehaved with the people. People therefore decided to take more stringent action against him and as such lodged complaint against him in the local police station. Copy of the decision of the community signed by all of them was also attached with the F.I.R. Social boycott of the miscreants was simultaneously imposed.

Police arrested Thakurdas and kept him on remand for 3 days. Now, none of the clients of Thakurdas could gather enough courage to rescue him. Finally some of his relatives gathered courage and approached the community collective to express apologies on his part and begged pardon. They pleaded in front of the community to halt all the proceedings against him and withdraw his social boycott while taking responsibility of his fair conduct in future.

Punishment was not the objective of the community. They just wanted situation to change. Considering that it was first mistake of Thakurdas, they decided to be soft towards him. They pardoned him but simultaneously warned everyone that if anyone else is found committing such a mistake in future, the person will not be pardoned. He will have to bear the penalty, social boycott and action by the government simultaneously.

The incidence of Thakurdas showed its impact soon. Milkan and the neighbouring six villages are now free of liquor. Women and children are feeling relief and peace is prevailing in family as well as village. Curtailment of unnecessary expenditure has resulted in improvement in the economic condition of the families. Shortage of money is no longer hampering education of children. 'No' to liquor has become 'yes' for lives of women and children of these villages.

Government Aid, Community Aide

Ramrati was upset today. Her children, 10 years old Ram Naresh and 7 years old Poonam, had demanded something but she made an excuse and asked them to wait for sometime. She knew that she will not be able to fulfil the demand, but then, studies of her otherwise academically bright children, were going to suffer.

Ramrati is a widow living in Nisore ka Pura village of Gram Panchayat Pachgaon and Tehsil and District Dhaulpur. The remote village is 2 km far from the Panchayat headquarter and 10 km far from the District/Tehsil headquarter. All the 117 families living in the village belong to Kushwaha caste which falls under the category of Other Backward Classes. Their main source of livelihood besides agriculture labour is mine labour.

Ramrati's husband, Rakesh, was a labourer in a nearby stone mine, but died young because of respiratory infection that usually develops among such labourers because of absence of provisions of protection from stone-dust that is produced profusely in these illegally run mines. Early demise of the bread earner of the family and undue delay in issuance of the otherwise sanctioned widow pension had made the condition of the family miserable.

“How long will I keep on misleading children through false excuses? When I am unable to afford even a square meal, how will I be able to meet their requirement? If the demands



are not fulfilled, how will children study properly?” A lot of such questions were bothering poor Ramrati. Ramrati is a Bal Adhikar Manch member and as such has high sensitivity towards child rights. Her inability to fulfil them was, therefore, hurting her much more severely.

Aggrieved Ramrati thought of discussing her painful situation with Naurati who too is a Bal Adhikar Manch member and has been to Dhaulpur to attend some of the trainings. Ramrati thought that she might be able to suggest some way out for her because of her enhanced knowledge.

Ramrati’s thought proved right when Naurati told that in the training that she attended, different schemes of government for education, health, care, etc. of children were discussed. Among them was the Paalanhaar Yojana which is meant for education and care of children of widows. She asked Ramrati to come to Bal Adhikar Manch meeting for more details because few other members, who too had attended the training, will also be available for information and discussion.

Next day when meeting of the Bal Adhikar Manch started, Prayatn’s Bahin ji was also present. After general discussions, Naurati raised the issue of Ramrati and proposed the forum to resolve it. Everyone supported the proposal. Other members who had attended the training told that under the Paalanhaar Yojana, government provides for education and care of children whose both or any one of his/her parents have died or have been ordered capital punishment or life imprisonment or are suffering from leprosy or HIV-AIDS. For such children, an annual aid of Rs 2000 is provided together with a monthly aid of Rs 500 for children under 5 years of age or Rs 675 if they between 5 to 18 years of age. For this a certificate of destitution is required from the Gram Panchayat which should be submitted to the Social Justice and Empowerment Department.

It was decided that two members of the Bal Adhikar Manch will go with Ramrati in the next Panchayat meeting and get the certificate of destitution prepared for her children and then help her in the submission of the application under the scheme.

Both the designated members and Ramrati reached the Panchayat meeting and submitted application for the certificate. They described the entire situation of Ramrati and submitted their evidence and requested Gram Panchayat to issue the certificate as soon as possible.



The certificate was issued without much delay. Now the application under the Paalanhaar Yojana was submitted. After a 2-3 rounds of follow-up, the benefit was sanctioned for both the children.

The aid resulted in the improvement of the economic condition of Ramrati and her children. Everyone is happy. Education of children is continuing well. There demands are getting fulfilled from time to time. The Bal Adhikaar Manch has now decided to follow-up Widow Pension of Ramrati as well. It is hoped that this too will be started soon. It is rightly said -

*'When Government sanctions Aid,
and Community is an Aide,
there can't be any barrier
to One's Bright Fate.'*

It is the Beginning...

Manish and Lekhraj had come to Dhaulpur to attend children fair. The fair was organised for entertainment and learning of children. Children from other villages had also come to attend it. Gathering was large. Everyone was enjoying activities as per his/her own liking.

Manish and Lekhraj felt more interest on playing. The school in which the fair was organised had a large playground. Both participated in cricket. Children from other villages too participated in it. At the conclusion of the fair, Prayatn's volunteer discussed about importance of games for school children and emphasized that leisure is a right of every child. The volunteer also informed that provision of playground has been made under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan and it has been mandated as a right of children under the Right to Education Act as well.

Manish & Lekhraj belong to Bhilganwa which is a village of the Gram Panchayat Basai Samanta in district and block Dhaulpur. The village is 10 km far from the district headquarter and 4 km far from the block headquarter. There are 120 families in the village most of which belong to Kushawaha community. Population of the village is about 1200. Major source of livelihood is work in stone mines. Agriculture is scanty.



The village has an government run upper primary school which does not have any playground. Manish and Lekhraj study in this school only. When they reached their village back after the fair they shared the discussion on school playground with their friends. Everyone started thinking about it. It became one of the agenda of the Bal Manch meeting. Need of playground and playground as entitlement of children was discussed in detail. Since the issue was beyond their approach, they decided to take it to the Bal Adhikar Manch. Manish and Lekhraj were given the responsibility because they were in better position to explain.

In Bal Adhikar Manch meeting, both the children raised the issue and underlined that playground is necessary in school. members of the Manch listened attentively and sensitively. They decided that Shri Gore Lal and Shri Natthi Lal will meet with the Head Master so that necessary process may be initiated at school level.

Shri Gore Lal, Shri Natthi Lal, Mahesh and Lekhraj met with the Head Master. Head Master himself was thinking about the playground. Thought gained strength. Immediate calling of meeting of School Development and Management Committee (SDMC) was decided.

In SDMC meeting, the issue was discussed in detail. Availability of land for playground was explored. Members suggested that 7 bigha of unused public land is available towards north of the village. It will be appropriate. Responsibility of departmental action was taken up by the Head Master while that of processes at Gram Panchayat, Tehsil and, if needed, District Collector Office was taken by Bal Adhikar Manch members who were also members of the SDMC.

When villagers contacted Patwari and collected detailed information about the land, they came to know that it is under illegal occupation of a politician. They also came to know that the land has been registered as two separate plots - one of 3 bighas and other of 4 bighas.

All the information collected in this manner was put forward in the general meeting of the village. Everyone held the view that land that public land of the village should brought into public use for the villagers only. They, therefore, authorized Bal Adhikar Manch to carry on the process.

Active one-to-one, telephonic and postal communication with Land and Revenue Department followed. A lot of hurdles came in the way but whole village stood together. After a lot of struggle 3 bigha land was approved for the school. Fencing was done as soon as it was handed over. Village meeting was called again and the status was presented in front of all the villagers. Villagers asked the Bal Adhikar Manch to continue its struggle for the remaining 4 bighas.



When children saw the ground they became happy although it was yet to be levelled and developed into playground. It will be done once the remaining part also becomes available. Children could now expect that soon they will be able to play games of their liking and even organise children fair.

In rural atmosphere, freeing land from illegal control of a political leader is not simple. But the power of organised action made it possible. Same power will continue to clear the remaining way forward. Development of school playground will just be a beginning in this regard. End will be the development of the entire village. Someone has rightly said, "If beginning is made, end does not remain far for long."

Exposure to Hope

“I don’t have new clothes. If I go to fair in old clothes, it will not look nice. I should have a dress. Then only I will be able to enjoy the fair. Otherwise what is the sense of going their?”

Pankaj was returning from his school with this disarray of thoughts in his mind. He and his friends had planned to participate in the fair which was about to be held in the nearby town next week. As soon as he reached home, he told about the plan to his mother and listed out his demands for fulfilment before the fair.

Pankaj’s family was poor. Mother too was perhaps struggling because of the situation over the entire day and had got irritated. Pankaj’s demands infuriated her and she started scolding him, “You are asking for new clothes for going to fair while I am struggling for meeting even the bare minimum household expenses. I can’t bear your tantrums. If you don’t want to study, fine, leave it and do some labour.”

Pankaj hadn’t expected such a response. He became sad and came out of his house. He remained upset for the entire day. Next day, instead of going to school, he turned towards the mines and worked there for the entire day breaking stones.

For first few days, nobody paid attention to his absence but when this extended to the entire week his friends, who were his schoolmates as well, started feeling that something is wrong. Pankaj was bright at studies and his absence could not, therefore, remain unnoticed for long.

At the weekend when the next meeting of Bal Manch was held children raised the issue of Pankaj’s absence in school. One of them, who had met Pankaj during the week, told that he has started going to mines. Children decided to talk to him directly. Two of them were therefore asked to call him.

When Pankaj came, he narrated the entire incident. Children got worried. They decided to talk about this with his family members about child rights.

On the same evening, representatives of Bal Manch met with Pankaj's parents and tried to explain them how labour is harmful for Pankaj at this age. But talk about rights appeared helpless in front of poverty. Pankaj continued going to mines. The only change the talk brought was regularization of participation of Pankaj in Bal Manch meeting.

This incidence is of village Reechhari. Reechhari is located on Badi-Sarmathura Road in Chilachaund Gram Panchayat of Badi Panchayat Samiti of Dhaulpur district. It is about 16 km far from Bad and is about 46 km far from Dhaulpur. A total of 54 families of Rajpoot, Kushwaha and Brahman communities live in the village. If agriculture is kept apart, all these families are dependent on labour in local stone mines. Most of these families are facing extreme poverty and, therefore, child labour is prevalent here.

From 20 to 22 November, 2007, National Convention on Child labour was organised in Bhubaneshwar, Odisha and 10 child labourers were invited from Dhaulpur to participate in it. Bal Manch of Reechhari picked up the opportunity and decided to send Pankaj to it.

The convention was an unforgettable experience for Pankaj. Beginning with a 30 hours long train journey which gave him a glimpse of the country in which he is living, the experience reached its climax on 19th when the children reached Bhubaneshwar and



saw child labourers from more than 20 states. Everyone shared his/her experiences. Everyone was talking about fighting for their rights. They were saying that government should ensure that every child is free from child labour and is not pushed to it in future. A rally was also organised towards the end of the event and everybody was raising slogans against child labour.



The five day tour to Bhubaneswar proved to be a turning point in the life of Pankaj. He decided that he will not work as a child labourer any more and will go to school instead. When he returned, he talked with his parents about it. He shared the entire experience with other Bal Manch members as well.

He joined school again and left going to mines. He has started trying for freeing other children as well from child labour. In this process, he is being supported by Bal Manch as well as Bal Adhikaar Manch. Efforts to mitigate poverty of such families are on. Exploration of support available under various government schemes is being made for the purpose.

Pankaj's own life has changed a lot. His parents realized that education is the ultimate solution for eradicating their poverty. They have started providing every possible support to him so that he is able to continue his education and is not pushed to child labour. The exposure received by their son has proved to be an exposure to hope for them.

Behaving Responsible

In order to construct pucca road to connect village Tarwa to main road, sand was dug out from the nearby land. This process had left pits on both sides. It was evening time and darkness was yet to engulf. Mohan and Ravi were returning to the village on a cycle. They saw that a few adults and children were standing around a pit. Children were pointing towards the pit and laughing. They were calling, "Mr. Pee Kay Gir Pade, Mr. Pee Kay Gir Pade!" (Drunk and fallen)

Mohan and Ravi became curious. They stopped their bicycle and came closer to the gathering to see what is lying there in the pit. Two of their fellow villagers were stumbling in the pit. Both were trying to stand up with the support of the wall of the pit or by holding the other but their legs weren't firm to give them a lift. One of them was trying light a match stick to light his bidi, but every time, either the bidi or the match stick, used to slip out of his hand. A lot of such match sticks and bidis were lying scattered as a result. The two were abusing and shouting at each other. One of them was fumbling, "Today... you ...deceived...and... won ... all... money. ...I...see...you...tomorrow". The other two was uttering similar words, "You...deceived...not...I".

The words fumbled by the two men, their stumble and tumblers and empty bottle of liquor lying besides them were enough to explain the entire incident to Mohan and Ravi. They must have gambled somewhere and lost all their money. The other temptation, i.e. of liquor, then must have taken toll on them resulting in their stumbling and fall in the pit while returning to the village.

Mohan and Ravi got worried because both of them were fathers of their friends Raghu and Maya. Two days ago, Maya had told him that her father came home in a heavily drunken state and started shouting at everyone. He in fact, scolded the innocent girl and, even,

slapped and abused her mother who was trying to stop him. Raghu too had reported similar scene at his home. So, Mohan and Ravi thought of helping their friends out and take the two men to their village. But the two men were not in position that the children may 'carry' them. The children, therefore, decided to go to their village and ask for help. They got on their cycle and Mohan started paddling it quickly.

"We have discussed the issue of addiction of liquor and gambling in our village so many times in our Bal Manch meetings and, at times, have raised it in front of the Bal Adhikaar Manch too, but nothing has improved," Mohan and Ravi started discussing while cycling down to their village.

Tarwa is a village of Rehrai Gram Panchayat of Baseri block. It is a residence of 70 families which belong to either Jaataw or Meena communities. Prime source of their livelihood is labour in stone quarries. Infrastructurally, the village is in better position as a primary school, an Anganwadi Centre, overhead water tank connected with a pipeline and physical connectivity through a pucca road are all present in the village. But addiction of men to gambling, betting and drinking has made the life of women and children of the village worse.



"Ravi, we need to find some solution of this problem. It is troubling all of us." Mohan stopped cycling for a while and asked Ravi.

"Let us talk with adults today once again. If they don't support, we ourselves will do something", Ravi replied.

“Okay, then let us meet again after supper”, Mohan started cycling again.

Upon reaching Tarwa, the two children informed Raghu, Maya and other villagers about the mishap with the fathers of the poor children. Some men immediately rushed to the site to rescue the two fathers.

By the time the fathers were rescued and brought to the village, Mohan and Ravi had finished their last meal of the day and had come out. Kundan and Ramveer, two more members of the Bal Manch, were also called along with Raghu and Maya and a discussion was initiated. Kundan said, “I have a friend in the Rehrai. He told me that the issue of gambling, betting and drinking was troubling them as well, but they have been able to stop it. If anyone is found indulging in any of the three social evils, he is fined. Still, if the person does not follow, there are punishments like expelling him from the community or the village. This has proved to be highly effective.”

All the children decided to meet elders immediately on the issue. They came to know that all the elders have collected on the common place towards the middle of the village. The day’s incident was discussed by the adults as well, but the discussion was neither concrete nor conclusive.



Kundan in this situation re-iterated his information about the community rulings in Rehrai. Two members of Bal Adhikar Manch also supported him. The discussion started taking concrete shape and a proper meeting to discuss similar steps in their own village was called on the next day itself. Responsibility of calling all the villagers to the meeting was shared by the adults as well as children.

On the fixed place and time, all villagers got together. Participation of women was more. Discussion began. Everyone was feeling aggrieved and was looking for some solution. Rehrai's example was discussed again. Finally, following decisions were made:

1. If anybody is found taking liquor or gambling or betting in the village a fine of Rs 1100 will be imposed upon him;
2. The same fine will be applied to even those who will be found playing cards even if money is not involved;
3. The fine collected in this manner will be used for development of the village and the children;
4. Person, who informs about incidence of such an act, will be paid a cash prize of Rs 100; and
5. The arrangement will be looked after by a committee of 15 members.

Both the communities residing in the village expressed their consent on the discussion. All of them, in fact, signed on the resolution that was recorded in black and white.

When liquor and gambling addicts came to know about the decision, they felt that abandoning is better. One of them, however, kept on. Villagers caught him red-handed one day and brought him in front of everyone for deciding his punishment. The person pleaded forgiveness. This being the first instance of violation of the rulings, villagers acquired softer approach and forgave him after a warning. But a simultaneous declaration was made that nobody will be forgiven next time onwards.

Now, no one dares to violate the community ruling. Tarwa is now free of the gambling, betting and drinking. Everyone is happy. Women and children, in particular, are feeling a lot of relief. The village has, as such, moved a step ahead on the path of becoming a child friendly village.

Alternates

Geeta Devi and Ram Kumari were returning from Baroli. Both of them are residents of Baroli Quarter village which is not much far from Baroli. Baroli Quarter is located close to the narrow guage railway line from Dhaulpur to Sarmathura. The village has been named so because of presence of quarters of the railway department. There are only 27 households in the village. Different communities live in the village. Labour in stone quarries is the major source of livelihood for them besides agriculture.

On their way, the two women saw that a large building was being constructed at the outskirts of Baroli. A lot of land had been left unconstructed around the building and then a boundary wall has been constructed.

From the opposite side, Vimla, a resident of Baroli, was coming carrying a bundle of grass on her head. Both knew Vimla. They had met in the Bal Adhikar Manch training that was held in Bari. Vimla stopped when she saw the two and placed the bundle down. After greeting and knowing each other's well being, Geeta asked Vimla, "Who is getting such a huge house constructed?"

"It is not a house, it is the building of the government school," Vimla told.

"Who is getting such a huge school constructed? In our village, we just have a small school" Ram Kumari asked with surprise.

"Government is funding the construction but School Development and Management Committee supervises it. I am also a member of the committee." Vimla took pride in revealing her membership in the committee. She continued, "Do you remember that we had a long discussion about the committee in the training that we had attended in Dhaulpur? We started acting upon it immediately and the result is in front of you - a new

block consisting of more classrooms, separate kitchen, as well as, separate toilets for boys and girls, are being constructed. Other arrangements like playground and playing kit for children are also now in place. Quality of education has improved and all boys and girls studying here, as well as villagers, are feeling happy. Did you not constitute the committee in your village?"

"We have lagged in this aspect," Ram Kumari replied sadly as she gazed the school building again. After a gasp, she told Geeta, "Tomorrow, the meeting of our Bal Adhikar Manch is scheduled. We will talk about this in the meeting".

Vimla requested Geeta and Ram Kumari to come to her home for a cup of tea, but the two were already late. They helped her in placing the bundle of grass on her head again and said then said good bye.

Neither of the two could forget the school building and the talk that they had with Vimla. They kept on discussing about it till they parted for their respective homes after reaching Baroli Quarter.

Next day, when Bal Adhikar Manch meeting started, everyone started talking about irregularities in the local government school. While some complained about irregularities in midday meal, others raised the issue of poor quality of education in the school. Poor condition of school building was also discussed. Amidst a chaotic discussion, Geeta presented her realization, "Whatever complaints we are raising about the school are absolutely true and school staff is responsible for them, but we too are equally responsible. After returning from training at Bari, we had told about the provision of the School Development and Management Committee but till date we haven't talked about it with the school administration."

Other people were still not displaying any interest in taking any initiative, but when Geeta detailed about the development of the school in Baroli and the their talk with Vimla, they

were shaken awake. Just like Ram Kumari and Geeta, they too started feeling ashamed and decided not to delay the issue any further. Immediately, a team including Geeta, Ram Kumari and two more persons - Chandan Singh and Raj Kumar - was constituted for meeting with the School Head Master.

Next day, all the four went to school. The Head Master was supportive. He himself was, in fact, trying to constitute the committee, but had failed because none of the community members were taking any interest. He requested, "I am ready. It will be better if we call a meeting of all the parents tomorrow itself. We have already got very late in this regard."

Immediately, the announcement for the parents meeting was made in the school and all the students were asked to inform their parents about it. Upon return, the four members, themselves, started communicating about the meeting to as many villagers as possible. Everyone was ready.

Next day, the meeting started sharp at 11 a.m. Representatives of almost every family were present. Local ward member and teachers were also present. The Head Master started the meeting with an introduction of the need, importance and role of the Committee. Geeta and Ram Kumari added their learning in this regard and reiterated what they saw in Baroli. The School Development and Management Committee was immediately



constituted. Everybody greeted all the members elected for the committee and batase, a traditional make of sugar, were distributed among all adults and children to mark the auspiciousness of the occasion. Decision to prepare the development plan of the school within a fortnight was also made simultaneously.



Two weeks later, another parents' teachers' meeting was organised and proposal for development of the school was placed in front of everyone. Intensive discussion took place. Finally, the Head Master was asked to incorporate the emerging recommendations in the proposal and submit it to the Block Elementary Education Officer.

The proposal has been submitted. It is hoped that it will be sanctioned soon and the work will be started within upcoming financial year.

The entire process was full of learning for people of Baroli Quarter. They were not aware that their involvement will speed up school development to such an extent. Children, parents, as well as, teachers became happy. The two ladies who initiated the process of change in the village, Geeta and Ram Kumari, are now waiting eagerly to see their own school develop in the same way as that of Baroli. Exposure to change in Baroli has helped in inspiring change in Baroli Quarter.

Welcome Daughters

It was 4 p.m. Murari and his wife, Radha, had descended from a bus and were walking towards their village. On the way, they found Rajesh and Kamala. The co-villager couple was returning from farm.

“Where are you coming from?” Rajesh asked Murari as the four started moving together.

“From Dhaulpur,” Murari replied, “Radha was not well”.

Until now, Radha and Kamla were talking about other things. But when Kamala heard Murari, she asked Radha, “What happened to you Radha? You didn’t tell me anything.”

“I am pregnant. We had gone for check-up.” Radha replied.

“What did doctor say?” Kamala asked happily to know the well-being of the mother and the foetus.

“Doctor said that it is too early to tell whether it is a boy or a girl. Come after some time.”

“What!” Radha’s reply shocked Kamala. They had reached village by then and it was time to part for way to their respective homes.

“What did Murari tell you about why they had gone to Dhaulpur?” Kamala asked Rajesh as soon as they were through with the supper and other domestic chores.

“His wife was ill, so they had gone to consult doctor. That’s it.”

Rajesh was not aware that Murari and Radha had gone for knowing the sex of the foetus and shall be aborting it if turns out to be girl. When his wife told the truth, he too was shocked.

“It is a sin!” Kamala continued.

“It is a sin and a crime as well” Rajesh added.

“This sin is taking toll on our village. We need to do something.” The two ended the day with a commitment.

Next day, sex selection became the issue of discussion in the village. Kamala and Rajesh hadn’t disclosed any name but raised it in general sense when discussion on the pre-decided agenda of the Bal Adhikar Manch meeting was over. Two staff members from Prayatn were also there in the meeting. They were requested to explain the issue in detail.

The two staff members discussed the scene of declining child sex ratio in the country state as well as the district and the corresponding imbalance in the society that this decline may create in future. They also told about the status that women and girls used to enjoy in Indian culture in the past and how the scene then deteriorated. They reiterated that sex selection is a violation of Women as well as Child Rights.

After the explanation, the staff members asked Rajesh to take the talk forward because he was the initiator of the talk. Rajesh said, “We should avoid the practice which is illegal and against our traditional values. Everyone, especially women, should think about it and should come up with their views on how to act upon it in the next meeting. The issue will be discussed again in the next meeting”.

This is a story of Battipura village. Battipura falls under the jurisdiction of Bari Municipality but is actually a village of 45 families all of whom belong to Jaataw community. The prime source of livelihood for the inhabitants of Battipura is labour in stone quarries. Agriculture is comparatively less.

Next month, the meeting of Bal Adhikaar Manch started again. Today’s gathering was not normal. A representative of almost every household was present. Agenda was limited to

one-point - prevention of sex selection. Everyone shared his or her views and an intensive discussion was held. Following decisions were made:

1. Be it boy or a girl, both are blessings of the god. No discrimination should be made between them.
2. No body in Battipura shall go for sex selection.
3. Check-up of any pregnant woman shall be ensured only if prescribed by doctor for well-being of the mother or the foetus.
4. If anyone is found violating the social system in this manner, he or she will be boycotted outcaste.

The head of each family signed the above resolution and it was decided that every family shall submit an affidavit in this regard. Local Anganwadi Worker, Asha Sahayogini, traditional birth attendant in the village, Jan Mangal couple, Ward Panch and representatives of Village Health Committee had been specially invited in this meeting. They were asked to enlist and pay special attention on pregnant women and newly wedded couples. A team of community members, including women, and staff was constituted for the purpose.

The list has been prepared and is now lying with the Bal Adhaikaar Manch. The information is updated from time to time. Awareness on sex selection being an inhuman, criminal and sinful act is being spread through various means. Even adolescent girls are also being made aware in this process. Effort is also on for generating awareness and establishing social systems against issues that encourage sex selection like gender based discrimination, violence against women and girls and dowry.

Murali and Radha, who too were counselled in this process, have abandoned thought of sex selection and Radha has communicated the decision of the couple to Kamala. Today, Battipura is free of sex selection.

Glossary

BAHIN:	It is a Hindi word whose literal meaning is sister. 'Bahin ji' is an address of respect used by children, as well as, adults for female social workers because of affectionate and considerate relationship
KAKA:	Hindi address for uncle who is older than one's father.
DARI:	An indigenous mat of cotton
CHARPAAI:	An indigenous bedstead
ODHNI-LAHANGA:	A traditional bridal dress
BHAIYA:	It is a Hindi word whose literal meaning is elder brother. It is an address of respect used by children, as well as, adults for male social workers because of affectionate and considerate relationship
MAATSAAB:	A local language usage to address male teachers
CHAPATTIS:	Flat and round form of bread generally made of wheat flour and common in Hindi belt of India
BHAGAUNA:	A type of mess utensil meant for cooking and keeping vegetables and pulses.

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