SOCIAL MOBILIZATION

FOR ERADICATING CHILD LABOUR

REPORT OF VISIT TO

JAMUI & PATNA DISTRICTS OF BIHAR, JUNE 2008

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR PROTECTION OF CHILD RIGHTS
Government of India
SOCIAL
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FOR
ERADICATING
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LABOUR

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Government of India

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Cover Photo: Girls from the residential Bridge-Course camp in Budikhad village, Jhajha block, Jamui.
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INTRODUCTION

The National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) wishes to build an understanding of the link between the abolition of child labour and the programme for universal education. Considering the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan’s (SSA) efforts in the country to reach out-of-school children who comprise child labour, the NCPCR considers it necessary to understand the dynamics of a child’s transition from work to school. The Commission focused on the SSA’s work in Bihar because the incidence of child labour is higher, as also are the numbers of children migrating to the far corners of the country, both of which are matters of grave concern.

Bihar has the fourth highest incidence of child labour in the country with over 11 lakh children in the 5-14 age-group engaged in child labour1. In terms of education too, 495/536 blocks of the state have been characterized as educationally backward with 21 lakh out-of-school children.2 Nonetheless Bihar is taking steps to save the childhood of numerous children who are unable to access schools. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is mobilizing communities to send their children to Residential Bridge Course (RBC) Camps as a first step to accessing education3. The Commission proposed to see how such a programme is reaching remote areas and eliciting support from children, parents and community alike.

A fact-finding team from the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, comprising Dr. Shantha Sinha (Chairperson NCPCR), Mr. Venkat Reddy (National Convenor, M V Foundation) and Ms. Spurthi Reddy (Consultant, NCPCR) visited Jamui and Patna districts of Bihar from 1st- 4th June 2008. The visit was aimed at reviewing the process of social mobilization for bringing children to RBCs, and to review the roles played by the community and the education department officials of all levels in this effort. The team visited two RBC camps in Jamui district operated by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Bihar government, and a non-residential bridge course (NRBC) camp in Patna city run by an NGO, and interacted with the children, their parents, panchayat/ward members and local government officials. Meetings were held with the Hon. Chief Minister, Shri Nitish Kumar, the Chief Secretary and Secretaries of the relevant departments.

Presented here is a report of the team’s visit, its observations and its recommendations.

1 Census India 2001
3 ‘Bridge-courses’ are accelerated learning programmes which impart age appropriate educational skills to out-of-school children in the age-group of 9-14 years.
Map 1: State of Bihar. The Districts of Patna and Jamui are highlighted.
Source: www.censusindia.gov.in

Map 2: Jamui District and Jhajha block
Source: www.mapsofindia.com
OBJECTIVE OF THE VISIT

In its visits around the country to review the situation of child labour, the Commission has often found numerous children from Bihar working in a variety of works such as cotton farming, jewelry making, domestic help, zari-work and many more. That children in hundreds are migrating from one state was cause for the NCPCR to visit the state and review the steps being taken to arrest this migration.

Meanwhile the Commission received information that in the last couple of months over 1200 children in Bihar have been stopped from leaving their homes for work, as they were motivated to seek education through bridge-course camps. According to informal sources, about 400 such children were stopped in Sitamarhi district alone. This success was attributed to the social mobilization measures initiated by the Bihar Education Department, which convinced children, parents and community to send children to the bridge-course camps and repose trust in the government officials to care and protect them.

These parents and communities are some of the poorest in the country. One of the core issues in the transition of children from work to school is considered to be ‘poverty’. Jamui presents a situation where some of the most impoverished families have foregone the benefits of their children’s work in support of their education, which is being provided by the state. It was important to document this for advocating government support to education.

Next, the SSA-RBC program’s approach links the issue of child labour with universal elementary education. By working at the grassroots the government has been successful in reaching all out-of-school children (potential child labour) irrespective of the forms of labour they were engaged in. Such an inclusive approach helps build consensus in the community about the encroachment on children’s rights by child labour and spreads the message of education amongst all. This is a precious instance of a ‘government-engineered-social-mobilization for education’ in one of the most underdeveloped areas of the country.

The Commission chose to visit Jamui because of its inaccessibility, tribal population, and large numbers of out of school children. Moreover Jamui has naxalite presence and the Commission is looking at systems that can protect children’s rights in areas affected by civil-unrest. Schools are one of the principal institutions through which children’s rights can be protected and propagated, and assume greater significance in unstable situations. If such development programmes can be effectively operationalised by the government in a Naxalite affected district it is possible in any district, irrespective of its inaccessibility, underdevelopment, and status of civil (un)rest. Moreover if it is happening in one state of the country, other states should
also be able to provide assistance to people through implementing developmental programmes and developing social assets.

The Commission considers it important to bring attention to such initiatives in order to stress the crucial need for government support to universal education. The Bihar government’s efforts in Jamui presented a prime example which needed to be studied for advocacy with the central government and other state governments as well.
A SILENT MOVEMENT TOWARDS UNIVERSALISATION OF EDUCATION: RESIDENTIAL BRIDGE COURSE CAMPS

The indicators for children in Bihar are quite dismal. The state average of underweight children (under-3 age group) has increased to 58% in NFHS 3, as compared to 54% in NFHS 2 and is 12 points higher than the national average. ‘Infant mortality rate’ rests at an alarming 62 per 1000 children and anemia affects 87.6% of children (6-35 months age-group) as compared to the national average of 79%.4 Further ‘census 2001’ has recorded the presence of nearly 3 lakh child labourers (age-group of 5-14 years) in Bihar. Of these children, 20% belong to SC/ST categories and 2.5 lakh children are engaged in the rural sector.5

The NCPCR team visited two RBC camps in Jhajha block of Jamui district. Jamui is one of the least developed districts in the country with a literacy level of 42.74%, and a sex ratio of 918 women to 1000 men, that is below the state ratio of 921:1000 and the national sex ratio of 933:1000.6 As regards children’s education, there are over 71000 out-of-school children from a total of 4 lakh children in the 6-14 age-group in Jamui, which means that approximately every sixth child is out-of-school.7

These are alarming statistics calling for comprehensive strategies to be initiated immediately. There are a total of 32 government RBCs operating in Jamui presently. The two RBC camps we visited were located in Budhikhada and Shvimandir Baliyadih villages of Jhajha block. These RBCs had girls from the SC and ST communities, in particular from the Santhal tribes. The gram panchayats9 that these 2 villages are part of do not have primary schools in all the villages, have only one middle-school for the entire panchayat, and have no high-school.10 Infact there is only one high-school for the entire block which is situated near the Jhajha block headquarters. Setting up RBC camps to educate children who in many instances have never been to school, is a monumental challenge that the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan officials have undertaken successfully. The process by which children are motivated to join schools is described below.

### Table 1: Number of RBCs in Jamui district having majority girls from a particular community

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<th>Scheduled Tribes</th>
<th>Minority</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
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<td>6</td>
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4 National Family Health Survey (NFHS).
5 Census India 2001.
6 National Family Health Survey (NFHS), Bihar Shiksha Pariyojna Project (http://www.bsppssa.org/household/household.htm) and Census India 2001.
8 Source: District Collectorate, Jamui.
9 Gram Panchayat: local government body at the village level.
10 Primary School has classes upto 5th standard. Middle-school has classes upto 8th standard, and High School has classes upto 12th standard.
Social Mobilization

The SSA officials of Jamui decided to begin by setting up RBC camps for girls. They were assisted by NGOs such as Pratham, M V Foundation and UNICEF. For mobilizing children to enroll in one RBC, they visited all the villages in that gram panchayat. These villages were often inaccessible by road and required the local officials and NGO representatives to trek through many kilometers of jungle and mountains. After arriving in the villages they conducted choupal and door-to-door meetings to explain the concept of the RBC and encouraged parents and the community to send their children to the three-day motivation-camp. In Budhikhada village alone 292 children turned up for the first motivation camp.

The motivation camp was set up in the village to convince the parents and the children of the value of education and build confidence of the parents to send their children to the RBC camp. During the motivation camp the teachers identify which children to enroll in the RBC, who can be enrolled in schools, and what other state facilities can be extended to the rest.

Community Support for RBCs

The success of the mobilization effort can be gauged by the fact that nearly 150-200 children participated in every motivation-camp, and all the parents were keen to have their children enrolled in the RBC. Though this was heartening for the SSA officials, considering that each RBC only has a capacity of 50 children, it also presented a dilemma- of having to deny admission. This was resolved by setting up criteria for admittance. They decided to select the older girls in the age-group of 11-14 years because the older girls of 13 and 14 years would lose the eligibility to join RBCs later, and the younger girls could join next year. Further priority was given to children from backward groups. Despite this there were many eligible girls in each village, and to avoid conflict and discord amongst the parents, the officials requested the village community to decide which girl children they would like to send to the RBC. The community was advised to select children based on the above criteria and give preference to orphan girls. In Shivmandir Baliyadih camp there were 10 orphan girls. All this builds community support for all children. It was also inspiring to note that married girls are attending these RBC camps with the support of not just their own families but their in-laws as well, which is a rare occurrence. The success of the mobilization campaign and the trust the education department has been able to

“agar hamare liye school hota, to hum bhi padhne jaate”

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11 Choupal: central gathering place in a village.
12 See Box 1 for details on ‘tasks of social mobilisers’
13 See Box 2 for details on the ‘motivation camp’.
BOX 1: TASKS OF SOCIAL MOBILISERS*

“Child labourers are spread across the country; working in dispersed villages and slums. The eradication of child labour cannot be done by the labour department alone, as it is so under-staffed. Labour department needs to have a cadre of youth volunteers who can be trained as ‘Social Mobilisers’ who will be responsible for withdrawing children from work as well as monitoring school dropouts and children with irregularity of attendance. It is understood that if such children are not tracked they would join the labour force as child labour.” The tasks of the social mobilisers will include the following:

- Identify and establish contact with child labourers
- Motivate parents not to send their children to work but to school
- Persuade employers to release child labourers
- Organize mobilization programmes at the local levels by organizing street theatre, public meetings and rallies, house-to-house surveys to build up a social norm and a consensus that children must not work.
- Assist local community groups to organize child rights protection committees which can be the watchdogs of various government departments dealing with child labour eradication.
- Liaise with local officials in the education, labour, police and social welfare departments and bring problems and identify solutions.
- Assist locally elected bodies to be vigilant about children’s rights and to monitor and review the prevalence of child labour in their areas.
- Strengthen school education committees (SEC) so that school functioning improves and drop-outs (potential child labourers) are reduced.
- Bring rescued children to transitional educational centres from where they can be mainstreamed into the formal school system.
- Follow up of the regularity of attendance of all school going children and establish processes of reviewing through the gram panchayats.”

The Commission proposed that 5 social mobilisers should be identified in each of the 6202 Blocks in the country. Each person would be responsible for 200 children and it is envisaged that through their activity the status of more than 3 crore children would be monitored. The resources of the Nehru Yuvak Kendras could be garnered for this.

BOX 2: MOTIVATION CAMP

A motivation camp aims at convincing parents about the merits of education, identifying children who will be immediately enrolled in RBCs and most importantly building confidence amongst the parents and community to entrust their child’s well-being and safety to the RBC teachers and managers.

All children in the 11-15 age-group in the gram panchayat and their parents, are invited to attend the motivation camp. Since the district administration of Jamui decided to start a RBC for girls, only girl children were invited to attend these motivation camps. A brief description of the activities of the camp is as follows.

Day 1
This is the first day when all children come to the camp and are engaged in various play activities for the first half of the day. After lunch is served the children are divided into groups according to their age, and a teacher is nominated as the group in-charge. In the afternoon session the children are made to sit together and engage in play and song. The evening brings a collective review session where all children introduce themselves in the assembly and talk about the activities of the day. The next day’s activities, such as a children’s rally, are also planned. The parents are encouraged to participate in the activities, and visit their children whenever they wish to. Since this is a residential camp, some parents stay overnight as well. A similar incident took place in Budhikhada motivation-camp where a father stayed the first night in the camp, and was so impressed by the security of children in the camp, that he woke up at three in the morning to go back to his village and brought five more girls to the camp the next day. No child is refused entry and children continue to walk into the camp till the last day and.

Day 2
In the morning of the second day the children are dressed and prepared (in a manner of readying for school) and after breakfast they take out a rally, persuade more children to join the camp. Upon returning to the camp, the children sit in their respective groups and collectively indulge in song, dance and play. This ensures that children learn how to sit in one place for a length of time. After lunch and a bit of rest, the group discussions are held. Each group-incharge talks to the children about their life outside school and elicits their individual case-histories. During this discussion some children show greater confidence and enthusiasm to speak and share. Such children are then encouraged to talk to the other introvert children.

Day 3
On this last day all parents are invited to attend the camp. In the presence of the parents, the children first talk about what all they did in the last two days and what they felt about it. Then the parents are asked to speak about: (a) how they have coped without the help of their child’s labour; and (b) what they feel their child has achieved after attending this camp. During the course of this discussion, the parents realize that they can cope well-enough without their children working to help the family, and seeing the difference in their children after attending the camp they wish for their children to get an education and a better life.
develop is evident in that there are presently a total of 100 married girls in all RBCs of Jamui.\textsuperscript{14} The children were also happy in the RBC and each said that they could bring another 3-4 children to join.

The girls who have joined the RBC are from the most backward sections of the region-Santhal tribals, Musahars, Doms, and Dalit Muslims. State figures show that girls from scheduled castes (SC) community, 23%, form the greatest proportion of children in the RBCs, followed by boys from the same community (20%). Children from the scheduled tribes (ST) community form 22% of the RBC students, and 11% of the children are from minority communities. These children were engaged in varied work such as agricultural labour, cattle-herding, domestic work, \textit{beedi-rolling}, brick-kiln workers, firewood collection, etc with over 69% of the children in RBCs engaged in the first three works. Some communities amongst these are more deprived and under-developed. For example in the Musahar community, the female literacy rate is 3.9% and only 9.8% of the children in the 5-14 age-group attend school.\textsuperscript{15} Taking note of this SSA started RBCs specifically enlisting children from such backward communities. In Jamui district 17 RBC camps have specially enrolled children from the Manjhi community and 3 RBCs for minority Muslim community children.

Community involvement in RBCs is also fostered by recruiting teachers from amongst them. Sometimes till the teachers were appointed the educated youth of the village conducted the teaching activities in the camp. In some areas the communities were so motivated that they provided security to the RBC camp, in one instance a man would guard the camp with bows and arrows at night. In others the communities have made all arrangements of residential facilities with fan and solar light, and are awaiting the education department to start the RBC. The local village panchayats have provided water-handpumps, constructed toilets, and installed solar lamps, from the panchayat funds; and the local village community has provided food materials. Other officials have also lent support to the camps from time-to-time. A link has been established with the NPEGEL (National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level) to provide facilities for the girl children in the camps.

The parents of the children in the camps have been at their supporting best. They are happy that their children are getting educated. Before the start of the RBCs most children were working. Enrolling such children in full-time schools meant that adjustments had to be made by the family, especially the adults, to take on the work rendered by the children. Nevertheless when the parents were asked whether they entailed greater hardship, they replied that they do not mind the extra work to help provide their children a better future. Many also said that poverty is not an impediment to education, since the government is providing free schools, textbooks, uniforms and other facilities to assist children’s education.

\textsuperscript{14} Local education official of Jamui.  
\textsuperscript{15} Census 2001
WORK PROFILE OF CHILDREN COVERED THROUGH RBCs IN BIHAR

Source: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Government of Bihar
**Government Officials and Social Change**

The RBCs and schools are engineering a social change in the area. It is not just the parents who are dreaming of a better future for their children but the community and the government as well. An example of this is Siddheshwari village of Jhajha block which is comprised of eight clans that were at loggerheads with each other. Concerted efforts of the local officials resulted in the clans setting aside their differences and starting a RBC camp for all their children.

It is pertinent to share another experience of the Commission in this regard. On the day of the visit the Maoist Coordination Centre (MCC) called for a bandh and it was not advisable to travel to Budikhada village. However on the persistence of the mukhiya (local elected representative) that the entire community looked forward to interacting with NCPCR’s team, the team was persuaded to visit and was escorted to the village by them. Though the meeting was scheduled for the morning half, about 250 villagers turned up for the meeting at the RBC camp, in the evening. It showcased the resolve of the community to ensure a better education for all their children, overriding concerns of a naxalite bandh. In such an area too, the education department officials have been successful in mobilizing people for education and they operate without any fear. In this context an education department driver of the neighbouring district of Lakhisarai told us, “**SSA ki jeep kahi bhi jaa sakti hai**” (the SSA jeep can go anywhere)!

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**BOX 3: A DACOIT’S SHRAMDAAN FOR CHILDREN’S EDUCATION**

Teka Manjhi is a dreaded dacoit of Jamui district with nearly 40 cases of dacoity registered against him. When some local NGO representatives walked through 15 kilometers of jungle to reach his village, Soneltarh Sono, for mobilizing the community to send their children to join RBC camps, their intentions were questioned by Teka Manjhi. Nonetheless, after listening to the purpose of their visit, Teka Manjhi was so inspired that he called a meeting of the entire village and motivated them to send their children to the three-day motivation camp. Thereafter when the villagers realized that there was no proper structure in which to conduct the camp, they built a temporary structure. Teka Manjhi was also part of this shramdaan (voluntary physical labour).

This story of Teka Manjhi’s shramdaan for children’s education was narrated to the Commission by the education officials at Jhajha block, NGO workers of Jamui, the State Project Director-SSA Bihar, and the Education Secretary (Bihar). This fascinating story has travelled to the corridors of the Old Secretariat in Patna and has reached the Chief Minister’s ears.

Apart from the wonder of it, the profound lesson in this story, as in others documented within this very report, is that every person has the heart to think about children’s wellbeing. Through working to guarantee children’s right to education, development, care and protection, we also have an opportunity to harmonize society.
PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE COMMISSION’S VISIT

Photo 1: A student of Shivmandir Baliyadih RBC with her mother.

Photo 2: Dr. Shantha Sinha and Mr. R. Venkat Reddy at the ‘public hearing’ in Shivmandir Baliyadih RBC.
Photo 3: Participants of the public hearing held at Shivmandir Bailyadih RBC

PHOTOGRAPHS OF VARIOUS RESIDENTIAL BRIDGE-COURSE CAMPS OF JAMUI

Photo 5: Girls rolling *beedis* in Baliyadih village (Jhajha block, Jamui)

Photo 6: Girls at the Budhikhad RBC (Jhajha block, Jamui)

16 The photographs in this section were taken by Jeevika Chhatwal, Noorjahan Momin, Preeti Prakash and Sneha Chhaterjee. They were the UNICEF (KCCI) Interns hosted at NCPCR in June 2008.
Photo 7: Solar Lamp donated by the Gram Panchayat at RBC Bhandra (Giddhour block, Jamui)

Photo 8: Married girls at the RBC Bhandara (Barhat block, Jamui)
Photo 9: Meal Chart at RBC Shivmandir Baliyadih (Jhajha block, Jamui)

Photo 10: Mid-day Meal at RBC Dhigra (Lakshmipur block, Jamui)
Photo 11: Daily Routine Chart at RBC Bhandra (Barhat block, Jamui)
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BIHAR

By undertaking exercises of social mobilization the government, in partnership with NGOs, has generated a massive demand for education amongst children and their parents. Therefore the first step is to increase the numbers of RBC camps and enroll all eligible children. The Bihar government is currently operating over 1200 camps with about 70,000 children in the entire state, and is planning to increase the numbers to meet the demand.

Starting RBC camps for girls has generated greater demand not just for more camps for girls, but camps for boys as well. As the mukhiya of Budhikhada village put it, “jitna dhyan beti par, utna dhyan beta par” (whatever concern is shown for the girls, the same concern should be shown towards the boys). The excitement of going to school and learning has been raised amongst all children. There is now a need to pay equal attention to our boy’s education. As one boy woefully put it- “agar hamare liye school hota to hum bhi padhne jaate” (If there was a school for us, even we would go to study).

Children currently enrolled in RBCs will complete the course in January 2009 and will need to be enrolled in formal schools from the next academic session. Thus the second step is to prepare individual plans for mainstreaming the children into full-time formal schools. This needs to begin now for effective transition next year. The status of welfare hostels assumes importance in the scenario where schools are not available in the children’s villages. In this case children will have to be accommodated in the hostels and enrolled in the nearest government schools. This requires coordination between the department of education and the SC, ST and BC welfare departments so that full benefits can be provided. Hostels must be equipped and capacities enhanced to receive children from RBCs.

The teachers and school administration of all schools where children from RBCs join should be trained to help these children adjust to the school environment. Most of these children are first-generation learners and as such are disadvantaged as compared to other more fortunate children. The parents of first-generation learners could also be ill-equipped to understand school practices and thus unable to help their children. The teachers should be sensitized to help the parents’ help their children better, thus contributing to an improved quality of education. The social mobilisers can play an important role here by providing assistance to the teachers and monitoring the progress of

“Aapko nahin pata ki hume high school chahiye?”
these children in school.

Education volunteers need to be identified for every village so that they can keep track of children’s continuance in school. Jamui district has appointed Bal Shiksha Hitaishis who assist children in their school-work beyond school-hours. An explanation of their role and responsibility will throw important light on the assistance that children require. Each Bal Shiksha Hitaishi is responsible for some 15-20 children. This volunteer’s work begins at 6 in the morning, when (s)he does a round of the village and wakes up the children. (S)he then ensures that they get neatly dressed for school and gathers them in one place. Then they do some physical exercise and prepare for the day’s classes for about an hour. After this (s)he takes them to school. Then again, after school ends, (s)he collects them from school and spends another 2 hours with them and helps them with the day’s lessons and homework. This person is paid Rs. 2000 per month by the government. These community education volunteers help children develop skills and knowledge that enhances their school participation. It was reported that other districts too had recruited social mobilisers from among the educated youth in the community. The scope of these ‘bal shiksha hitaishis’ should be enlarged to support children from RBCs who have enrolled in schools. They may be given additional training for this.

The RBCs have ignited a desire amongst parents for a complete education for their children. Having started on the path of education, children, their parents and communities are not content to stop half-way. They wish to tread the high-way to complete education but there are many challenges for this to be realized. Firstly, easy access to schools up till the 10th class is not available for all villages. In Budhikhada village the high school is situated 25 kilometers away at Jhajha block and there are no regular public transport facilities from the village to the block. In such cases girls are forced to discontinue education. This prompted one old tribal mother to stop the NCPCR team’s vehicle and question the lack of high school in her village. When asked why she didn’t state this problem in the meeting, she responded, “aapko na hi pata hai, ki hame high school chahiye?” (don’t you know that we need a high-school? Should we have to ask for it?). This question eloquently summarises how the right to education has been internalized by the people of Jamui, and how parents will leave no stone unturned to secure their children’s education. This is a call to the government to improve access to all schools firstly, by starting more schools, and secondly, by providing safe and reliable transport to access far-off schools.

Infrastructure of both the RBC camps as well as schools needs to be improved. There is no excuse for condemning children to study in hovels with specks of light chancing in and inadequate facilities. As one eight year old we met during the visit to
Kamlanehru Nagar Basti of Patna said, “kothi mein padhna hain, jhopdi mein achcha nahi lagta!” (we want to study in a building, we don’t like studying in a hut). Presently the primary school runs from a small tenement. In this basti a very good concrete building, currently being used as a NRBC (Non-Residential Bridge Course), was offered to the local school for usage. However the teachers had rejected such offers. This is a classic case of teachers resisting a move to better facilities as it would enhance the visibility of the school and in turn their performance. After our visit to the Patna slum, we were told that there are a number of un-used government buildings in Patna city which can be used as schools. Coordination between the different departments is required so that the existing facilities can be used efficiently for children’s education. Simultaneously teachers should be supported and their work continually monitored by the department.

Jamui presented an example where the government has placed trust in the last worker and supported them in fulfilling this task of social mobilization. The flexibility and decentralization of decision-making power has played an important role in the success of the programme. The team found the commitment of local officials impressive. It would like to know more about the interventions of the authorities that empowered these officials to take on this arduous task of community mobilization to bring children to RBCs.
INSIGHTS FOR NATIONAL POLICY

There are lessons to be learnt from the Bihar experience for adoption in the entire country. Presented here are three interventions which will further the realization and protection of children’s rights in schools and through schools.

Social Mobilization

The role of social mobilization for furthering education cannot be stressed adequately. “If children can be prevented from joining the work-force through the counseling of parents, children and the employers, much of the task of various government departments and ministries would be reduced. It is vital to ensure that children stay at home and go to formal government schools rather than leave home to work full time. Since the prevailing social norm justifies the working of children using the ‘poverty argument’, sustained social mobilization is required to change this societal norm”.17 This can only be achieved when a person is nominated solely for this task. Further, the government should consider appointing such an education volunteer with the exclusive responsibility of helping children who are making the transition from RBC to formal school.

The SSA-Bihar’s success is special because it started with the mobilization of girls and has succeeded in opening over 32 only-girls RBCs in Jamui. It was an astute step of the officials because, had they started by setting up an RBC camp for boys, the demand for RBC camps for girls would never have gained momentum. Moreover because the SSA officials started with the most neglected group of children—girls, that too adolescent girls in the age-group of 12-15, and from the most backward communities—it gave them the confidence to continue this endeavour.

Education Volunteer for Improving Child Participation in Schools

Secondly, the Bihar Government’s education volunteer, ‘bal shiksha hitaishi’ is improving children’s participation in school and retaining them. Apart from engaging the child in positive activities after-school, this also helps keep the child away from any after-school work. Wholesome development of a child can only be achieved if a child is engaged in age-appropriate creative activities the entire day. One cannot consider school participation as the limited set of 5-6 hours that the child spends in the school premises, but the other activities that he/she does which contribute to making the child an active participant in school. This is another reason why children should only study and not work, because work results in a compromise of the child’s

participation in school. Consequently this may also result in children dropping-out of school due to non-performance and the associated discomfiture.

**Government Capability in Protecting Children’s Rights**

The government is capable of protecting children’s rights under all conditions, even of civil or social unrest. Jamui’s education programme is a case-in-point for all areas affected by civil unrest where the State has succeeded in providing education to children, protecting their rights through schools and generating awareness in the community. It has also showcased that a synergy between the government and the community would pave the way for protection of children’s rights and in the process enable the deepening of democracy as well as harmonize societies.
CONCLUSION

The Commission was pleased to note the efforts being undertaken by the Government of Bihar to educate its children. These efforts are already paying returns. As mentioned earlier at least 1200 children were stopped from migrating out of the State in search of work this year, because they were enrolled in RBCs and schools. Bihar is one of the largest exporters of child labour in the country and such efforts are playing a pioneering role in safeguarding children’s rights, not just to education but also care and development, and saving them from exploitative and hazardous work and living conditions.

The RBC camps are spinning a net of hope and confidence in the far-flung districts of India. By bringing education to the door-step of some of the most backward communities of India, the government is equipping children to lead a fulfilling and self-reliant life. As one girl of 13 remarked when asked how she has become so hoshiyaar (smart), ‘chaar mahine se padh rahe hain, forward nahi banenge!’\footnote{18} This girl had never been to school and might have never stepped out of her village before joining the RBC camp. If an RBC camp can instill such confidence and positive self-appraisal in four months, one can only imagine what full-time formal schooling can achieve.

The ‘social mobilization for education’ has made the community aware of children’s needs and enabled them to protect the rights of their children. This inclusive process provides space for everyone to contribute towards the development of children’s rights, and builds a norm within the community of thinking for ‘all’ its children without favour and discrimination. An inclusive social mobilization process is the only practical solution.

It was heartening to also witness the astuteness, enthusiasm and dedication of the local education department officials in prioritizing the neglected groups of children for enrollment to RBCs (such as girls, older girls in the age-group of 12-15 and children from backward communities), mobilizing parental and community support, drawing support from other departments, and liaising with local NGO members. The government’s community education volunteer programme is a unique step of the Bihar SSA that can be adopted by the other State Governments.

In its visits to other states, the Commission has always found children from Bihar comprising the majority of child labour. When the other state governments are pressed to repatriate these children to Bihar, they respond by saying that ‘the children always return’. After witnessing the efforts of the Bihar government, the Commission

\footnote{18} “We are studying since four months, will we not become forward!”
shall renew pressure on the various State governments to increase their efforts of sending the children back.

This visit to Jamui and Patna was a fruitful one and the Commission hopes that the same tempo of work will be sustained so that all children are brought into the fold of education and out of child labour very soon.
ANNEXURE 1

Programme of the Visit

2 June 2008

Visit to two RBCs in Jhajha block of Jamui district.

3 June 2008

9.00 a.m. – 10.00 a.m. Visit an NRBC camp in Kamalanehru nagar slum of Patna city

10.30 a.m. – 1.30 p.m. Inauguration of Bal Adhikar Suraksha Samiti at Taramandal, Patna¹⁹

6.30 p.m. Meeting with the Hon. Chief Minister, Shri. Nitish Kumar

4 June 2008

10.00 a.m. – 12.00 a.m. Meeting with the Chief Secretary and other Secretaries.

12.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m. Press Meet

¹⁹ See Annexure 2 for report on ‘Inaguration of Bal Adhikar Suraksha Samiti’
ANNEXURE 2


‘Bal Adhikar Suraksha Samiti’ (BASS) is an association of teachers, panchayat and ward representatives and NGO workers, which has been formed with the express purpose of safeguarding children’s rights in Bihar. Dr. Shantha Sinha inaugurated the Samiti on 3rd June 2008 at Taramandal in Patna city. Other distinguished persons who participated in the meeting were Shri. Ramdev Prasad (Chairperson, Bihar Child Labour Committee), Shri. A. K. Pandey (Programme Officer, SSA, Bihar), and Mr. R. Venkat Reddy (National Convener, M V Foundation). The meeting was attended by over 200 people who have been actively working in eight districts of Bihar, namely, Patna, Sitamarhi, Sheohar, Araria, Kishanganj, Jamui, Vaishali and Rohtas. Smt. Abhalata was chosen as the President of the BASS.

Speaking on the occasion, Shri. Ramdev Prasad said that all out-of-school children should be considered child labour. This is because if children are not attending school for a long period of time, the parents then compel them to work either in their own home, fields or village, or migrate in search of work. He also demanded that all child labour should be regarded as hazardous in nature and urged one and all to work towards total abolition of child labour. He went on to state that poverty cannot be considered as a deterrent to education, because the state is providing free schooling, uniforms, mid-day meals, cycles etc. SSA’s success is dependent on rooting out child labour and out-of-school children. Shri. Prasad also called for stricter enforcement of child labour laws and presented a set of demands that the Bal Adhikar Suraksha Samiti can raise.

1. He asked the BASS to request all people’s representatives, IAS-IPS officers, teachers, etc to voluntarily declare that they will not use child labour.
2. All political parties should be asked to declare that none of their party members shall use child labour.
3. To strengthen enforcement of child labour law, the names of violators should be publicized so as to act as a deterrent.

Shri. A. K. Pandey shared the government’s plan to start RBCs in every block of the state. Smt. Abharani also spoke on the occasion saying that education is a means to social change and the Bihar Government is committed to this goal.

Delivering the inaugural address Dr. Shantha Sinha said that we must recognize that child labour is not due to poverty but that poverty is a result of child labour. Children are cheap forms of labour who are submissive and can be made to work long hours. Using child labour only benefits the employer and not the child. She said that wherever child labour has been eradicated, the wages of adults have appreciated. Citing the example of Rangareddy District of Andhra Pradesh, Dr. Sinha stated that
due to the abolishment of child labour in over 1000 villages, the wages of women have tripled. If there is no child labour then adults can earn more and poverty will be reduced. Taking this argument forward she demanded that all poverty alleviation programmes should have a child labour elimination component.

During this and other visits, the Commission has witnessed a massive demand for education amongst the poorest of the poor. The poor believe that through education their children will gain self confidence, will develop and will have ‘freedom’. “Education is the way to freedom”. Noting the important role that BASS can play, she said that BASS should help parents in their battle for children’s education. She said that members of BASS and like organizations/associations are the Commission’s partners in realizing children’s rights. At the village and community level, children are people with names and faces and not mere statistics. Without this civil society support the government will be unable to fully realize the goal of education for all.

Commending the SSA and state government for its efforts of bringing children to RBC camps she said that if 70000 children are presently enrolled in camps, then this means that 70000 individual plans were made at the ground level. Without this detail of work, it is impossible to bring children to school. She said that this same tempo of work should be sustained for another 5 years if all children have to be brought into the fold of education, and abolish child labour.

Dr. Sinha concluded by saying that it is time to recognize the good work that is being done in the field of education in the state, and that there are many lessons that other states can learn from Bihar.
ANNEXURE 3

Recommendations of NCPCR to Chief Secretary, Bihar

6th June 2008

Dear

On behalf of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, (NCPCR) and its team which included Mr. R. Venkat Reddy and Ms. Spurthi Reddy, I wish to thank the Bihar administration for all the arrangements made during our visit to the State from 1st to 4th June 2008. We would particularly like to thank Mr. R. J. M. Pillai, Chief Secretary, for chairing the meeting of the Secretaries and offering to take immediate steps based on our suggestions.

During our visit to the residential bridge-course camps in Jamui it was heartening to see the enthusiasm of the children in the RBC camp, the support of the parents and the community and, most importantly, the dedication of the local education department officers who have succeeded in convincing the girls and their parents to enroll in the RBC camps. We also visited a non-residential bridge course camp in Kamla Nagar basti of Patna. Based on our interaction with the students, parents, local community, elected panchayat representatives, local administration and NGO workers we present the following issues for immediate action. Some of these were also raised in the meeting with the Chief Secretary and other Secretaries, held on 4th June 2008.

Strengthen Bridge-Courses and Schools
1. Increase capacities of RBCs wherever there is demand, with an emphasis to saturate the areas affected by conflict.

2. Begin planning for mainstreaming all children in the RBCs into formal schools.

3. There should be increased integration between the Education Department and the SC/ST and BC/OBC Welfare Departments, for the use of the welfare hostels to accommodate the children who have newly joined schools after completing courses from the RBC. The capacities of these hostels should also be increased.

4. School Infrastructure: Some schools in Patna are reported as having inadequate physical infrastructure such as school buildings. It has been brought to our notice that there are several unutilized buildings belonging to various departments that can be used as schools. We request the Chief Secretary to consider giving an executive order for utilization of all such buildings for school purposes.
Documentation
5. ‘Bal Shiksha Hitaishi’ – the community education volunteer is a successful strategy in the state. The Education department should document the profile, work and reasons of success of this community education volunteer, for nation-wide dissemination.

6. The Education Department to commission a study to document and analyse the processes by which children are being brought to RBCs and then mainstreamed into schools. The NCPCR can facilitate such a study if the Education department can finance it.

Child Labour
7. The government must strengthen its capacities to receive its own child labour who are repatriated from other states. These children should be immediately enrolled in residential bridge camps so as to reduce the possibility of their re-migration.

8. In Bihar at present the NCLP schools are being operated by NGOs. These should be integrated with government functioning. Also cooperation between the NCLP and SSA must be initiated to achieve universal coverage of all children out of school.

9. Enforcement of the child labour laws should be a priority concern of the NCLP and the Labour Department.

Panchayats and Child Rights Monitoring
10. The panchayats and local administrative bodies should be enabled to monitor children and their status at the gram panchayat level. The Panchayati Raj Ministry, GOI has chosen 34 of Bihar’s districts for a direct allocation of Rs. 1 crore, for capacity building measures. These finances can be used for imparting child rights training to the panchayat representatives. Moreover, the NCPCR has prepared a module for training on child rights which can be incorporated in the panchayati raj representatives training schedules. This module shall be sent to you shortly.

11. Under the Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF) programme two blocks in 5 districts of Bihar will be chosen to equip gram panchayats for protection of children’s rights in a systematic fashion. This involves preparing all the gram panchayats in the select blocks to monitor the status of the children in their constituency, protect their rights and strengthen the capacities of all the institutions/departments in delivering of services to children. Further the processes introduced at the level of the gram panchayats
would inform the block/mandal level panchayat as well as the zilla panchayats.

A detailed note on this shall be sent to you shortly. The NPCR shall facilitate this process and depute Mr. Dheer Jhingran and Mr. Venkat Reddy to discuss this initiative in detail with the Government of Bihar. The support of all the relevant departments is requested for this.

Giving every child an access to education up to class ten and investing in providing all that is necessary to make education happen, we feel can ensure a secure freedom for these children and their families and even deepen democracy. We look forward to working with the Bihar Government to further children’s rights and seek your support in this endeavour. A detailed report of the Commission’s visit shall be sent to you shortly.

With regards

Yours Sincerely

Sd.

Shantha Sinha

To,

Mr. R.J. Mohan Pillai
Chief Secretary
Government of Bihar

C.C.  Mr. Anjani Kumar Singh, Principal Secretary (Education).
Mr. Vyas, Secretary (Labour), Government of Bihar.
Mr. Vijay Prakash, Principal Secretary (Social Welfare).
Mr. Deepak Kumar, Secretary (Health).
Mr. Afzal Amanullah, Principal Secretary (Education).
Mr. Pancham Lal, Principal Secretary (Panchayati Raj).
Mr. Vijay Shankar, Principal Secretary (Cabinet Coordination).
Mr. Rajesh Bhushan, SPD-SSA.
District Collector, Jamui
District Collector, Patna

Copy also to:
Mr. R. Venkat Reddy, M.V. Foundation, 201/202, Narayan Apartments,
West Marredpally, Secunderabad-500026 (Andhra Pradesh)
### State-wise Distribution of Working Children according to 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 Census in the age group 5-14 years

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**Note:**
* 1971 Census figures of Assam includes figures of Mizoram.
** Census could not be conducted.
*** Census figures 1971 in respect of Mizoram included under Assam.
**** includes marginal workers also.

Source: Ministry of Labour-Government of India

Note: Of the four states with the highest child labour Andhra Pradesh is the only with reducing numbers of child labour. And this has much to do with the efforts of the AP government to bring children to the fold of education through RBCs.
Setting up an RBC in Teka Manjhi’s Village

There are a few steps to setting up an RBC in Teka Manjhi’s Village. First, it is important to have a clear understanding of the purpose and objectives of the RBC. It is essential to involve the local community in the planning and decision-making process.

Once the objectives are defined, the RBC can be established with the help of local leaders and community members. The RBC can then focus on improving the quality of education and ensuring that children have access to basic education.

The RBC can also work on improving the infrastructure in the village by building schools and providing other educational resources. This will help to attract more children to school, which in turn will lead to better education outcomes.

The RBC can also work on improving the health and nutrition of the children in the village. This can be achieved through the establishment of community health centers and providing access to healthy food.

Overall, setting up an RBC in Teka Manjhi’s Village can have a significant impact on the education and well-being of the children in the village. With the right support and resources, the RBC can make a difference in the lives of these children and help to improve the future of the village.

Report prepared by Kartik Jha, Assistant Programme Officer, Bihar Shiksha Pariyojana Parishad.
पिऽ— सवं खुराना शविदास को वापस बुलाकर केंद्र में शिक्षा ग्रहण को डाल दिया। पंजाब में काम कर रही शकुंतला, पिऽ—श्री सांतामादा ने घर आने पर आरो सी० सी० काकन को अपना आशियाना बनाते हुए पंजाब जाने से इनकार कर दिया। पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों ने सोलर लाईट लगवा दिया। कहते हैं सफलता उत्साहबद्ध की कुंजी है। इसी कुंजी को ले संकल्प का कार्य के एक दिन उस गाँव में पहुंच गया जहाँ के नाम से जिले में सिहरन होती है। प्रखंड सोमो मंचायत लाल्लेवार का यह गाँव सोमनलांट जिले में मिनी चम्बल के नाम से जाना जाता है। सोमो—चरका पत्थर मुख्य भूमि से केंद्र किलोमीटर हटकर यह गाँव प्रखंड मुख्यालय से लगभग 14 किलोमीटर उत्तर पूर्व की ओर अवस्थित है जहाँ जाने के लिए तीन छोटी—छोटी बसस्थानी नदियों को पार करना पड़ता है। चरका पत्थर पहाड़ियों के इर्द गिर्द बसे इस गाँव में लगभग 40 घर हैं, जिसमें माँगी समुदाय के लगभग 400 लोग अपने जिन्दगी को ढो रहे हैं। विकास की रोशनी दूर—दूर तक दृष्टिगोचर नहीं होती है। वास्तव में इस गाँव को देखने के बाद आदमी का एक बार सोचता है— क्या वास्तव में भारत को आजाद हुए छह दशक बीत चुके हैं?

**Xκφο d k n`;  Vd k εκφ h d k ?kJ**

प्रकृति की गौड में बसा अल्पायाचा और अपराध की एक लम्बी गाथा अपने दानां में समेटे इस गाँव में एक भी घर की दर्दगरी आई नहीं जिसमें आदमी सीधे प्रवेश कर सके। शायद ये घर कह रहे हैं—गरीबों के यहाँ आना हो तो सर बुकाकर आना। इस गाँव के बच्चों की शीर्षक व्यवस्था हेतु बगल के एक गाँव में विद्यालयहें— प्रकृति जन्मगीजर। सामाजिक ग्राहक इस प्रकार के हैं कि गाँव का एक भी बच्चा विद्यालय में उपस्थिति दर्ज नहीं कर पाता था। पूरे गाँव में सर्वाधिक शिक्षित व्यक्ति हैं श्री प्रमो दासी जो दूसरा वर्ग पास किया हुआ है। सर्वाधिक शिक्षित होने के कारण वे गाँव वाले के बीच मुखिया के नाम से जाने जाते हैं। गाँव के बाहर काली मार्ग का एक मंदिर है, जिसके पास मंदिर का एक बड़ा सा क्षेत्र है। एक सामुदायिक भवन है जो पूरे गाँव का इकलोला भवन है, जिसमें ईट का प्रयोग हुआ है। बिनांक 28.12.07 को संकल्प प्रखंड कोर दल के सदस्यों इस गाँव की ओर रूख हुआ। बातचीत हुई, पर अन्तर्निर्माण पर
छाया अविश्वास पिघल नहीं पाया। चार बेठकों के बाद अंत में वह दिन आया 25.04.2008।

विशाल वर्गल की शीतल छाया तले गाँव बाले को एकत्रित किया गया। सर्वथा परिमल माँझी, मंदू माँझी, मतलू माँझी, बिजा माँझी, दलपत माँझी, कारू माँझी, गोपी माँझी, बनवारी माँझी, सुखदेव माँझी, कपिल माँझी, लाली माँझी, अरुण माँझी आदि को काफी मशक्कत के बाद जमा किया गया। इस गाँव का इतिहास रहा है कि वहाँ जब भी कोई बाहरी व्यक्ति गया है, पुलिस का मुखबिर बनकर गया। इस परिस्थिति में सभी को एक साथ बेठकर बात करना टेंडीजीवी थी,,

लेकिन कहा जाता है कि अगर उद्देश्य पाक हो तो परिस्थितियाँ अनुकूल हो जाती है। उजड़े हुए विश्वास के साथ लोगों ने बातचीत की। बैठक के दर्शन्य एक व्यक्ति अनवास उपस्थित हुआ – कृषक शरीर, काळे रंग का लिबास, आवास में दृढ़ता। सयाल खूंजा – ‘ये कौन आदमी है, इसे क्यों गाँव के बारे में सबकुछ बता रहे हो? परिमल माँझी के हस्तक्षेप से वह व्यक्ति भी वहीं बैठा।

परिचय की आवश्यकता नहीं थी—पुत्र सुनाया नाम था – ‘टेका माँझी’। अपराध की दुनिया का वह नाम जिसके ऊपर पुलिस रिकार्ड के मुलाकात सैकड़ों मुकदमे दर्ज है। पिता शिरसू माँझी तथा माता कुमा देवी के चार बेटों में एक यह शख्स 1995 ई ओ में पुलिस की गिरफ़्त में आ गया था। लेकिन शांति दिमागी इस इस्लाम ने 1997 ई ओ में जमाई जेल से भागने का दुस्सहास किया था। तब से फरार की तरह जिनदीन बसर कर रहा है। यहाँ उल्लेखनीय है कि श्री दिरसू माँझी आज भी जमाई जेल में सजा काट रहा है। पहाड़ों की गुफाओं और जंगलों में रहने वाले इस इस्लाम के अन्दर भी 'इस्लामित' नाम की कोई चीज है – इसका इस्लाम इससे बातचीत के क्रम में हुआ। 

गुप्त जी की यह पंक्ति – “सहानुभूति चाहिए। महाभिमुक्ति है यही!” की साध्यता इसके साधारण के क्रम में समझ में आई। बच्चों की पढ़ाई की चर्चा हुई तो फिर वही रटा रटाया सा शब्द सामने आया – गरीबी। उपर्युक्त जनमानस के साथ काफी देर तक तक विवर्तन होता रहा। ही, यहाँ यह बता देना जरूरी है कि बैठक के प्रारंभ में मैंने लोगों को साफ़ रुप से बता दिया था कि मैं आपके साथ समस्याओं का समाधान नहीं हूँ। लेकिन सारे समस्याओं के समाधान का तरीका हमलोग मिल बैठक के वस्त्र निकाल लेंगे। बातचीत के क्रम में लोगों से यह विमर्श किया गया कि गरीबी क्यों है? सभी ने इस पर अपनी प्रतिक्रिया दी। अधिकांश लोग यही कह रहे थे कि सामाजिकवादियों के शोषण के कारण लोग गरीब होते हैं। चर्चा के क्रम में शोषण के तरीके की ओर लोगों का ध्यान खींचा गया और अंत में उन्हें यह समझाने में सफलता मिली कि हम गरीब इसलिए हैं कि हम अशिष्ट हैं। 

अगर बच्चे पढ़े लेंगे तो बाहरी दुनिया से साकारात्मक की समझ उनमें आ जाएगी। यह समझ ही उन्हें समाज की मुख्यवाद से जोड़ेगी, समस्याओं के समाधान के लिए सम्भव नवागी। हल्के—फुलके विरोध के बाद लोगों ने सकारात्मक रूप अपनाया। अविश्वास की इसी नीली मोटी परत उनके अंदर प्रतिस्थापित हो चुकी थी, जिसे लोड़ने के लिए कुछ करके दिखाना जरूरी था। गाँव के लोगों के सीच दो नाम बार—बार गूंज रहा था—मुखिया जी एवं सरदार। सरदार के नाम से लोग टेका माँझी को बुलाते थे। बातचीत के क्रम में
बहुत सी बातें उम्री। स्मृतियों के पने उलटते गए, झांसावाली वास्तवों की कहानियों सुनाईं गई बीच—बीच में माहील गमगीन हो जाता लेकिन किर उसे समेटकर वापस मूल बिन्दु पर लाने का सफल प्रयास किया गया। गॉंव के लोगों के बीच जब यह प्रस्ताव दिया गया कि गॉंव के सभी बच्चों को रखकर खाने—पीने एवं पढ़ने की योजना की जाएगी। उपस्थित जनमानस को चौहाल भरी नजरों से इस प्रस्ताव को समझने का प्रयास करने लगा। वहीं बगल में स्थित सामुदायिक भवन के केन्द्र बिन्दु मानकर बातचीत का सिलसिला आगे बढ़ाया गया। लोगों ने प्रथम भरी निगाह ‘सरदार’ की ओर ठहरी। उसने अपने दूर आवाज में कहा – यह तो अच्छी बात है लेकिन इसके बदले यहाँ पुलिस आएगी। फिर उसे आश्चर्य किया गया कि इस केन्द्र में पुलिस नहीं आती है, पुलिस इस केन्द्र को चलाने में सहयोग करती है। अनिर्णय भरे भावों से लोगों ने सहमति जताई तथा कार्य योजना बनाने लगी। लोगों से यह अनुरोध किया गया कि इस सामुदायिक भवन की सफाई करवाई जाय तथा कार्य यथार्थी व प्रारंभ किया जाय। आश्चर्य तो शह उन जब लोगों के बीच से ‘सरदार’ उठा तथा उसने मनू मॉँझी को आदेश दिया— कुढ़ाल लाओ और इसे अभी साफ करें। देखते—ही—देखते जन सहयोग का अदभुत नमूना यहाँ दृष्टिगोचर हो गया। टेका मॉँझी खुद कुढ़ाल चला रहा था तथा शेष चार युवक मनू मॉँझी, अर्जुन मॉँझी आदि घास—पास को बगल के गड़बड़े में डाल रहे थे। देखते ही देखते सामुदायिक भवन के चारों ओर का परिवेश साफ सुधार हो गया।

“Well begun is half done.” सफलता का विश्वास दूर हुआ। सिर्फ एक कमरे में बच्चियों कोंसे रहेगी और पढ़ेगी, खाना कहां बनेगा। इन समस्याओं पर गॉंव वालों से बात चल ही रही थी कि
अपने बच्चों को पढ़ाने के लिए निर्धारित भवन में चूला पुताई का काम कर रहे थे, गाँव के लोग। टेका माँझी के नेतृत्व में मजदूरों का एक दल काम कर रहा था आधी लूंगी और गंजी पहने, माथे
पे हल्की सी पगड़ी बोंचे यह खुद सीड़ी पर चढ़कर चुना पोत रहा था। दिन भर में पूरे मकान का स्वरूप बदल गया। येवेत ध्वाल किरणे विशेषता यह मकान मानो कह रहा है अब यह मंदिर बनेगा, इसमें भगवान रहेंगे। लेकिन इसके पीछे की दास्तान अत्यंत ही दर्दभरी है। गाँव के लोग दिन में मजबूती करते थे तो रात में खाते थे। विद्या मंदिर के नाम पर किए गए श्रमदान के कारण उस दिन पूरा गाँव भूखा सोया था। ऐसा प्रतीत हुआ इतनी लंबी अवधि तक शिक्षा से दूर रहने का प्रायश्चित्त था वह उपवास और प्रायश्चित्त के बाद तो सारे पाप खुल ही जाते हैं। उस गाँव के लोगों के लिए भी यही हुआ। दिनांक 27.04.08 को आवासीय उत्तरार्थ अन्दर का 'कैम्प' प्रारंभ हुआ।

केंद्र को शुरू करने में गाँव वालों ने अद्वैत सहयोग किया, शुरुआत के दो दिनों तक खाना बनाने के सभी वर्तन गाँव वालों ने अपने-अपने घरों से निकाल कर दिया। गाँव के आबाद युवा नर-नारी दिनदहर उस केंद्र के इर्द-गिर्द जमा होकर कोटूहल भरी नजरें से एक-दूसरे को निहार रहे थे। शिक्षा की मशाल उस गाँव में जल उठी। नहीं-नहीं जान चढ़क रही थी–“शिक्षा है अधिकार हमारा, कलम है हथियार हमारा।

गाँव वालों के बीच आर्टी सी०-आर्टी सी० शब्द गूंज रहा था, मानो हर आदमी इस बात को जानने वाला हो। सहयोग समिति गाँव वालों के द्वारा बनाई गई थी। जिसके
सदस्य उस केंद्र की देखभाल करते थे। लेकिन इस प्रयास में पंचायत सचिव श्री रामजी महतो का सहयोग सराहनीय रहा। सहयोग समिति की बैठक में टेका माँझी का हुक्म जारी हुआ था – गाँव का काई भी व्यक्ति शराब पीकर स्कूल के आसपास नहीं आएगा। अगर कोई आएगा तो
उसे हम देख लेंगे। दिनांक 29.04.08 को जिला के सदस्यों ने अपनी आंखों से देखा बच्चियों
खाना खा रही थी, परोसने वाले गाँव के लोग थे, टेका माँझी भी खाना परोस कर खिला रहा था।
शायद उसकी अपनी शैक्षणिक खुशी (11 वर्ष) उस कैद में पड़ती है, उसी की प्रतिकृति उसे सभी
बच्चियों में दिखाई दे रही है। यूनिसेफ की तरफ से मुहैया कराए गए कॉफी, पेसिल, खाद्य कटर
आदि को वितरित करने की वात आई तो गाँव के लोगों के द्वारा ही इसे वितरित करवाने का
निर्णय लिया गया। जब ‘सरदार’ की बांसी आई तो कॉफी बॉटले वक्त उसके आँखों में आयू थे।
पूछने पर वह सो पड़ा और सिफर इतना कहा ‘सर’ आपलोग पहले व्यं नहीं आए?

शिक्षा के प्रति सामाजिक जुड़वाए एवं सहयोग की इंतहां तो तब दूषकों दूर हुई जब बन्दूक चलाने
वाले हथियारों ने अपने लिए कॉफी और पेसिल की मांग की। परिणाम भी सामने आ चुका है और
अबतक खिसके टेका माँझी ने अपना हस्ताक्षर करना सीख लिया। केंद्र के संचालन में उसके
द्वारा निम्नांक जा रही भूमिका को देखकर व्यं चले हुए “हमदय परिवर्तन” की याद आती है,
लेकिन यह तो प्रभाव वह इतना है, इंतहां का इतना पूरी नानाव जाति को रखेगा।

रंगेश में यह कहा जा सकता है कि पावन लक्ष्यों को लेकर शिक्षा के सिपाही अगर समाज में
संस्कृति बदहाएंगे तो समाज में खुद नहीं बदहेगा। प्रयास जारी है, रास्ते पथरीले हैं, घंटा कूर है,
लेकिन नजर के सामने जल्द है। सफलता मिलेगी ..................अवश्य मिलेगी।

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"Chaar mahine se padh rahe hain, **forward** nahi banenge!"

- 14 year old student at the Shivmandir Bakliyadih RBC, Jamui district.