

A Book By Lek Ladki Abhiyan



Towards Change
A Document of Transformation

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A WORD OF GRATITUDE

This book of report by Rajiv Mulaye is an eye-opener document for all those who are sensitive on issues of girl child, LekLadkiAbhiyan obliged to publish this report and take this opportunity to express our word of appreciation to Rajiv Mulaye for visiting twice to ShirurKasar and facing all odds in field and showing commitment to write this report. Thanks to Kailas Jadhav,Shaila and Dipenti for taking efforts to publish this report with nice design and photographs.

By Adv. Varsha Deshpande

FOREWORD

One fine morning, I received a call from Varsha Tai inviting me to conduct a theatre workshop for girls from the families of sugarcane farm-workers. They migrate from Marathwada to Western Maharashtra for six months every year. While conducting workshop, I realised that the girls were more bold in comparison to the girls of the same age group in the rural areas of Western Maharashtra. I could know the cause only after Varsha Tai told me about the circumstances in which the girls live.

It is obligatory for the girls to migrate with their parents every year. If they stay at home for studies, parents are not in a position to take any risk about them. That's why child marriages are still performed in the region. Girls attending the workshop had either left the house of in-laws after getting married or succeeded to cancel marriage with the help of Varsha Tai. After workshop, the girls nicely performed in a play named '5W1H' which was written and directed by Kailas Jadhav, a prominent activist of LekLadkiAbhiyan.

As a theatre artist, I was in touch of Varsha Tai and Kailas for years. I was also aware of their efforts to save girls and their sting operations. After this workshop I was introduced to a totally different process of empowering girls. After sting operations in Beed district, she came to know about the child marriages in ShirurKasar block also having lowest birth rate of girls. She started working in the block in very adverse conditions. After a deep study, she realised why girls are so unwanted. It was necessary to eliminate a root cause. She conducted a huge gathering of adolescent girls at ShirurKasar and selected many girls for capability building. She arranged training sessions for them in many fields from nursing to driving. Girls attending a theatre workshop were undergoing a nursing course at Satara.

Few months later, I got an opportunity to visit ShirurKasar with Varsha Tai along with the girls, eager to speak out at the first ever public hearing for adolescent girls. The State Child Rights Protection Commission was going to conduct hearing. On the way to ShirurKasar, we stopped in front of a sugar mill for some time. Many people

from ShirurKasar were working in the sugercane fields. A 16 year old girl wanted to meet her parents. When they arrived, she gave some money to her mother. It was her own earnings as she was working as a nurse at satara. The same girl had to face many difficulties and injustice due to early marriage some years back and had left the house of in-laws to empower herself with the help of Varsha Tai.

Appreciation was clearly seen in the eyes of her parents, when she handed over money to mother. The incident left a deep impact on my mind. Then, while attending a public hearing, I witnessed the boldness of these girls once again. They were fearlessly talking about the problems they have to face in day-today life. They demanded better schooling, saperate washrooms in the school, good roads and transport and much needed safety. The Child Rights Commission directed the officers from various Govt. departments accordingly. Varsha Tai introduced us with more girls, most of them were married and having children before the age of 20. There were divorced, saperated and widow girls too.

After nearly 8 months we visited ShirurKasar once again. This time Varsha Tai made me aware about the situation in small villages and a lifestyle of suger-farm workers. Villagers can't get even safe drinking water, irrigation, power, roads and other basic facilities. The soil is very good for farming, but due to lack of water, the villagers have to migrate every year for cutting sugercane. We visited many schools, Anganwadis, Govt. hostel and markets in the area.

I was watching totally different world. It was difficult to believe that these people also live in a same country which we boast to be the 6th largest economy in the world. Let's have a quick look.

- Rajiv Mulaye

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I'm Rupali, a resident of a small village in ShirurKasar Tehsil of Beed. My parents regularly migrate to Western Maharashtra for eight months every year to cut sugercane. I was married at the age of 15 when I was a 10th class student. A groom was 29 years old and I was told that he is a bankemploee. Afterwards I came to know the fact, that he was working as a plumber.



I entered the house of in-laws with total ignorance about what marriage really is. I was even unable to talk to my husband and everyone was forcing me to enter his room at night. I was afraid and kept refusing for eight to ten days. But everyday I was brutally beaten by my husband and in-laws for this 'sin'.

At last I called my father to take me back to home and thretened to end my life if he fails to do so. My father took me home for the occasion of Nag Panchami festival and then I never returned to the house of in-laws. One day, my husband came with

his friend to take me back. I was not ready to return. Both of them beaten me and forcefully tried to take me away from my home on a bike. On the way, I jumped from a bike and get injured. While getting treated at the hospital, I continued my refusal to return to the house of in-laws and was taken home after treatment. My relatives continued forcing me to go back and everyone kept beating, torturing and cursing me all the time. Meanwhile, I read a board inviting adolescent girls to YuvatiMelava at ShirurKasar. Asha Tai told me about LekLadkiAbhiyan and I joined the movement. Varsha Tai brought me to Satara for nursing course and after finishing the course I'm now working as professional nurse.

I'm Anita, a village girl from Beed district. Within only five months after appearing to 10th class exams, I learnt a lesson how the hunger for dowry is unending. It's a leaky pot which can never be filled. My husband was a junior college student when we got married. My father-in-law used to beat him for mistakes. At the time of marriage, my father gave almost 80 per cent amount of dowry alongwith some household utensils to my in-laws.



After two months, my in-laws started demanding for the balance amount of dowry alongwith some more utensils. e.g. CRT tvset was given to them at the time of marriage. Now they were demanding LED tv. My father had already borrowed a lot from relatives at the time of marriage. Now he was unable to fulfil the demands of my in-laws. At last he surrendered and decided to take me back to home just five months after my marriage.

After nearly two and half years, my aunt who lived in ShirurKasar suggested my father to send me to Satara with Varsha Tai. My father agreed and after getting trained for a year, today I work as a nurse in a private hospital. I stay at Muktang with my friends. We cook together and help each other. Meanwhile, my husband is now diploma holder and working in Pune. He is a good person and wants me to stay with him. I may think to respond him but will continue working as a nurse in pune. I'll never return to the house of my in-laws at any cost. I have realised that being self-sufficient is a key to many problems faced by the girls like me.

I'm Archana and my story will make you believe that sometimes a wrong call may turn you to a right direction in life. My marriage was fixed when I was minor. I wanted to study further and didn't want to get married. I was watching the struggle of my elder sister who was also married and got children in early age. She had to stop her education. I tried hard to cancel my marriage with the help of relatives. I had lost my father in 2011 and my mother and grandfather were in a hurry to settle my marriage.



One day, when I was calling one of my relatives, I wrongly dialed a number of Varsha Tai. I knew about her work; but without saying anything, I cut the phone. After some time I called her again and told that I didn't want to marry. She came to my home and convinced my mother and grandfather. When I came to Satara with Varsha Tai and started earning after getting trained as a nurse, I realised the value of money. It was a turning point of my life. I had never seen anything except my home and farm. LekLadkiAbhiyan had shown me the real world.

Today, I work with a company in Daund in Pune district. I serve in a clinic run by the company administration for their employees and get a handsome salary with PF and other facilities. I always dream about returning home to

take care of my mother. Now my family members themselves admit that child marriage is a wrong practice and I think this is the biggest achievement.

I'm Hema and staying at satara from few months. I was married to a 12th class student, when I was studying 10th class. My parents had given two third amount of dowry to my in-laws at the time of marriage. Few months



latter my husband and in-laws started beating me and demanding the balance amount of dowry. My husband consumes liquor regularly. After some days my husband left the house of my in-laws due to family disputes and took me to live in a separate house.

One day when I visited to the house of my in-laws, I had to face misbehaviour by my father in law. It was so embarrassing for me that I called my father and informed him about the incident. He took me back to home after

talking to my husband. Months over months passed, but my husband didn't even asked me to come back to stay with him. One of his relatives from Mumbai tried for reconciliation.

Meanwhile I heard about Yuvati Melawa organised by Lek Ladki Abhiyan. I went there and expressed my desire to learn something for self-reliance. Then I came to Satara with Varsha Tai for nursing course. Whenever I go to

attend hearing of a court case against my husband and father in law, I can see my husband roaming freely on roads; but he never appears before the court. I can do nothing except waiting for justice.



I'm Bhakti, from a small village in ShirurKasar block. I'm 22 years old and still unmarried because my mother is sensible enough to understand my wish to become self-dependent. I lost my father in a railway accident when I was studying in 8th class. After passing 12th standard exams, I came to Satara with Varsha Tai.

In our village, girls go to school only for admission and then directly appear to exams, because it's not safe for us to go to school everyday. My mother migrates to Phaltan, Koregaon or Shrigonda for six to eight months every year to work in sugarcane fields. My school is 4 km away from my village and road is lonely. Besides a risk factor, girls can't attend school because of housework.

My elder sister is Asha worker and she introduced me to Varsha Tai. I attended Yuvati Melawa at ShirurKasar and decided to try hard for success in my life with the help of LekLadkiAbhiyan. After coming to Satara, I

enrolled my name to nursing course. After passing the course, I'm now working with a private hospital. I'm a hardcore opponent of dowry system and will never marry to such a greedy person.

I'm Rehana, a 23 years old girl from Muslim community. Although I come from a small village in ShirurKasartaluka, there is no custom of child marriages in our family and we

do not follow dowry system too. I've passed 12th standard exams and feel myself lucky because I could attend college regularly. My father works as a carpenter and makes furniture. I belong to a large family and have three sisters and two brothers.

My family income is very low and expenses are high. I had to study and work together. I had to earn money for my fees by working in cotton fields. After coming to Satara, Varsha Tai helped me to complete my trainings a



nurse and now I'm self-dependent. My marriage is recently fixed with a person who works in Pune. I'll continue working after marriage and will help my husband.

I'm Jayashri, an ambitious girl from a small village in Beed district. Today I'm 21 and have completed nursing training from Civil Hospital, Satara. I'm living here from March 2017. Before that, my family members were trying to fix my marriages,

but I convinced them not to make hurry. I was introduced to Varsha Tai in YuvatiMelawa and decided to come to Satara.





I've now completed my training and working with a private hospital for the last six months. Now, I want to join a Government Nursing Collage to get degree, so that I will be able to get a better job and more income. I'll never get married before I get a better job.

I'm Vaishnavi from a small village in Beed district, where nobody can think about modern technology and computers. Nobody can even think that uninterrupted power supply is possible. On this backdrop, today I'm happily working with a computerised photo shoppie. I design wedding photo albums on computer screen. But it was not that easy for me, because my family members had decided to create my own wedding album few years



back when I passed HSC exams. I refused to marry with the help of activists of LekLadkiAbhiyan, who convinced my family members. Then I joined a computer course and became a skilled designer. I'll marry only after being self-dependent.

My name is Ruksar and making you beautiful is my profession. Today, while working with a beauty parlour at Pune, I remember the days when my marriage was fixed at the age of 17. My engagement was also done. But, I told my family members that I want to learn and earn before getting married. No one from my village can even think that a girl can work and earn.

Fortunately, I was a member of Kishori Gat formed by LekLadkiAbhiyan in my village. Asha worker had given me a form to fill and I could get vocational training according to my liking. I



completed 30 days beauty parlour training program in ShirurKasar and after practicing there for some days, came to Pune for a job. Refusing to marry and joining the course was an important decision that shaped my life.

My name is Ranjana and I want to drive kids to their schools either by school-bus or by auto. I've not yet completed 18th year of my age but yes, I can drive four wheeler due to the vocational course undertaken by LekLadkiAbhiyan. I got training to drive a

vehicle for 40 days at ShirurKasar.

As soon as I'll get driving license, I can start my new profession. I am associated with LekLadkiAbhiyan through Kishori Gat in our village that bears a name of SainaNehval. I'm thinking of taking loan from a bank for a commercial vehicle. My parents, who were trying for



my marriage two years ago, are now supporting me foreconomic self reliance. The discussions in my family about my marriage are fully stopped and my family members are eagerly waiting to see me driving my own vehicle.

Child marriages and related illegal practices like dowry system are occurreddue to a specific lifestyle of majority of the people in ShirurKasar block of Beed. Almost 80 per cent adult population migrate for six to eight

months every year in a production season of sugar factories in Western Maharashtra. They do not bother about the services they get from government machinery because they live in their villages for a very short period. When they leave homes, they feel uneasy as they are worried

about the safety of their adolescent girls. They think that child marriage is the easiest way to overcome this anxiety. Let's see how these practices make all the systems weaker and weaker.

Lack of flexibility



As per the government decision, a residential school is provided for the SC-ST students at every Taluka place. The government residential school at Shirur-Kasar is a well maintained one and have a capacity of 100 students. Students are provided with healthy diet. Saperate hostel is built for girls, but only boys can get admission

to residential school. Girls have to seek their place in schools outside the residential campus. As the hostel is far away from the town, it is inconvenient for girls to travel. No vehicle is available and girls have to walk at least 1.5 Km.

ShirurKasar is a VJNT dominant block and majority of the adult population migrates seasonally. SC-ST students are comparatively few in number in this area. As the result, many hostel rooms remain idle every year. If the girls belonging to VJNT community are allowed to stay there, they can complete their education and their parents can also migrate for work

without fear. Teaching and non teaching staff in this school is efficient. A little flexibility is needed for passing over the benefits to really needy people.

Many problems can be solved by two policy decisions. 1. Admission for girls in a residential school & 2. Alloting surplus seats to VJNT students. LekLadkiAbhiyan is keeping after these demands, so that a little flexibility could result in a major change in the situation.

We call it 'Anganwadi'

A cement road leads to a big and beautiful temple in ShirurKasar. Premises of the temple is very clean. On the other hand, there is a very small and dangerous building of Anganwadi in front of the same temple. Anganwadi premises is very ugly and kids have to learn and play in a company of dangerous stray dogs and dirty pigs.

This is not the only example. Majority of the Anganwadi buildings in this block are in the same condition. Anganwadi is a foundation of education. If fresh environment is not provided to the kids at this stage, they will distract from education. The educational dropout is a serious problem in this area. Seasonal migration of the adult population has already made the education secondary for these people. They think that when their kids will grow up, they will have to work as sugercane cutting labour.



We think we will have to percolate the thought that education can change the fate of children. So we as LekLadkiAbhiyan started construction of the Anganwadi building at ShirurKasar and the work is almost completed. But the efforts are not enough. There are 47 Anganwadis without building in this tehsil. They are on paper only.

Risky schooling

Education shapes our life and educated generation shapes our nation. So, due importance should be given to schools. But in ShirurKasar block, even school buildings can tell us a story of the quality of education. Most of the buildings are old and needed to be repaired. Broken roofs and walls tells how dangerous the school buildings are for the students. School buildings in many villages like ShirapurDhumal, Malegaon, Disalewadi, Warani, Chahurwadi, Vadali, Hingewadi, Rupur, Zapewadi, Mangewadi, Ukada, Gajipur, VadachiWadi, Anandgaon, Dhokwadi, Bhanakwadi, Sangalwadi are the example of how risky the schooling is.

LekLadkiAbhiyan has provided financial assistance to undertake repairing work of the school building at Limba. It has also raised this problem at various platforms. School building should attract students, but the buildings in this area threaten students.

It's very urgent to repair school buildings

before any unfortunate incident happens.No washrooms are provided to the girls in many schools. Girls have to travel for more than an hour to attend school. So, after leaving home in the morning, they have to spend more than seven to eight hours out of their homes. Can we even think about spending this much time without washroom? Isn't it harmful for health? Moreover,



the students can't get clean, pure drinking water at many school premises. Nobody cares for cleanliness of school premises. Is it fair to play with the future of young generation?

Admission and Exams

What is education? A shocking answer is 'Admission and Exams'. Many students, especially girls go to school once for admission and then directly appear to exams. Anyone can easily imagine the standard of education. There are so many educational institutes throughout the district. But education is nothing but a business. Passing is more important than knowledge.



A problem is obviously rooted in the lifestyle here. Some of those who migrate for sugarcane cutting, carry their children with them, who work as 'Half Koyata'. A term 'One Koyata' is used for two laborers - husband and wife. Children help them as 'Half Koyata'. Advances are accepted by the parents in the name of children and contractors carry them to fields along with parents. The children left behind in a village with their grandparents also have to work. They either help in housework or in a cotton fields. At the end of educational year, they appear to exams. Before 2010 there was a facility of SakharShala, a school connected to a suger factory, where children could study. After a new education policy was declared, SakharShalas were closed and a facility

of VasatiShala (Residential School) was provided to the children near their own village. Arrangements of residence and meals for the children were made at school. But still practice of migrating with parents continued and VasatiShalas became means of corruption. Fictitious logs and entries in attendance register of such schools became common. VasatiShala is the best example of how a great concept is ruined by corrupt system. As a result, most of the children have no option to stay away from education and work as 'Half Koyata'. Thus, knowledge is far away from these children, even after implementation of a new education policy. The focus is only on passing and not on learning. There are so many complaints of malpractices during exams. But, who bothers?

Lonely path... No vehicle

Schooling is more difficult for girls, especially for those who have to go to adjoining village. Many girls have to walk four to five kilometers if they want to attend the school. The road is lonely and emergency help is impossible. As their parents are away from village, girls become soft target for men of bad tendency. More shocking thing is that, such incidents are ignored and no complaint is registered for molestation. Prestige gets more importance than safety. Police also don't consider this



problem seriously. There are many cases in which a complaint is registered after Court directives. Girls therefore, avoid to attend school regularly.

State Transport Corporation do not provide buses according to time schedule of schools. Here also a little flexibility is needed. ST fare is fixed according to stages. If many villages are to be covered in a single trip, it is necessary to increase fare due to increase in distance. If some trips are designed exclusively for school-going children and exempted from the tariff rules,



girls will attend school regularly and travel without fear. LekLadkiAbhiyan is keeping after this issue on various platforms. Girls have also raised voice at the first ever public hearing by The State Child Rights Commission.

With the help of donations received by generous persons and charitable societies, LekLadkiAbhiyan has started providing bicycles to girls, so that they can travel together to school.

Rules... What's that?

It is general practice that a female caretaker is appointed at girls hostel. While working in ShirurKasar block, LekLadkiAbhiyanreceived a complaint against a male teacher at Ashram Shala. Girls were under pressure due to his misbehavior. In fact there is a clear provision in a

Government Resolution that a female caretaker should be appointed at Ashram Shalas. But in the process of investigating the complaint, we came to know that many Ashram Shalas don't follow the rules. Most of the schools are run by the trusts and the founders are politically influential persons. Fake entries are made in the register to obtain more grants.

In short, Girls are not safe anywhere and the parents are incapable to fight the adversities.



They are left with the only option. As they know that child marriage is against the law, some of them obtain fake Adhar card. LekLadkiAbhiyan raised objection about admissibility of Adhar card as age proof and stucked up to the demand that only school leaving certificate should be admissible as the authentic proof.

Thus, the battle has begun from making them follow the simple rules and it will end with making them feel that they are respectable citizens of the world's sixth largest

economy.

Towards transformation....

YuvatiMelawa at ShirurKasar was the beginning of transformation. Girls attended the event in a large number and expressed their feelings. It helped us understand their suppression both due to the situation and system. We decided to work in the direction of developing a generation of

girls which will be self dependent. The process of confidence building started with various vocational courses and girls are now thinking that they can change their fate. The first ever public hearing for adolescent children by the State Child Rights Protection Commission geared up the process of transformation. During the hearing, girls raised all the issues relating infrastructure. Issues like dangerous school building, quality of education, lack of washrooms and clean drinking water at school, condition of approach roads and time-table of bus trips. Child Rights Commission sought clarifications from the officers from concerned departments. Meanwhile, officers from State Transport Corporation promised the Commission that bus routes and time-table will be designed according to requirement. Officers kept their promise and one such bus trip is recently started. Some more trips are expected to start in coming days. Government departments and officers are co-operative with us in many ways. The process of transformation is not that easy, as we all know. But we strongly believe that it's possible with collective efforts by locals, government machinery and LekLadkiAbhiyan. We do not expect everything from the government. We also request charitable trusts and generous people to help in this process. Repairs of some school buildings, water supply scheme for some villages, construction of washrooms in the school campus, providing bicycles to girls, construction of Anganwadi building, assistance to the people facing drought are few examples to give clear message that we believe in collective efforts. Yes, we are on the way of transformation. A change will come!

