



CHILD BRIDES NO MORE!

Story of a community-led Initiative against child marriages in Jharkhand



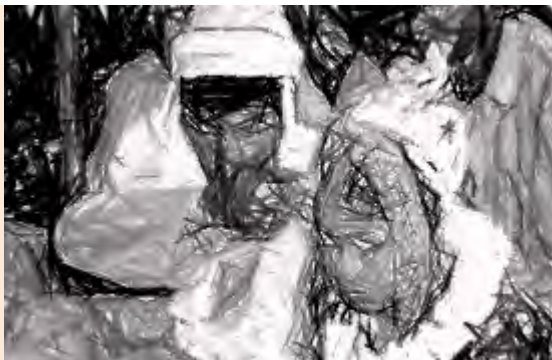
Nilima and Monica, both 14 years of age, were good friends. They played together, went to the same school and lived in the same village of Dhanbad district in Jharkhand.

On their way to school, they would often stop their cycles at a tea shop, where several other classmates would join them and they would cycle to the school together, to escape eve-teasing.



In the summer of 2016, Monica suddenly stopped coming to school. Worried, Nilima and her friends reached out to her younger brother to find out why.

Monica's brother told them about her marriage fixed in the following month. She wanted to study, but her parents didn't want her to attend school any longer or to play with friends.



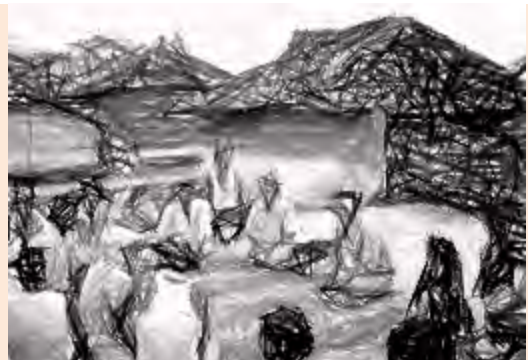
Soon, Monica was married off to a boy from the neighbouring village. The boy was a year older to her and worked at a construction site in a nearby town.

Nilima and her friends were sad that Monica had to discontinue her studies. They, however, knew that the same fate awaited them as well!



One afternoon in 2016, two young men came to their village. They were associated with an organization based in the neighboring district and were keen to learn about the lives of children in the village.

The two men started coming to the village regularly and met different groups of women, men and children. They chatted with people to learn about harms faced by children, and also about community's expectations from children.



A number of challenges faced by children were identified during those meetings, e.g. harassment faced by girls on way to school, pressure on children to contribute to family income, discrimination against girls, child marriages, etc.

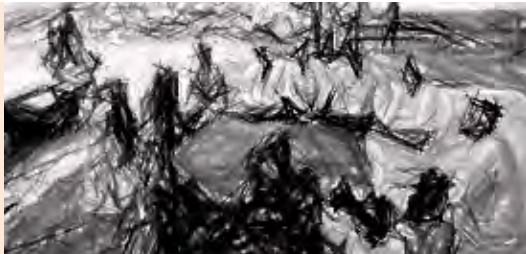
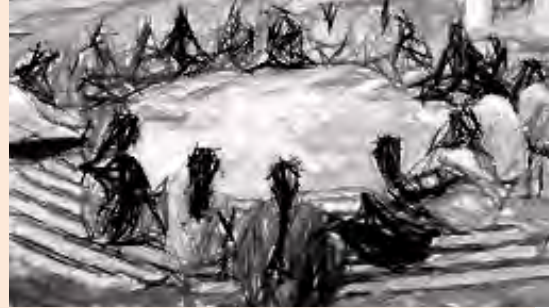
The issues were discussed at length during a village level meeting. The two young men urged people to think if the community could resolve any of the issues.





To Nilima's surprise, many people in the village expressed the need to stop the practice of child marriages. They felt it would benefit children of all social groups and there was no need to approach any external agency for this.

Several people came forward. They identified natural leaders from each habitation of the village and formed a forum, inclusive of men, women and adolescent children. Only those who would be able to spare time for the initiative were included.



Soon, the forum prepared a plan to move forward. They decided to reach out to various habitations and initiate discussions on the pros and cons of having children married early.

A day finally came in 2019 when the entire community came together and pledged the following for the children:

- *The opportunity to study at least up to higher secondary level;*
- *The opportunity for girls to decide if they are ready for marriage;*
 - *All marriages to be dowry-free.*



Nilima and her friends are very happy. They hope to join a university one day and make their family and village proud. Life is now shining on them!

Co-learners in the community-led initiative:

