

Two Bihar Dalit women in Nobel race

PRANAVA K CHAUDHARY

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PATNA: A ray of hope for recognition on a global scale is there for Bihar's two illiterate, Dalit women social activists working at the grassroots level. Both of them belong to a Yadav-dominated nondescript Lakhsaur Khairi village in Madhubani district.

The two Dalit women, Tiliya Devi (in her mid-40s) and America Devi (in her mid-30s), who are associated with the Jhanjharpur-based people's organisation "Lok Shakti Sangathan", are among those on the preliminary list of nominees for this year's Nobel Peace Prize which is to be given to 1,000 women from all over the world jointly.

Tiliya fought opposition from all quarters, including in her home, for bringing about a change in the life of her downtrodden community. Along the way, she succeeded in rallying hordes of women in favour of her fight for a better life and took on the might of the upper-caste people who had encroached upon the agricultural land belonging to Mushars. She contested the panchayat elections and has been working as a panchayat samiti member since 2001. America, another mushar woman, began her career as a social activist about 15 years ago. Becoming part of the social movement was only the first step. America later took on the Bihar government — first, a minister who had taken over a village pond belonging to Dalits, and then, the government itself which had denied Dalits employment. She won both the fights, and even forced a reexamination of the government policy. Initially, not many people were willing to take seriously a few illiterate women protesting without the support of even their husbands, but America changed all that.

In Jharkhand, a lone organisation, "Ayo Aidari Trust", has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Three tribal women — Munni Hembrom (born in 1969), Agnes Murmu (born in 1962) and Agatha Baskey (born in 1975) — have shown enormous grit and resourcefulness in setting up the organisation which works for the empowerment of the women of Santhal tribe to which they also belong. Out of 1,000 women who are to be given the Nobel Peace Prize jointly, 157 will be from South Asia, the largest number from any region. There are 16 nominees from Bangladesh, nine from Nepal, 29 from Pakistan, 12 from Sri Lanka and 91 from India, programme coordinator in India Juhi Jain told ToI on phone from Delhi.

Jain said the number of the nominees from India is the highest. These figures show the immense contribution of South Asian women to peace, justice, human rights and sustainable livelihoods.

Two Bihar Dalit women nominated for Nobel Peace Prize

Indo-Asian News Service

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Two Dalit women from Bihar have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize this year for their work on empowering the disadvantaged sections of society.

Tiliya Devi, 40, is a member of the panchayat committee of Madhuban district's Lakhnore block and America Devi, 35, is a social activist.

The two women are among the 92 Indian women and a total of 1,000 women worldwide that have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005.

Both the women belong to the poorest of poor Dalit community of Musahars that is known to eat rats for survival.

The work of these Nobel-nominated extraordinary women includes fighting against powerful landlords for Dalits' land rights, waging war against social evils like alcohol and empowerment of poor, particularly landless women.

The nomination of Tiliya and America for the prestigious prize assumes much significance because they are illiterate and landless farm labourers unlike other educated women nominated for this category.

Tiliya, a mother of six, was ousted forcibly by her husband a few years ago for taking up the cause of poor Dalits. But this did not deter her for she set up Lok Shakti - an organisation to fight for rights of the poor.

She has helped settle dozens of Dalits on a 13-acre land that she managed to free from the clutches of landlords who had encroached it illegally decades ago.

"Thanks to Tiliya's efforts, Dalits in the area now have a roof over their heads, and their children go to school," a district official said.

Similarly, America freed a seven-acre pond from the grip of powerful landlord, helping fishermen regain control of the water and have a source of livelihood.

Nobel contenders from rat eaters race

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Patna: Two women activists of the lower cast Musahar community of Madhubini district in Bihar are among those on the preliminary list of nominees for this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

These two women -- Talya Devi and America Devi -- belong to an extremely poor sect, which is known for eating rats for survival. The two are among 1,000 women from across the world nominated for the peace prize.

They have made a mark towards empowerment of women and fighting feudalism in State while belonging to a small village.

America Devi, in her 30s, began a career as a social activist nearly 15 years ago. She took up a fight with a state minister, who had taken over a village pond belonging to the Musahars, and later on, with the State government, which had denied employment to many lower caste people or Dalits.

She won both the fights and even forced a re-examination of government policy. She has her goals set for the future.

"My main aim is that our society progresses. As far as it would be possible, I will fight for the status of women in our society so that the mission to empower women in villages gains strength," America told a news conference in Patna.

Taliya, in her mid-40s, fought opposition from all quarters, including her home, for bringing about a progressive change in her downtrodden community.

She became the rallying point for hordes of women to take on the might of members of the upper caste who had encroached upon agricultural land belonging to the Musahars.

She contested panchayat elections and has been working as a panchayat member since 2001.

Taliya hopes she can contribute towards rampant unemployment in her area of social work.

Out of 1,000 women in the race jointly for the Nobel Peace Prize, 157 will be from South Asia, the largest number from any region. There are 91 nominees from India, 16 from Bangladesh, nine from Nepal, 29 from Pakistan and 12 from Sri Lanka.

The nominations from India include noted writer Mahasweta Devi, Captain Lakshmi Sehgal and a number of women activists working at the grassroots

levels for women's empowerment in different parts of the country.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee is expected to announce the winner on October 14.

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