

TRANSCRIPT:

Fire in Our Hearts

a BYkids film
THEIR WORLD THEIR FILMS



[Captions]: 80 million tribal people live in India today. Their cultures and traditions are an important part of India's ancient civilization. But many worked as slaves to landlords because they could not repay small loans. They were illiterate and did not know that this bondage was against the law. In the late 1970s a movement to free these slaves began near the city of Mumbai. Tribal men and women formed a labor movement and succeeded in freeing themselves from bondage. Ten years ago, the union's members built a residential school for their daughters. Nearly every girl at this school is the first in her village to receive an education.

Teacher: Okay, ready? One, two, three, start!

[Students sing]

Jayshree Janu Kharpade: My name is Jayshree Janu Kharpade and I made this movie. I am a sixteen-year-old girl from the Warli tribe in Maharashtra State, India. Me, and all the girls here at my school, are the lucky ones. We are the first generation who will not be illiterate like our mothers.

Students sing: For too long we have been under attack, we have been assaulted by injustice. But now there is a fire in our hearts, we will fight for change. For too long we have tolerated our suffering. We have watched each other dying at work in other people's fields. But now we are listening to our hunger, we will change our lives.

Jayshree: When I first learned that I was being considered to make a movie about my life, I got very excited. But at the same time I got scared. I had never seen a movie camera before. But with Hindavi-tai to translate, Joyce and Cat taught me the basics of camera and sound. Now I was ready to begin. All the girls at our school, including me, have faced struggles at a very young age. I would like to tell you about those struggles.

When I went home during the last Diwali vacation, I told my mom, that I'm getting a chance to make a movie about my life. She was so happy that I was getting this kind of opportunity, she was so excited that her daughter had been chosen to make a movie. But just before we started shooting she died. I want to dedicate this movie to her, my mom.

My family is so important to me and I want you to meet them first. They live two hours away from the school in a small hamlet called Harohale. Harohale is about 5 km away from this town and very different. It has no shops or people rushing around like here.

My father.

My mother died on December 12th. It was an extremely difficult time for our family. My father had no one to help him look after my sister and two younger brothers while he worked. Mom was breast feeding my baby sister then. Without her milk, my sister kept crying. She wanted our mother. Thankfully, my father's sister stepped in to help. It wasn't easy for her to take care of us and her own kids, but she did. Many relatives and others in our village told my father he should pull me out of school. They said I should be looking after my family. But my father stood up for me when everyone was talking. And his sister agreed to continue helping our family.

Please sit, Dad. Only you supported my going back to school. Why?

Jayshree's Father: I wanted you to be educated. I knew that by getting an education, you could become independent one day, you could stand on your own. You should pursue your education for as long as you want to. It will give you a good future.

Jayshree: This is a brick kiln where my parents and other tribals migrate each year in search of work. They get very low wages but they have no other choice. Back home in the villages there's no way to survive. The whole family migrates together. They live together in grass huts with no running water or electricity. My parents used to take me with them to look after my young brothers and help them out on the site. I used to carry the bricks on my head like this. I cried because of the pain in my legs.

I once asked my mother why other kids go to school and I don't. She told me, "Education is not for poor people like us. It's a luxury we can't afford." This is my uncle and aunt. I used to do this work until I was ten. We would put clay into a pit like this and create mud by mixing water into it. Then we'd throw that mud outside the pit just like my aunt is doing now.

Uncle, why is my cousin Kishor here not attending school?

Uncle: His siblings are younger with no one to look after them.

Jayshree: So when did Kishor have to leave his school?

Uncle: He was a regular at school, but he had to leave in the third grade to look after the little ones.

Jayshree: Was he interested in his studies?

Uncle: Yes, he was. But at the time we had a tricky situation at home and had to make that decision.

Jayshree: Auntie, how do you feel about my cousin Yogita now attending our residential school?

Auntie: We're happy. The education there is good.

Jayshree: So you want Yogita to get educated?

Auntie: Yes, we're trying to give her a good education.

Jayshree: How many more days will you work here this year?

Uncle: Six months.

Jayshree: So in six months when you return home, what will you do?

Uncle: We'll collect and sell firewood.

Jayshree: You are a union activist. How did you convince my parents to enroll me in the school?

Union Activist: Our union had decided to help children keep going to school when their parents migrated. I went to your village and saw young children there who were not going to school. Your father was the village committee head for our union in those days. So I asked him why children in the area weren't getting an education. The next day I went to your house and I asked your father why you weren't going to school. I told him that if you don't go to school, it would be a big loss. You'd always be illiterate. Without an education, you wouldn't be able to protect yourself in the future even when you got married. You'd be vulnerable to exploitation and disrespect. Your father and I had a good relationship. We shared a similar way of thinking. He said, "Yes, I will enroll her."

[Students Learning]

Jayshree: I attended first grade in my village school but had to drop out to look after my brothers. After a three year gap, I was enrolled in the second grade at our school for tribal girls. It was really difficult for me in the beginning. I'd been out of school for three years. I couldn't read or write. I couldn't even remember how to hold a pencil in my hand. But Madam Kamini was my teacher then and she helped me to learn reading and writing. Later, I managed to pass the 5th, 6th, and 7th grades in one year by taking many classes at one time. This school has made terrific changes in me. I became a scholar.

Our school only goes up to the 7th, so I continue to live there but attend a public high school nearby. Every day, a group of us older girls from the school take a bus there. By working hard, I hope to get my degree in engineering. My father is very proud that I'm also the class monitor.

Vivek Pandit: We will fight! We will win!

Crowd: We will fight! We will win!

Jayshree: This is Vivek Pandit, my inspiration. He is a great leader. Today, we are with him in the Medha village. The people here warmly welcome him because he helped free them from the debt bondage that had made them slaves.

Vivek: The laborers will come! People who steal from us will go! We are humans! We are humans!

Jayshree: This is Vidyullata Pandit, who worked with her husband from the beginning to build this movement. She often went to jail for that. She is always active with women's rights issues. Today the village is celebrating the return of titles to their lands which had been stolen from them by powerful landowners, or were never recognized as theirs by the government.

Bhau, after you formed the labor union and helped organize thousands of workers, what was the motivation to start our school?

Bahu: When we freed our people from bondage, many of them were illiterate. Even their young children were not attending school, as landlords and other upper caste people were treating them as untouchables. They weren't even allowed to drink water from the same wells or pots as the upper castes. Our people used to sit on the ground, as they weren't supposed to sit on a chair because they are from a lower caste. So, our first struggle was against this brutal treatment. We organized our people, and taught them that we are not animals, we are human beings. We have the right to live life with dignity. We told them not to eat the stale or leftover food that the upper castes used to throw at

them. We forced them to sit on chairs, instead of on the ground. Back then, when people used to buy bus tickets they would hesitate to board the bus with upper caste people. They were scared to sit next to them. We fought to remove that hesitation. We told them to say, "We don't want sympathy, we want our rights." By 1995, we realized that we'd successfully secured many of our rights. Our people got their land back through the labor union's struggle. They could now earn their bread and butter. It was time we turned our attention towards education. We decided to build a school for boys and girls. But then we learned about the very low literacy rate of girls among the Katkari tribe. So we decided to start a special school for tribal girls. But we started this school not only for you to be educated. It's now your responsibility to also empower our people through education. We still have a lot to do for the betterment of our people.

Jayshree: Yes, Bhau. I will get educated like you and work hard for the empowerment of our society.

Mother and 2 Children: [Singing] We shall overcome. We shall overcome. We shall overcome someday. Oh, for deep in my heart, I know that we shall overcome someday. We work hand in hand. We work hand in hand. We will walk hand in hand someday. For, deep in my heart, I do believe that we shall overcome someday.

Jayshree: What kind of work does your mother do?

Classmate 1: My mother is a single mother, my parents are separated. They used to fight. My father has left us and now my mother looks after us. We are a total of four siblings. One older sister got married so now we three are her responsibility. She earns our living by gathering scrap. Before I enrolled in this school, I used to go around to gather scrap with my elder sister. An activist from the labor union saw us there and told my mother, "Don't spoil your daughter's education, We have a school. Let her enroll there."

Jayshree: What are your mother's hopes for your future?

Classmate 1: She tells me to study hard to become a doctor. Becoming a doctor is my dream also.

Jayshree: What do you want to become in the future?

Classmate 2: I want to become a teacher.

Jayshree: So do you know what you have to do to become a teacher?

Classmate 2: Yes, to study hard.

Jayshree: What do you want to become in the future?

Classmate 3: I want to become a policewoman.

Classmate 4: I want to become a social worker.

Jayshree: How did you get enrolled in this school?

Classmate 4: With the help of activists from the labor union.

Jayshree: Before you enrolled in this school, were you attending school at your village?

Classmate 4: Yes, I was enrolled, but I was not attending regularly because of household chores.

Jayshree: You are the Chief Minister of our school, so how do you handle the problems of our girls?

Chief Minister: I always try to understand their problems, but if I can't, I present the problems to our teachers so they can solve them.

Jayshree: Rupali is our Minister of Health. While the student ministers meet, labor union representatives also meet on our campus. It now has 50,000 members. We gained our freedom because of the freedom fighters who came before us. They have been my inspiration since the first day I arrived here when I was still a child.

Bhau is now a member of the State Legislature and he and some union activists are making a surprise inspection of a tribal school for girls run by the government. Bhau has invited me to learn what is going on.

I'm surprised to see there's only one classroom for the whole school. The girls sleep on the floor.

Bhau: Does the female superintendent provide you the necessary things? Soap? Toothpaste?

Jayshree: Toilet stalls are in place but there aren't any toilets, or electricity.

Bhau: This is the toilet... The bathroom... This is the micronutrient supplements. Which is not necessary at all. We are spending millions of rupees, they have purchased this and just distributing it. And I know this factory, which is known for bribing the government officials and ministers to purchase their product. These are also useless. This micronutrient supplement. If you give better grains then you don't need it. See the quality of grain. So you're not providing good grain and spending on micronutrients.

How many girls do you have here in this residential school?

Teacher: Sixty... thirty six?

Bhau: Full sentence:

Teacher: There are twenty-six [unintelligible] here.

Bhau: He's a teacher.

Don't let him go, don't let him go! If our government tribal schools have english teachers like you, what would be the future of these children!

Mother: How dare you come drunk on duty when you are teaching adolescent girls?

Bhau: We will agitate to ensure the rights of these tribal students. We'll ensure a well-equipped building is constructed and good, qualified teaching staff are hired. Will you join us in this agitation?

Crowd: Yes.

Bhau: Louder.

Crowd: Yes!

Bhau: Do you want a well constructed school?

Crowd: Yes.

Bhau: A good teaching staff?

Crowd: Yes!

Bhau: Attend school in the same building you sleep in?

Jayshree: [Singing] Look within your hearts, you will find fire burning by which we want to change our atrocious present.

Crowd: [Singing] Look within your hearts, you will find fire burning by which we want to change our atrocious present

Jayshree: [Singing] We tolerate a lot. Our many laborers have died on the farms of landlords.

Crowd: [Singing] We tolerate a lot. Our many laborers have died on the farms of landlords.

Jayshree: [Singing] Now our hunger is calling us to change the present.

Crowd: [Singing] Now our hunger is calling us to change the present.

Jayshree: [Singing] We soldiers have started this battle...

Crowd: [Singing] We soldiers have started this battle...

Students: [In call and response with teacher] Education is our right. Not a privilege of the upper classes.

Who will stop us from winning our rights? We will seize our rights.

Long live our struggle.

[Credits roll]