

## RISING STAR

TRUST  
HER  
TALENT

*A mother's grit determination for prioritising her daughter's schooling despite myriad challenges pays off with the latter's unprecedented success in sports*

It came as a surprise for Mani Maddi when her 13-year-old daughter, Vandana Murmu, returned from hostel and informed that she had been selected for inter-school kho kho championship. As a child growing up in Madhuban village of Jamtara district, Jharkhand, Vandana had hardly ever displayed her calibre in sports, probably because she never really got a chance.

Vandana belongs to a region in India where social norms, dictated by patriarchal outlook, don't allow girls a chance to exhibit their skills in domains other than domesticity. In fact, Jamtara features top among the high-prevalence districts of child marriage in Jharkhand, with 51% (women aged 20-24 years who have been married before the age of 18) as against the national average of 24% (NFHS 5 2019-21). In such a scenario, talent such as Vandana's tend to remain disguised.

### Untapped Potential

"We didn't know much about kho kho until our daughter started playing it in school," recalls Mani, who is associated with Self-Help Group, Srijan Ajeevika Sakhi Mandal, as an Active Woman. "But seeing her enthusiasm, I convinced my husband to allow her to participate in the competition," she adds.

Little did she know then that Vandana was soon going to win accolades for her village by representing Jamtara at state level championship (held in Dhanbad district early this year) and then

representing Jharkhand at the 32nd Sub Junior National Kho Kho Championship, held in Maharashtra during October 2022.

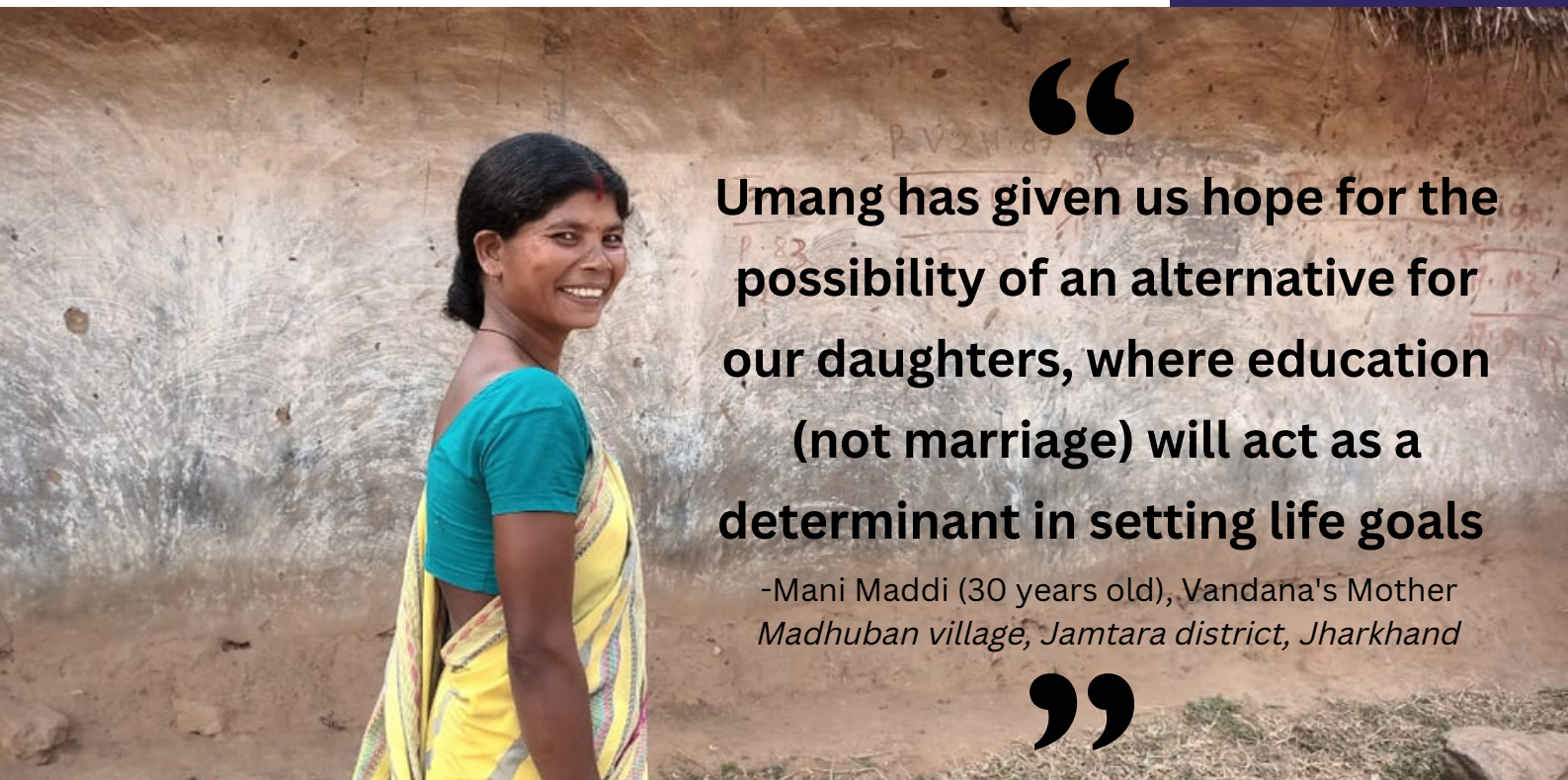
"Girls from Jharkhand have no dearth of stamina," points out Madhuri Sinha, Vandana's Physical Education Teacher at Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (Jamtara, Jharkhand). "However, they often lag owing to lack of awareness and guidance. Many talented girls don't excel because their parents considered sports as a futile activity for girls. Luckily, Vandana has a supportive mother who allows her to pursue her interests," she adds.

Vandana Murmu is a classic case of how placing girls in the education system (schools) can help identify & channelise their hidden potential. This is also the story of a mother's grit determination for prioritising her daughter's schooling despite myriad challenges at her end.

Being wife of migrant labourer and a mother of four daughters (aged between 2 and 13, the eldest being Vandana), it hasn't been an easy life for 30-year-old Mani Maddi. Apart from financial crunch and difficulties in making ends meet, she is often subject to neighbours' taunts for not bearing a male child and sending her eldest daughter to school instead of preparing her for household responsibilities.

"I have been subject to constant judgment and societal pressure. But I don't care anymore," says Mani. This change in outlook has





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 ”

-Mani Maddi (30 years old), Vandana's Mother  
*Madhuban village, Jamtara district, Jharkhand*

come in the last three years since Mani associated with the Jharkhand State Livelihoods Promotion Society (JSLPS) as an Active Woman and was introduced to Project Umang.

## Umang Brings Hope

Working on the principle of “Inter-generational Transmission of Empowerment from Mother to Daughter”, Umang aspires to reduce prevalence of child/early marriage by 15-20% in high-prevalence districts in Jharkhand and empower adolescent girls. It is currently active in 2 districts of Jharkhand – Jamtara and Godda. It strongly advocates the fact that an aware mother will raise empowered daughters.

“Umang has made me realise the potential of my influence in shaping the future of my daughters. Repeated deliberations during Umang sessions, followed by home visits by Village Organisation leaders and members, have reinforced the idea of me participating in major decision making for my daughters’ lives and how I should be negotiating with my husband to protect their interests,” says Mani.

As an Active Woman Mani’s role involves – ensuring that all SHG members participate in Umang sessions; encouraging mothers to participate in household decision making, especially those pertaining to their daughters’ future; encouraging mothers to send their daughters to school; informing them about Prohibition of Child Marriage Act and the ill effects of child/early marriage.

She herself is a school dropout who could study only till 8th standard, following which she was married at 16s. She wants to ensure that her daughters do not share her fate.

*Since its inception in 2019, Umang has engaged more than 178,000 women, including 1,314 active women*

“Umang has also given hope for the possibility of an alternate life for our daughters, where education will act as determinant in setting life goals instead of marriage,” she says.

“I wish our adolescence also had a platform like Umang that could have saved us from early marriage,” says Mani. “I certainly don’t want a similar life for my daughters. Hence, I will do every possible thing to give them a life I ever had,” says Mani.

Mani is among the 178,000+ women Umang has engaged with so far, since its inception in October 2019. These include 1,314 Active Women who are associated with it. Its primary objectives include capacitating women collectives to create an enabling environment & encouraging adolescent girls to fulfil their aspirations & life choices; and establishing a scalable and sustainable model for addressing child/early marriage through the SHG platform. What started with one block each in Jamtara & Godda districts as a pilot in 2019, has expanded to 13 blocks in both the districts. By far it has reached out to 3,400+ villages and capacitated 15,035 SHGs, 1,218 VOs and 61 CLFs

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