

## Case Study: Sita Kumari (14)



SITA KUMARI, from the tiny tribal village of Hutup in Ranchi District, attends 9<sup>th</sup> class at a local government school. She is the second of five daughters – Gita, Sita, Reeta, Neeta and Babita! – of Muni Devi, an illiterate housewife who earns some income by brewing rice beer, and Charku Mahto, a daily wage mason commuting to nearby Ranchi city. Her family’s income is roughly Rs 2,500 (\$50) per month.

They have two cows (but no milk), two goats and one hen.

Unlike her two younger sisters who play on her team and are all smiles, for Sita football is a serious affair. Last spring, Sita’s parents arranged the marriage of her fifteen year old sister, and in an interview with *The Hindustan Times* (“Bend it like Bekhambhai”, Sunday 6 December 2009), her mother and father made it clear that unless something big happened for Sita, she would be next.

But things are changing. According to her mother, football has delayed the prospect of marriage. Her father says he would be delighted if she made the state team and even happier if she moved out of their house into a sports or school hostel – more titles mean less dowry and better marriage prospects, and leaving the house means one less mouth to feed.

This is looking more and more probable. After participating in a selection for the Sports Authority of India (SAI) State Girls’ U16 team in July where she was not selected, she paid attention to what was evaluated and a month later had mastered the moves. She has made it back into the final selection for the team after a few more months’ practice and a week at India’s premier football academy, Tata Football Academy (TFA) in December.

“I feel happy and I have been attending evening class [at Yuwa Club],” she says. “Study is important for me, but math is very hard. My mother’s behavior is changing. She used to always think about me doing housework.”



Sita working with her father in their vegetable garden (Photo credits: Ashok Nath Dey for *The Hindustan Times*)