

# Trained in canals, Phillaur schoolgirls make a splash

AAKANKSHA N BHARDWAJ  
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They live in 'jhuggis' adjacent to a canal in Phillaur. Their fathers do not even earn much to feed the families on a daily basis. This is a tale of the resilience and bravery of Sonia and Laxmi, girls from Government School, Jhandi Peer, Kadiana, in Phillaur, who recently participated in the district-level primary school games that were held in Adampur. There was no coach to train them, no lifeguard to protect them, but still these swimming lovers participated and surprised everyone.

Theirs was the only government school that participated in the event. Two private schools had also taken part in the contest and the girls competed with well-trained participants from private schools.

Block Primary Education Officer, Adampur, Sadhu Ram said that the girls performed really well without any help. "They will reach heights," he said.

Schoolteacher Jagjit Singh Randhawa, who encouraged the girls to take part in the event, said these young swimmers had suffered a lot in their lives. "They live in poor conditions and there were



Laxmi and Sonia at the swimming meet in Jalandhar.

“They live in poor conditions and there were times when people would help the family with food and other things. The girls learnt swimming by spending hours in the canal. Jagjit S Randhawa, TEACHER

times when people would help the family with food and other things. The girls learnt swimming by spending hours in the canal," he said.

The teacher said the girls were not regular in the school. "I once went to their jhuggis to ask the parents to send them to the school regularly. Their parents told me that the girls had gone to swim in the canal," the teacher said.

"When I went there, I saw them and called out their names. The girls got scared and within a minute, they swam to the other side. That day I was furious but I recog-

nised their talent. And when the games approached this year, I was clear in my mind that I was going to make them participate," he shared.

Raj Kumar, elder brother of Sonia, said he wished that she becomes a great swimmer in life. "She is good in studies too and we want that she earns so well in her life that she no longer has to ask others to feed her," he said.

Jagjit Singh said he would now ask officials in the area to help the girls by getting them trained properly so that they could take part in state-level games too.

