

ETHICS & ECONOMICS OF TRIBAL POPULATION OF SANTHAL PARGANAS (JHARKHAND)

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INTRODUCTION

Santhal Paragana (23°45' NL and 86°20' EL) is an oldest division and covers an area of 14.2 thousand kms in the part of Chhota Nagpur plateau which forms the part of the peninsular hills and plateau of India, is a hilly terrain, rich in natural resources. The major resources of Santhal Pargana are forest, agriculture, animals and minerals Natural vegetation in the form of forests is the best gift of nature to mankind and act as the home of wildlife and perform productive, protective and aesthetic functions as well The hilly terrain of Santhal Parganas is covered with sub-humid deciduous tropical forest and the major tribal populations of the area are Santhals and Paharias that comprise about 33% and 5% of the total population of the entire area respectively. The well known Santhal and Paharia community inhabiting the hilly tract of Santhal Pargana division of Jharkhand, constituted the backward and primitive tribes of India. Emotionally being attached to the hills, this community has been living in bushy and wooden huts built amidst the forest cover on the hill tops, hill slopes and in the foot of the hillocks since ancient times as recorded in the history. These community are extremely poor and miserable and faced all sorts of basic problems of life such as dangerously hazardous hill habitat consuming much of their energy in collecting drinking water, gathering forest products for meagre earnings by selling them in the weekly or biweekly village markets mostly at a walking distance of 5 to 7 kms from their homes. Such hard manual labour, undernutrition, malnutrition and partial starvation are the most obvious features of these people

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methods of the study included the spot observation and interview of villagers with the help of appropriate schedule. Schedules were prepared in order to gather information regarding location and situation of tribal area, forest resources and their uses, Jhum cultivation, Mahajans exploitation and economic status.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The hilly terrain of Santhal Pargana covered with sub-humid deciduous tropical forest which is dominated by Sal tree which is often associated with Sagwan, Arjun, Asan. Harre, Bahera, Shisham, Semul, Imli, Mahua, Kendu, Mango, Jamun, Kathal, Ber, Khirni, Sharifa, Bel, Babul, Siris, Palas, Pipal and Gambhar as the main floral component. In non-timber plants of other important use Bamboo, Sabe grass, Kendu, Kadam. Thatch Grass, Shatavari, Ghrit Kumari, Neem, Madar, Brahmi, Dhatura, Amala, Karanj and Ashwagandha. Bamboo, Save Grass, Thatch Grass etc. utilised variously for thatching ropes, mats, brushes, etc. whereas Kendu leaves meant for Bidi making, Sal leaves for plate making. Date Palm leaves for mattresses and brushes, Mahua flower for local wine (Daru) and Harre, Khair, Babul, Bel, Siris, Palas, Papaya, Pipal, Ber, Gambar, Mahua, jamun, Arjun, Bahera, Chirchira, Ghritkumari, Shatavari, Neem, Kachnar, Tar, Madar, Brahmi, Dhatura, Amla, Karanj, Sarpagandha, Ashok, Ashwagandha etc. are of medicinal importance.

Dhari (low land) of Santhal Pargana is used for growing kharif crops whereas Bari (Uplands) is used for the growing of fruits and vegetables Hill tops are generally used by tribals for shifting cultivation (locally known as Kuraon or Jhum cultivation).. This is a traditional agricultural system of tribals. Under Jhuming, forest are cleared partially or fully, the plants are burnt and cultivation is taken up for the new sites. The land is put under cultivation with crop mixtures for two-three years when its fertility is exhausted. The land is then abandoned, new area is searched and thus the practice of Jhum is continued in other virgin areas. The main crops grown in Santhal Pargana include grains, pulses, spices, fruits, vegetables, oil seeds, fibres,

sugarcane, other non edible crops. Among grains, paddy finds the foremost place followed by wheat, maize, marua, and barley. Kurthi is the main pulse grown in the area followed by gram, arhar and masur. Spices include garlic, onions and piper. Important vegetables of the region are potatoes, tomatoes, brinjals, pumpkin, Rape seed, Mustard, til and linseed are the main crops grown as oilseeds. Patua (jute) is the main fibre yielding crop. Ghagra locally known as Barbatti is grown in the area specially in shifting / Jhum cultivation. Maize-barbatti, maize-arhar, Jowar-Arhar-Barbatti, Maize-Jowar Soyabean-Barbatti and maize-jowar-barbatti-arhar-soyabean are common crop mixtures preferred in Jhum cultivation. Mixed cropping provides an all purpose diet to the farmer

Jhum gives high crop yield but temporarily. In the present study, it has been found that unmanaged and excessive jhuming causes massive destruction of virgin forests and their conversion into the fallow lands which are subsequently colonized by the exotic weeds which adversely affects indigenous plants by making these hill forest unproductive and poorer in plant species diversity. At the same time, jhuming practice leads to complete denudation of the forest. Other alternatives to this traditional agriculture in which the tribals are much skilled did not prove to be much fruitful to them and therefore, this practice should not be banned completely. It is suggested that proper management for regeneration of denuded natural forest is to be undertaken after jhum cultivation.

The hilly terrain of Santhal Pargana is associated with a diverse types of wild animals which are used by the tribals for food, finance, medicines and recreations. Tribals have been consuming wild animals as food and their various products serve as an important financial sources and also used as medicines for the treatment of various diseases. The serious addiction to alcoholic drinks like Mahua wine, Pocahi and toddy is the most remarkable features of the entire tribal community which is supposed to be the major reason of their present miserable health and socio-economic conditions. Hygiene of the tribals were also affected due to their habit to keep the livestock along with other households in the same courtyard or adjacent to their living room. They usually tamed lots of goats, pigs, owls and pigeons, etc. as economically beneficial livestock,

Out of large plots of unmanageable land settled in their names very small areas are cultivable that too need huge capital investment. This invites the exploiting Mahajans (money lenders). Due to continuous process of exploitation by the Mahajans from generation after generation the poor owners of the land on the hill slopes are now become bonded labourers on their own piece of land. It is observed that Jhum cultivation is in practice under the pressure and persuasion of the Mahajans. The tribals get loan from Mahajans and are so much indebted that they dare not to escape their grip. The remaining part of the year after agricultural activities are over they are left to survive on the wood cutting practice and selling them in weekly village market on negligible price. Thus, they have been mercilessly destroying the forest cover of the hills out of their ignorance. It appears that the activities like Jhum cultivation and wood cutting in tribal belt are under compulsion leading to ecological imbalance of serious nature in this area. The extent of deforestation at many places were found to exhibit its impact causing enormous soil erosion and loss of soil fertility also. As a result many hillocks have become totally nude, devoid of vegetation

A detailed picture of tribal economy drawn on the basis of data collection regarding the sources of income from agriculture, forest products (mahua, bamboos, wild fruits etc.), livestock management wages and a few other sources, tells a different story denying the existing poverty and miserable socio-economic status. Analysis of the data obtained revealed an average monthly income of tribal family in the range of Rs. 1600/- 1850/- appears to be quite sufficient for the complete redressal of present poverty and misery of the community. Massive and forceful exploitation by the Mahajans for the last several generations appears to be the major reason for the present miserable socio-economic conditions of the tribal community. The obvious result is that the landlords are reduced to mere manual labourers on their own plots of land. The analysis of their economic drainage causing poverty reveals that lion share of their annual income to the extent of 40 to 60% goes straight to the Mahajans, the so called agricultural finance from the very farmyard. These people are invariably very weak in the matter of alcoholic drink. The remaining part of the income is actually utilized by them that too in a very haphazard manner. The overall situation have created miserable conditions of life for them.

REMEDIAL MEASURES

A thorough analysis of the entire circumstances of tribals including their environment, ethics, social harmony and economic status invites the cooperation and serious attention of all concerned including the Government authorities, NGOs and Researchers besides, the sensible individuals to do the best positive actions for the redressal of their major problems. Road communication upto hill foot should be improved to remove the difficult and hazardous approach of the tribal villages. Existing nonfunctional and poorly functional schools should be renovated and revitalized by social and administrative means to promote literacy and education in tribal community. Efforts of massive afforestation should be encouraged behind mass scale

deforestation. Prominent plants of economic values (medicinal plants, fruit-timber yielding plants) needs protection, preservation and further propagation. Tasar culture practices observed in certain area of tribal belt appeared most prospective. However, extensive training and technical guidance are needed to involve the tribals in this industry (Datta Munshi et al., 1993). The scheme of Panchayat/Gramsabha be seriously executed so that they may be relieved from the grip of mahajans

Intensive literacy programme, various socio-cultural and ecological awareness alongwith training programmes must be undertaken in time for the immediate revival of the tribals and turn the wheel towards progress and prosperity of the community which has remained neglected for very long period of more than fifty years since freedom. Surprisingly, the "Freedom Pillar" of Godda town (Santhal Pargana division) set up in 1947 indicates that most of the martyrs listed on it are tribals. The first name is also that of Tribal. So, they are first to die for freedom, the last to get benefit from it.

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