

Understanding the Socio-educational Status of the Parhaiya: An account through the field experience

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Abstract: *This paper is based on field experiences and field notes of my PhD work. In this study a lesser known tribal group named Parhaiya is in focus. They are categorized as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group and inhabit in the state of Jharkhand. Though my research work primarily concerns with educational status of the said tribe, I encountered various social variations that encompass health, economy, infrastructure, awareness, lack of inter community communication, stigmatization, being responsible for the dismal state of education. In this paper, through my experiences from the field, I have delineated briefly the etic and the emic of these conditions.*

Key Words: *PVTG, Education, Jharkhand, Field Experience, Social Capital.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Parhaiya is one of the eight Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of Jharkhand, India. Amongst the 32 scheduled tribes, these eight PVTGs are in extremely vulnerable and in a situation of deprivation. The vulnerability that they face is the basis of their identification as PVTGs among other crucial parameters. This identification is based on three criteria¹-1.Pre-agriculture level of technology, 2. Low level of literacy and 3. Stagnant or diminishing population. Whether the vulnerability has anchored them into this situation or the deprived situation has made them vulnerable, invite concerns and research from a myriad of perspective. Available sources² point out that this community across its settlement resides in the remotest of areas. However, it's not clear from their history that whether they have been forced or the choice is thrust upon them to settle into the areas, which are remotely located.

The Parhaiya is a minor tribe of Chotanagpur that is found in the interior villages in some of the blocks of undivided Palamu of the then Bihar. Now they are dispersed among the districts of Palamu, Latehar, Chatra, Garhwa, Gumla of Jharkhand. This community stays generally in the inaccessible areas. Parhaiyas are in a miserable state. Their chief means of livelihood is gathering and hunting and some of them practice the slash and burn type of cultivation and they are in a state of abject poverty. Earlier this tribe was confined entirely to the hills and used to manage their livelihood mainly by bird catching, and the snaring of wild animals and by selling the medicinal herbs in the form of folk medicine. But gradually these activities have got reduced down and a few of them cultivate but mostly they make bamboo products and shifted to daily wage labor.

O Malley (1926) gave an account of the Parhaiyas as follows "At the present day many of the Parhaiyas are to be found residing in the plains, but they generally choose the more jungle villages and reside in separate tola or hamlets. Some are good cultivators, but the majority live in the hill ranges and roam about from spur to spur clearing small patches of ground on which they cultivate a few crops, and bring down to the plains honey, bee-wax, lac and jungle produce, to barter for grains, salt, tobacco and cloth". In current times, they collect honey in a group they sell it in market and share the money with the group. In earlier times, they were hunters and gatherers and practised slash and burn type of cultivation, which can only be inferred from the fact that they generally resided in the village which were closer to the forested regions, where plough cultivation seemed difficult to carry on.

The old British records do not give any indication of the migratory history of the tribe. This probably leads us to believe that they are one of the ancient settlers of the district who probably lived in peace and isolation for many centuries and thus gradually their ancient tradition and folk history sank into oblivion. Parhaiyas were unmistakably a Hinduised tribe. It appears from Dalton's³ account that the culture of this tribe was in a process of change. They imbibed many of the Hindu cultural characteristics by the time Britishers visited them.

¹ Survey Report, 2002-03, Page.7

² The Parhaiyas of Palamu, Bihar Tribal Welfare Research Institute

³ Dalton, E.T. 1872 Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal. Calcutta. He was an anthropologist and commissioner of Chotanagpur in 1861 during the British Raj.

This available literature on Parhaiya dates back to the early 90's, in the undivided Bihar. After that there is a complete historical amnesia about this community. In 2000, Jharkhand got separated from Bihar. So what has been the situation of the Parhaiyas after Jharkhand came into being in 2000. During this period no significant literature could be found on the Parhaiyas. So, here's a look at the Parhaiyas of Jharkhand from the field experience of a researcher.

2. Field Experiences:

The experiences that I have presented in this paper are majorly garnered through the field visits related with my PhD research work. The research particularly concerns with the education of the Parhaiyas. For the concerned study, interview schedule, observation, interview, focused group discussion have been used. However, there are certain experiences during the field which teach more than any theoretical book related to field methodology. In this paper I congregate my field experiences and weave them with the seam of personal anecdote and first hand field experiences.

3. The Distribution of the Parhaiyas:

In Jharkhand, the largest number of Parhaiyas are concentrated in Palamu and Latehar. In Palamu, the population of Parhaiya is 10,330 and in Latehar it is 6954⁴. The Parhaiyas of Palamu is comparatively well connected than that of Latehar. Here, in this paper major focus will be on the Parhaiyas of Latehar.

In Latehar district, the largest number of Parhaiyas live in the Barwadih block. But, I as a researcher was prohibited from entering into that area by the district administration since the area was dispute prone. In that situation, I looked for another option and it was found that Latehar block is the 2nd largest inhabitant of the Parhaiyas. Here, the maximum Parhaiyas are concentrated in two villages- Nareshgarh and Kone. Both of these villages come under Tarwadih Panchayat and they share the adjacent boundary. From the district headquarters it is around 15 km. As a researcher my main focus was to work on the educational aspect of Parhaiyas. One of the stakeholders of this study was the teachers of those specific schools where the Parhaiya children were enrolled. From the literature, it was already clear that Parhaiyas live in the remote areas, but schools are comparatively in some communicable areas. So, first, I approached the schools in the villages and met the Parhaiya children there. At the local level, first, I collected the basic information from the *Mukhiya*. Literature also says that Parhaiyas are divided on the basis of their hamlets or tolas. In the field, it was found that it was indeed the truth. In the village Kone, the Parhaiya tola is called Khudgadi. The village Kone comes on the way to Sarju project⁵. Earlier there was no proper road to reach the area, but due to Sarju plan and establishment of CRPF camps now well-connected roads are there, though often the road remains deserted. The CRPF camps were established here due to the insurgency. Kone, some part of the village is plain, to reach the place some small *kacha* roads are there, but to reach north-west of Khudgadi, no road goes there. Almost one and half km no proper road is there to reach this part of the Parhaiya tola, which is located at the foothill.

In the earlier visits, it was found that the Parhaiya tola of Nareshgarh is Telpedi. Nareshgarh, this village is at the down of the hills, it's situated at a little high altitude from Kone. To enter into Nareshgarh one river has to be crossed, though apart from August- September it remains dry, and through this river small vehicle can go to the village Nareshgarh. Inside the village there are narrow lanes. To reach the Parhaiya tola Telpedi, from the main Nareshgarh road almost half km one need to walk throughout the narrow grass-covered road. From this tola to Nareshgarh School the distance is around 2km. After spending almost 2 months in the village Nareshgarh, one day it was found one more Parhaiya tola is there named Kurpani. Though this tola comes under the village Nareshgarh, it remains completely isolated. Even the *Mukhiya* and the Parhaiyas of Telpedi never mentioned about that tola. The basic reason for their isolation is their geographic isolation. It is situated at the top of the hill. To reach the hamlet one needs to walk through unpopulated area almost 10 km. The same river needs to be crossed six times, small unseen lanes are there in between jungles which is very tough to negotiate. After 8km, one upgraded primary school is there which is taken care by a single teacher. Through the teachers' network, the information about the isolated tola of Kurpani stemmed out. Here, through this paper, I try to delineate the experiences that I had as a researcher and put forth the unreached life of the Parhaiyas of Kurpani, their views on education and how the local school teachers and other community members look down upon them. How, despite an array for policies and planning for them, their life is plagued by a day to day struggle for food, home and health. The severe scarcity of basic amenities has deprioritized education for them.

⁴ Source :As per Census of India 2011, Census Office, Jharkhand

⁵Sarju Project Sarju Area Development Action Plan (SADAP) is the rural livelihood development plan for holistic development of adivasi and tribal people across rebel-hit Sarju-Kone area in Latehar under the Ministry of rural development, GOI. It was expected that every family living in that area gets basic amenities at their doorsteps by providing all season roads. It was supposed to involve better rural electrification, promotion of educational facilities, strengthening of anganwadi centres, and the building of roads, houses, rural markets and community centres.

4. Kurpani: Perspectives from an etic:

Kurpani is the south eastern part of Nareshgarh, in the midst of jungles and hill. According to some oral tradition since water used to ooze out from the place, it was named as Kurpani. Only the Parhaiyas are concentrated in that area. To reach the area one wide dry river which mostly remains dry, needs to be negotiated at various levels. The river is full of sand. During the heavy rain when some part of the river is covered with water the communication from Kurpani to other places gets blocked. And those who have to go out of the village have to wade through the river. It has become normal for them. Apart from going on foot, no other option remains to reach the hamlet.

Here, the houses of the Parhaiyas are more asymmetrical than the houses in other Parhaiya tolas. While the place is full of jungle and in the midst of hill, from one house to another house could not be seen since the distance from one another is longer than other villages of the Parhaiyas. So, their inter communication also gets limited comparatively.

Strangers' entry into the tola, especially if that unknown person has come regarding children, the villagers don't allow and remain reluctant. In my first visit I was accompanied by one of the villagers' from Nareshgarh, still the Parhaiyas of Kurpani didn't believe me and questioned my presence and gave life threat. The factor that contributed to this was that when I was in the field, the rumour was prevalent that due to immunization, a child in school died and I was seen as one of the persons with the intention of vaccination. Rumors of child trafficking were also doing round the corner as I was mistaken sometimes as a threat to the children. It could be seen as very natural, their concern for their child, the Parhaiyas cannot be an exception to the influence of rumours. However, had it been the *Mukhiya* (instead of a common villager) with me, the same would have never happened. Before this visit, I had been to Telpedi with Mukhiya and there the Parhaiyas accepted my presence at that time very easily, but I went to them after some days, but alone this time and the same people avoided talking to me. The same situation could be implied to Kurpani inhabitants also. Had it been the Mukhiya with me, I would have been accepted there on the day first itself. In the villages of Jharkhand *Mukhiya* seems to be the most powerful in their concerned areas. Here, the power relation could be seen. Power influences their behaviour, likeness, their doing or action. Since power accompanied me, they talk with me and without power they did according to them. This is an example of how power influences the thinking as well as the action of the powerless.

After this incident, I first as a human and then as a female had to think about my steps ahead of the next field visit. I had no other choice as my main motivation work was this community and without getting to know the situation of such isolated group, my work would be some shoddy, superficial and unfinished business. After many discussions with the school teachers of Nareshgarh and Kone, I was able to find out that one NGO, *Vedic Society* works in Latehar, under which the Kurpani School is also included. So, this time I tried to go to the hamlet with one of the *Vedic Society* members after two months of my first visit. This member accompanied me to the home of that person who had warned me during my earlier visit. But this visit worked and I got the opportunity to understand and experience the situation. By frequent visits to the *tola*, I became clearer that it was not only the elders who were aggressive at the entry of an unknown person to their locality but the small children were also afraid of the same situation. During my initial visits of two-three days, I noticed it. On the very first day I saw one child sitting at the river side during the school time in his uniform, but after seeing me, he hid himself behind a tree. Another such incident happened on the day 3rd-in the river three children were swimming joyfully, but after seeing me, they tried to run away since they were afraid of an outsider.

5. Emic talk about Kurpani:

Twenty-six Parhaiya families are there in Kurpani. Each of them has land but not everyone does cultivate. A few of them get themselves involved in some cropping in whatever land they have. People here go to the jungle, work as a daily wage labourer, make bamboo products. Those who cultivate and do all these other works, by doing such activities yearly they can save Rs. 10000-12000. Their hope at some point this money will give some fruit. Through their yellow card, they are supposed to get 35 kg rice. However, out of their 35 kg ration, they get 32 kg, 3 kg siphoned off in between. Now people here have developed an interest in money and mobile phones. So they have developed the habit of migrating and doing jobs in some planning, which actually means working in a factory. For some months they go to work. If they leave their family here the lady or wife who by default becomes the head of the family, runs the house in debt. So once the man comes after earning some money, they payback those debts and the rest of the money is used for arranging basic amenities. In this way, their economic situation never gets improved.

On the other hand, those who take their family to the place they migrate to, their children don't get education, most of the months they remain out of their own area. Though RTE talks about admission into school at any time, neither they are aware of it nor is it possible for them to execute the admission process in a different and unknown set-up. Those who are little aware and cultivate apart from doing other traditional work in the hamlet itself they view that, the work of those areas (planning and other jobs) can't be better than here. One of them says, "Here you have to work staying at own home, but there you have to work under someone else. So where is the benefit? It can't be as good as here. Those who went to school they are also sitting ideally at home. After some time they too will go for such planning work. By education, they mean job only. That is why people are not interested in education here. More

often children hoard cattle and hover around jungles, more than 50% children replied they don't like to come to school but like hoarding the cattle.

In terms of basic facilities, there is an acute shortage of water here. The river they use for all the activities remains almost dry apart from the months of August- September. Small amount of water could be found at some specific catchment area of the river which is used for all the purpose. Electricity is a day dream and hogwash for them, because even Nareshgarh does not have this facility, which is relatively well connected to the district. *Mukhiya* and other leader hardly come to them. But during the election of the region, they are asked for a vote, though *Mukhiya* has never visited their place, since people tell them to vote they go for voting. The hospital facility is not in and around. "We need to carry people over *doli* (palanquin) and to cross the river then only by some vehicle we can reach the hospital."(SamanParhaiya)

Amidst all the difficulties that the villagers encounter, the villagers told there is no less effort from the government's side, but the more the government is putting efforts to bring them to the line of development, the more they seem to be getting marginalized. Community members told that the lack of awareness is one of the major reasons. According to a Parhaiya women, after getting up children start loiter around mango- jamun tree rather than going to the school. They also talked about the unhygienic condition of the Mid-Day Meal (MDM). The cook of MDM is completely neglects her job, but due to the dominance of her family, she is still in the job. It shows power within the powerless also. Whoever gets some power they will exercise it, doesn't matter whether it's over their own community, children or other. The absence of breakfast in school was reported, if they discuss it with the school teacher, she replies, *school cholana itna aasan nhi*, it's not easy to manage a school.

Loss of their language has led to the loss of their identity which has ushered them into a void. Their language lost, now they speak Sadri, they are ashamed of speaking their language. As per the information garnered from the Parhaiya people, till now, not a single child has studied beyond class viii. One woman told, *padhai ko lek eidhar ka guardian ka kami hain*(Guardians are least concerned about the education of small kids). Her two children are in Netarhat residential school which was little surprising to me as how have they reached the residential school from such a remote and inaccessible hill. During the interaction, it was found that the lady's parent home was at Chandwa, which is well connected with the humdinger of a town. She could not receive education since her parents died at her early childhood. Four five children from this *tola* are there at residential school. According to them, it's a big school with big buildings, teachers are very good there, they keep telling to bring children to that school. There is a good arrangement for staying, food, now you can't identify our child at there that they are the child from this jungle. We could not study, but I wish my children to get educated. She also asked the local people to send their child to the residential school, but they never listen to. She told if guardians are not aware how children would go to school. Government has introduced residential school for the adivasi students where all kinds of facilities are provided. According to few aware mothers of the tola, there (residential schools) the childrens are not at all influenced by their home environment. And to get admitted in residential school some basic knowledge is required. If they go to this local school and learn something then only they can be expected to get admitted to such residential school. A few Parhaiyas are aware of education, where most of them were silent regarding education. One Parhaiya man tells, 'everyone can't be admitted to the residential school, so in the local school itself, people should try so that teaching-learning takes place properly.'

6. The experience of the local school teacher:

The upgraded primary school of Kurpani is led by the single teacher. She is a para teacher⁶ based in a village called Kone. She is from the adjacent village to Nareshgarh and stays on the other side of the river. Since the establishment of the school, she has been working there. According to her, here the children are safe till they are inside the womb, after the birth, the guardian doesn't know where their children are, so forget about education. She has to manage all the official works along with classes at the school. Sometime she can't come to school, still, the member of Vedic Society tells her you don't come to school. She was telling that *baccha log ko ghar ja jake school bulana podta hain*, "if one festival gets over they don't come to school for days. I have to go to the hills to bring them into the school, and guardians tell that their children are not well. The children keep roaming here and there. Those children who come to school regularly, they perform better. There are such guardians who don't eat but would make sure to send their children to school. But they are exceptions. One such girl is there in the school who comes to school regularly, the school key also remains with her." During the teachers' absence no teaching-learning takes place in the school, though school remains open, only a few children remain present and only MDM is served in such a situation.

One of the major issues with the Parhaiyas is that they are involved in excessive drinking. But this also needs critical attention. Whether they drink to relieve themselves from the hard times, obliterated dreams that they encounter.

⁶ Para teachers are paid less than the regular teachers, they are expected to meet the needs of basic education within the limited resources.

The teacher and other community members feel that economically the Parhaiyas can't be said poor. They are getting ration from the government, all the women after marriage (after 18 years) get a pension from the government. Apart from that daily they make bamboo products at least three, each of cost Rs.100. So if they save some money from that after spending they can't be termed poor. But after getting the money they drink, and sometime they will offer their children also, *thoda pi lo* (drink some). And the children who drink from the childhood how their brain will develop? They come to school with chewing tobacco, the teacher by punishing them they have brought to some line. Initially, they were very dirty too, on the same plate they eat again and again and keep those in the same place to eat in the next time, so by doing those they invite disease also. Earlier they did not wear clothes. Now, for *Shiv Charcha* (spiritual talk on Shiva, an Indian deity) many things improved, drinking is reduced, they become cleaner also. Gradually they are changing, but it will take time to change. They don't like to come out from their place that's why they are lagging behind. If someone tells them to go to the city, they reply whether there we shall get kandhmul? They shall not get their forest resources to earn their livelihood. So what they will do by going city?

To improve the educational scenario in the area, one NGO, Vedic Society works here. According to the working member of the NGO awareness is necessary, but improvement is possible only after they adhere to that. However, from my all the visits it was observed of their more effort on collecting the entered datas of the children from the school register. This was a weekly effort. Once in my presence one meeting at Kurpani was organized by the member of the NGO to raise awareness on education. But, the effort of Vedic Society member to collect gather more and more people in the meeting seems to be hogwash as it seemed more important to have more pictures.

I met the school teachers of Upgraded Middle School, Nareshgarh since Kurpani comes under the village Nareshgarh. Four teachers have been working in this school. Though they are not the inhabitants of Nareshgarh but from the same Panchayat. According to these teachers, the Parhaiyas are economically backward that lead to their deteriorated educational status. Most of the time they remain inebriated condition, so education hardly is an issue. At present everything is given free, admission, school dress, books, MDM, etc. But they need to buy copy, pencil etc. Getting those things is a tough task for them as they have hardly any money. If the male members of the family go outside for earning, the responsibility lies with the female. In that process, the female by taking debt, arrange the required things. But gradually this also becomes impossible for them as they are denied money by the money-lenders. If Guardians become aware children will be able to improve because much of the time they spend at home (Promod Prasad).

The social condition of Parhaiyas is lagging behind from the mainstream. Their generations are not literate. Their motive is to earn and eat, they are hardly concerned about their future. They live from hand to mouth. They are underprivileged due to their drinking habit; it leads to health problem also. Children also follow the elders. If they stop their drinking habit some development can be there. Through counselling they should be made aware about the benefits of education. Most often they stay together with the same language spoken people as they speak. But now according to their need, they started coming outside gradually (SumanRunda).

I talked with the teachers of Kone High School. Most of the teachers of Kone School is from the Nareshgarh village, so they were expected to have a good idea. The Parhaiya guardians are not much interested in education. One of the teachers reports, "they have to be approached in the home to spread awareness about the importance of education, they are apathetic." They are in careless position. Forcibly they are brought to school. The Parhaiya children are very reluctant to mingle with other kids. It's not because their intellectual capability is less but because of their culture. If they listen to teacher they can understand but they are very irregular. *Baccha masli, sikar, kabutar marne chale jate*, guardians become happy if they come back catching those. According to the headmaster, they are underdeveloped, government facility is not much among them, they don't have new housing facility, water problem is very acute in the hills, the housing pattern is not linear, distance between houses are very much, for that their communication among themselves is also lesser, gathering two three people they keep drinking, their residential area should be planned, in a linear way. Changes need to be brought in their habit. The NGO, Vedic Society is there, but they too do what is possible through easy way those whoever comes in contact, but not in a dedicated way. So it does not become that effective in real situation, much is there in showing off.

The Parhaiyas are not getting aware regarding education till now. They make Jadoo, chup, pangkha, minimum Rs. 100 they get in one. One person in a day makes such three, if the whole family is involved they can make more. After selling these products in some local shop or agent the parents will drink. That's why they can't become aware regarding education even after seeing the others. They are not interested in any kind of change and moreover those who have studied they are also sitting ideally, so where is the need to get educated? By education they only meant job, but they can't think it if they get educated it will bring change to their thinking. They have the problem in their thinking itself, they are not able to come out of it. Their economy is not that poor since they are getting many things from government, they have no problem of food, but they are not part of the social change (Santosh Vengra).

7. Eat, drink and be merry: Stereotyping the Parhaiyas:

This is how the neighboring communities stigmatize the Parhaiyas. The neighbouring communities include-Munda, few Birhor families, Nayak, Chero and 4 Muslim families. The Muslim families particularly their younger

generation is relatively educated, they never stigmatize the Parhaiyas, rather many times the researcher experienced their encouragement towards the education of Parhaiyas though it hardly had any effect according to the Muslim young generations. However, their neighbour who are comparatively modernized and follows Hinduism and Christianity, their view on Parhaiyas stereotypically remains that of a community that is drown in boozing. They get so much of bounties by the government that they have become passive towards the welfare policies (*Parhaiya log to daru pe hi diwanahain, ob 18 years me government se hi per month Rs. 100/ miltahain along with 35 kg of rice, to kahaaurpodhailikhaikarega?*).

8. Few Observations and Recommendations:

Looking at all the observations and what has been said by people it seems the Parhaiyas are primarily to be blamed for the situations that they are in. but, from the observations I have made it is necessary to get into the underlying reasons-

From the views of the teachers Bouerdieu could be remembered. He discussed about capital which is not only economic but prevalent in the culture. This cultural capital leads to social inequality and it is reproduced by the education system. According to the teachers here, the Parhaiyas are underdeveloped not only for their economy but also for their culture, geographical location and all the factors contribute towards their backwardness. On the other hand, to acquire cultural capital education is supposed to contribute. But our education system does not encourage the least known communities like Parhaiyas to acquire cultural capital; rather it helps to maintain the inequality. Thus, it also helps to preserve the power of dominants and become a powerful means of maintaining power structures and creating a docile work force and finally the communities like Parhaiya could be seen alienated, depressed. Followings are the major concern that has catapulted the Parhaiyas in a situation of sheer deprivation and marginalization.

- No entertainment or cultural practices has led the community to a situation of alienation with the community which finally has resulted in no sense of community.
- Lack of basic infrastructure
- Long distance of the schools makes it easier for the kids to find excuses to skip classes and deviate into doing something which makes them finally drop out from the classes.
- Loss of their cultural and linguistic identity
- Trust deficit between the community and administration and policy makers.

As such, a community like Parhaiya can only prosper when the policy makers and the government design a system of eclectic welfare which specifically caters to the needs of this community. The infrastructure of the school must match the real world that the Parhaiyas come from. It necessarily means that a holistic development can ensure a sustainable development and education.

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