

CHANGING LIVELIHOOD PATTERN OF THE FOREST DWELLING ORAONS THROUGH DEVELOPMENTAL INITIATIVES BY THE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

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Abstract: *Tribal people (Adivasi) over the year become the most disadvantaged, exploited and neglected lot in our society. Primarily they live in the forest and are considered as the most backward and underdeveloped. But, after the independence of India, welfare of these segments has been given very high priority. Like the other tribes in India Oraons (14%), second largest tribe in West Bengal mainly settled in the Jalpaiguri district is no exception from these welfare activities. The present research is an attempt to study the various problems faced by the Oraons of Jalpaiguri district and also find out the impact of various governmental schemes for diminishing their vulnerability. The study reveals that the Oraons are faces severe dilemmas due to economic deprivation, educational backwardness, geographical and environmental condition and poor health. Various departments of the state basically Forest, Panchayet and Rural Development, Backward Classes Welfare Department etc. took recommendable initiatives for diminishing the above burden.*

Key Words: *Tribe, Forest dweller, Oraon, Livelihood, Problems, Development input.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The Oraons call themselves as the *Kurukh* while others term them as the Oraon or Uran tribe (1). The Oraons belong to the Proto-Australoid stock inhabiting various states across central and eastern India as well as in different parts of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Pakistan (2) also. But their original home was South India, from where they migrated to Chhotonagpur plateau (3). Their traditional mode of livelihood is agriculture (4,5). In West Bengal, they constitute 14% of the total tribal population, the second largest tribe after Santal mainly settled in the districts of Paschim Medinipur, Bankura, Jalpaiguri, South 24 Parganas (6). It is believed that the British India Government brought them to the Northern part of West Bengal to work in the different tea garden labour. The Oraons of Jalpaiguri district are mainly concentrated in the forest fringe as well as inside the tea garden areas. So, traditionally, they depended on the forest and tea estates as their economic pursuit, but in recent times they become mainly settled agriculturists in connection with the proper implementation of Forest Rights Act as well as less demand of tea garden labours. But, agriculture in the areas is not sustainable due to uncertain rainfall, low fertility of the soil, absence of irrigational facilities etc. So, their economy in transition again (7). With this type of economic uncertainty, low literacy, rapid dispossession of land due to Reserve Forest Area, absence of alternative livelihood options, entering of wild animals from surrounding forests they face miserable condition there (8). As a result they are shifted to other livelihood option.

The Oraons residing in such forest environments adopt coping strategies to protect their livelihoods. These strategies include, intensification of existing income activities, diversification into new activities, migration, drawing upon social relationships and informal credit networks, drawing upon assets and adjusting consumption patterns etc.

In connection with the backwardness of Scheduled Tribes of West Bengal, two separate departments (Backward Classes Welfare Department and Tribal Development Department) under the government of West Bengal came into existence after independence with the primary object of ameliorating the conditions of the tribal people of the state not only for the Oraons. As the majority of Scheduled Tribe population of West Bengal practice agriculture, a great deal of emphasis has been given to improve their agricultural practices. Measures in this sector include introduction of improved seeds, manures and chemical fertilizers, reclamation of land, distribution of vested lands to share-croppers, improvement of livestock, extension of irrigational facilities, encouragement of homestead vegetable-cum-fruit gardening etc. in addition to the above, encouragement is given to pig-rearing, goat keeping, poultry keeping etc. as subsidiary means of livelihood. Encouragement is also given to them to take to trade and crafts. Again financial assistance is rendered to agricultural landless labourers. Cooperative grain *golas* also have been opened for them in different areas. Since fifth

five year plan LAMPS (Large Areas Multi-Purpose Society) are set up in tribal areas. Apart from the schemes of the Backward Classes Welfare Department as well as Tribal Development Department, many other departments of the state government have been implementing other miscellaneous schemes covering the different sectors such as livelihood, health, housing, village infrastructure etc. for the welfare of the Scheduled Tribes.

Hence, various government departments of the state have been taken welfare measures of the tribes for last few decades. So, impact of such schemes may be assessed for future planning, rectification of the implemented welfare schemes as well as momentum of its impact. By considering these, an empirical study has been conducted in a tribal concentrated district of the state of West Bengal.

2. OBJECTIVES:

The study has been mainly focused on-

- i) To find out the various problems faced by the forest dwelling Oraons.
- ii) Listing of developmental inputs and their utilizations by the particular beneficiaries.
- iii) To find out how the implementing agencies worked there effectively.

3. STUDY AREA AND THE PEOPLE:

The study has been conducted in an Oraon village of Metally block of Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal. The village is located near to the Gorumara Reserve Forest and besides the bank of Nawarah River. The said village is connected by *moram* road from nearest railway station New Mal Junction and Lataguri market. There is no regular public transport system, so the people had mainly to walk long distance to reach the bus stand, market, hospital or other public places. The settlement pattern is bilinear. The village surrounded by dense forest with hilly terrain. This forest dwelling Oraons mainly depend on agriculture and forest produce collection whereas, others are depend on eco-tourism sector. Facilities like electricity, drinking water etc. are available in the village.

There is no documentary evidence available regarding the origin of the village and their migrational history. According to the local oral tradition, nearly 200 years ago their forefathers had migrated from Ranchi district of Chhotonagpur plateau. The then British colonial government brings them as labour in tea gardens and since then they have settled there. Altogether there are 41 families who are the permanent residents of the village. The total numbers of families comprising of 261 population out of which 133 are male and remaining 128 are female.

4. METHODOLOGY:

The primary information for the research has been collected through intensive anthropological fieldwork using both qualitative and quantitative methods like household census, structured and unstructured interview, case study, participant observation and focus group discussion. The village under study was purposively selected due to implication of various government welfare schemes and facilities, easy accessibility from nearest resource centres. All the families residing in the village were considered for present study. To collect socio-economic information, a structured and unstructured survey schedule has been implemented there. Few case studies regarding various problems, developmental inputs by the various government agencies and departments have been employed. Beside case studies, focus group discussion also organized to collect information regarding problems and welfare measures. Qualitative information on problems and development were collected from the local government representatives by focus group discussion and interview method.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Socio-Economic Profile of the Study Population:

From the study it is revealed that there are altogether 261 populations out of which 133 (50.96%) are male and 128 (49.04%) are female (see the table given below). Out of the total number of population under study respectively 28.74% belong to the age group 0-14 years; 66.67% in the 15-59 years and remaining 04.59% belong to the age group 60 years and above. While considering the marital status of males, it is found that 40.6% are married, 57.14% are unmarried and only 02.26% are widower. In case of female, 41.41% are married, 50.78% unmarried and 07.81% are widow. The table under discussion also exhibits that out of total population across both the sexes 62.07% used to live in nuclear family, 34.48% lived in joint family and 03.48% in broken family. There is a greater gender disparity; females are more used to live in nuclear and broken family than their male counterpart. Among the study population 68.2% are literate and 31.8% are illiterate. The rate of illiteracy is double in case of female (42.19%) than male (21.8%). Among the literate population, majority of them have achieved upper primary education (up to class VIII). From the table it is revealed that among the total number of population 67.82% are employed. Out of the total number of employed population 49.15% are male and 50.85% are female. From the table it is revealed that among the employed population

across both the sexes 21.47% are farmers in own land, 14.69% are tea garden labour, 15.82% are employed in forest office, 22.6% are engaged in eco-tourism sector where they are mainly employed as *Jipsy* driver, tourist guide, and in dance troop. Similarly, 16.38% are daily wage labour and 07.35% are engaged in miscellaneous activities like minor forest resource collection (NTFP), unskilled labourers and very few as government employees.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Profile of the Studied Population.

Characteristics		Male		Female		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Population		133	50.96	128	49.04	261	100
Age group (years)	0-14	41	30.83	34	26.56	75	28.74
	15-59	86	64.66	88	68.75	174	66.67
	60 and above	06	04.51	06	04.69	12	04.59
Marital status	Married	54	40.60	53	41.41	107	41.0
	Unmarried	76	57.14	65	50.78	141	54.02
	Widowed	03	02.26	10	07.81	13	04.98
Family type	Nuclear	78	58.65	84	65.63	162	62.07
	Joint	53	39.85	37	28.91	90	34.48
	Broken	02	01.50	07	05.46	09	03.45
Literacy status	Literate	104	78.20	74	57.81	178	68.20
	Illiterate	29	21.80	54	42.19	83	31.80
Primary occupation	Agriculture	26	29.89	12	13.33	38	21.47
	Tea garden labour	06	06.90	20	22.22	26	14.69
	Forest staff	28	32.18	00	00.00	28	15.82
	Eco-tourism sector	13	14.94	27	30.00	40	22.60
	Business	03	03.45	00	00.00	03	01.69
	Daily wage labour	07	08.05	22	24.24	29	16.38
	Others	04	04.60	09	10.00	13	07.35

A good proportion of the Oraons people are primarily engaged in agricultural activities during monsoon and rest of the time they are involved in other economic pursuits as minor forest resource collection (NTFP) and daily-wage labourers. Few years ago, a large number of Oraons are depending on forest-based economy. From the above mentioned economic pursuits of the Oraons, 26.83% of the families monthly income is up to rupees three thousand, whereas 24.39% can earn monthly rupees three thousand to five thousand, 19.51% earn rupees five thousand to seven thousand, 12.2% earn rupees seven thousand to nine thousand and remaining 17.07% can earn monthly rupees nine thousand and more.

Problems faced by the Oraons:

Due to locational disadvantage of the village under study, the villagers have been faced multiple problems. The attack or entering of wild animals in the village is very frequent or common phenomenon there. Attacking or killing of the domestic animals as well as the Oraons by wild animals is also a common incident. Sometimes the wild animals also destroy household properties, crops, vegetables etc. In recent past their economic condition was very worst. Their main economic pursuit agriculture is not sustainable for its geo-climatic condition of the village. Uncertain rainfall, low level of fertility of the soil, absence of irrigational facilities, heavy cold etc. hamper the production of the local cultivable seeds. So, now a sizable number of Oraons are predominately depended on eco-tourism sector. The educational status is sub-standard and there is no one who has passed under graduate. Remoteness, absence of educational institution in or near to the village instead of primary school, awareness of the parents as well as economic deprivation is the main reasons behind low literacy. Health services in the village are fully absent and for this they visit nearest health centre i.e. located in the Lataguri market. Major prevalent ailments among them are rheumatism, tuberculosis, asthma, measles, chicken pox, *kalajar*, dermal disorder, leprosy, digestive disorders etc. Majority of them were not in a position to treat the said ailments due to their economic limitation. This isolated village is also more behind from the governmental benefits for about five decades after independence of India.

But at present, the forest department of the state has been taken different developmental activities for the betterment of the forest dwelling tribals. Intentionally, the forest department has taken these developmental initiatives to make a strong relationship with the tribal people to protect the forest jointly. This initiative has addressed to the 'Bana Niti' (Forest Act). Side by side other departments like Panchayet and Rural Development, Backward Classes Welfare, Tribal Development etc. have also involved them to diminishing the problems faced by the Oraons under study.

Developmental Inputs by various Government Agencies:

Various development plans and programmes have been implemented or delivered to the said forest dwellers distinctively in two ways: one is through individual level and another is community level. In this particular study main focus has been given only to those government agencies or departments those have been engaged with these developmental initiatives. So, from the study it has been revealed that various departments of the Government of West Bengal namely Forest Department, Panchayet and Rural Development Department, Tribal Development Department the then Backward Classes Welfare Department etc. engaged there with welfare measures. At the preliminary level forest department took initiative to form a committee known as 'Eco Development Committee' (EDC) especially to implement the plans and programmes in the village which may be consulted before their implementation with its member villagers. This EDC officially operated by the Wildlife Division II of Lataguri South Range. Various individual as well as community level developmental inputs are elaborately mentioned below:

A. Efforts by the Forest Department:

Majority of the literate youths of the study village employed as tourist guide from where they can earn 100 rupees per trip. Other youths employed as driver in the *Jipsi* car used for the eco-tourism purpose in Garumara and Lataguri reserve forest areas. From this profession they can also earn same amount as mentioned earlier. The forest department engaged few unemployed members of this village as forest guard who observe and protect the villagers and village property from wild animals and others. The forest department has been constructed one residential house for guests and one bore-well for the families residing there. Last four years ago, mosquito net also distributed to them. The forest department released compassion to the respective families whose household properties and lives are damaged due to attacking of wild animals. Some male and female members of the village recruited in the government tourist lodge located at Lataguri Forest Beat Office area. The villagers also received their *patta* land from the forest department last four years ago. Two sanitary latrines have been constructed in the village.

There is a boundary canal around the village to protect the villagers from the attack of wild animals. The forest department also built up number of watch towers in the neighbouring areas of the village to look after the activities and movement of the wild animal especially at night. One community centre has been constructed by the same department to arrange different meetings, seminars and ceremonies and for any other purpose whatever needed. The department has already purchase several musical instrument and utensils that have generally been used by the villagers during any festivals and ceremonies. With the assistance of the department, a dance troop has been formed by the youths of the village who are performing their cultural activities like songs, drama and playing musical instruments for the entertainment of the tourists. By the way of such performances they can earn rupees twelve hundred per programme. The villagers also employed during clearing of forest, loading and unloading of timber. On behalf of that each male member has earned about rupees five hundred per day. A training centre has built up in the village premises to promote the village youths in various handicrafts through hands on training by specialized instructors. The handicrafts from such training centre may also helpful economically to the villagers. Four culverts or sluish gates have build up on the canals to protect the village from flood and for harvesting the rain water for agriculture and daily use purpose.

B. Efforts by the Panchayet Department:

Not only the forest department but Panchayet department has also taken several developmental measures to uplift the worst condition of the villagers as well as to develop they daily livelihood situation of the village as result the process of the village are now setting a new fortune have been accepted in various plans and programmes to develop their daily livelihood situation. Among these plans and programmes are-

Last year the job card holders received 100% job opportunity under MGNREGS (*Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme*) but in the current (2012) the rate of job opportunity is not satisfactory. Under IAY (*Indira Awas Yojana*) altogether 18 houses have been sanctioned by the Panchayet and Rural Development department. The local Panchayet also took initiatives to assure the drinking water for the villagers by establishing two deep tube-wells. Three ponds have been excavated in the village for daily use purpose of the villagers. The said department also took initiatives to develop the drainage system and excavated small canals specially to protect wild animals as well as proper water transportation. Development and repairing of village roads is also an initiative by the department under MGNREGS.

Recently the Panchayet department has taken enough efforts to leveling of undulated agricultural fields and to increase the fertility of the soil. According to the villagers few years ago local Panchayet have supplied fruit bearing saplings, cash crops, manure and fertilizers to strengthen their economic condition. Simultaneously, 2 kgs. of rice in a month for an individual has distributed at the rate of rupees two only under *Antordaya Yojana* scheme. The said department also encourages to the women to form SHG (Self Help Group) by which self employment may be created and in connection with this loans have been sanctioned to strengthen the groups.

C. Efforts by the Backward Classes Welfare and Tribal Development Department:

West Bengal Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Development and Finance Corporation under the departments have operated a branch of LAMPS (Large Area Multi-Purpose Society). Locally the LAMPS maintained by the 'Matiali Thana LAMPS'. As a part of the activities of LAMPS, various livestock like cow, pig, goat, duck, hen etc. have been distributed to the majority of the families as their alternative livelihood opportunity. The department also involved to provide training to develop the skills like handicrafts, motor driving etc. They also sanctioned various scholarships for the students and encourages to them for higher education.

6. CONCLUSION:

It is well known that most of the tribal are victims of acute poverty, low literacy, ill health and absence of village infrastructural facilities and many others. As a result, the tribals remain at their present position on the graph of development (9). Various studies have been made on poverty, living standard and quality of life of different tribal populations viz. Elwin (10), Saxon (11), Caprihan (12), Mahapatra (13), Yadav (14), Sharma *et al.* (15), Mishra *et al.* (16,17). The present study shows that the Oraons like many other tribal populations are victims of poor socio-economic conditions.

In study area, Oraons traditional activities were mostly forest resource collection and agriculture. The community use the nature very sustainable way. However, the use of environmental resource is the limited to extent necessary for them. When we look into the changing context of livelihood of the present study village it is found that it has changed a lot in course of time. During the British period the villagers were mostly depending on forest resources and as labour in tea gardens for their livelihoods. Apart from these resources they used to do some cultivation. In course of time, slowly this forest got degraded because of Forest Right. The degraded resources failed to suffice the needs of the villagers. It compelled the tribal inhabitants to look for other alternatives. In the initial days it was only agriculture, which gave them an alternative source of livelihoods. But the infertility of soil, uncertain rainfall, heavy cold and traditional technology failed to meet the rising needs of villagers.

In the contemporary days the villagers have received lots of option for their livelihoods. The activities mostly by the forest department have given a scope to shifting for alternative sources. The introduction of MGNREGS has also brought some hope in the minds of poor Oraons. The introduction of other development initiatives like *Antordaya Yojana* Scheme, activities of LAMPS, eco-tourism, training centre for handicrafts, leveling of agricultural land and many others have widened their scope of livelihoods. Farming is now the primary source of livelihood for most of the households in study area though it has not given them a sense of security.

If we analyze the engagement of employed Oraons in various activities it will be found those 78.53% individuals are involved in non-agricultural activities. Those who are engaged in non-agricultural activities are working in tea garden, forest department, eco-tourism sectors, business, daily wage labour etc. It reflects that now nobody in the study village fully depending on forest resources for their livelihoods. A smooth shift has seen from the field of agriculture to non-agriculture activities.

The present empirical research had made an attempt to portray the traditional pattern of tribal livelihoods in the village of Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal as well as shows how this traditional way of living has shifted smoothly in alternative livelihood options. Introduction of various development programmes by government and emergence of new industries in locality have given such alternative sources of livelihood for the forest dwelling Oraons.

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