

Tribals are victim of 'poverty politics' by media

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“ Ek Roti Nahi De Saka Us Masoom Ko,

Lakin

Wo Tashveer Lakhoo me bik gayi

jis me Roti ke bagair Bachha Udaas tha.”

Faced with a rapid decline in their population and forced to live sans basic amenities, members of the primitive tribe of Jharkhand has blamed, among others, the media for their shoddy conditions. “In the sound and fury of bigger happenings, everyone has forgotten about us,” said a tribesman.

During a visit to several Birhors' tando across Jharkhand and West Bengal, this I met with several Birhor families who did not welcome media attention.

“Your photographers and reporters did not have the courage to document our true conditions and present them before the masses,” alleged Badasuker Birhor of Chalkari village.

At least two others, Birendra Birhor of Chordaha and Karmi Birhorni of Demotand, agreed.

“The media has left no stone unturned in making us miserable. From time to time, new faces appear and give us assurance of a better life. They talk to us about our tough life — how we live semi-naked, how are we born, how we die, how we work, how we cook our food and eat — and they take our photographs. These apparently sell like hot cakes and the proceeds benefit the media, themselves, while we are forgotten,” Badasuker said.

The Birhors believe they are the victims of “poverty politics”, said another tribesman. “Making shaggy dog stories of our lifestyle in every newspaper and magazine may fetch the media revenue but those who do these stories do not have the cause of our uplift in their hearts. The spice-hungry media cooks up stories to create hype without any regard for reality,” Phulchand, also residing in Chalkari, said.

Venting his anger, he said, “Are we not poor? Are we not suffering? Do you know you press-walas have made all politicians and bureaucrats' rich leaving us to starve, and when you people got bored with your stories then you all started haunting our families and our lifestyle. You people have no sympathy for us.

You people earned your bread by cashing on our lifestyle. Now, please leave us to our misery and stop stalking us.”

Repeatedly on the interval of times new faces (of newsmen) appears before us, they gives us assurance for betterment of our life, talk with us about our tough life— how we semi naked live, how we born, how we die, how we work, how we cook our food and eat, they took our live photographs and use to sale it like hot cakes for their own benefits only, not for our benefits, told Badasuker.

Please leave us alone on our fate. Now I am sick and suffering because of my poor conditions.

I was shocked and sympathized with their (birhor's) questions. Spontaneously I put my hand in my pocket which came out with few cash, gave it to them. But yet to know, why I had given them money? Because sympathy or they were poor or there was some other reasons (may be my selfish motive- to gather the information's about them)?

Meanwhile, this tale unveiled the harsh impact of our crazy reporting on poor people struggling for at least one square meal a day.

The Birhors are still living in hope that a day will come when the Government will know all about their pathetic conditions and work to change their life. The Birhors are a honest and peaceful people who seldom fight among themselves and avoid conflict with others.

The traditional Birhor economy has been based on nomadic gathering, hunting, and making ropes out of the fibre of a particular species of vine which they sell in markets. But the Birhor's lifestyle has been disrupted in recent decades due to deforestation and the Government's attempts to settle them into permanent agricultural villages. Despite decades of resettlement efforts, they still abandon their settlements early in the morning to wander in their forests, only to return empty handed by evening.

Besides, the most ironic and ridiculous that innocent Birhor's — an endangered nomadic primitive tribe facing exploitation by middlemen and non tribal. The plight of tribals is miserable as cunning people including middlemen, moneylenders or non tribal peoples, used to exploit them by various means. Dishonest middlemen exploit the honesty of the tribal people for securing exorbitant profits.

Study also found that middlemen are playing as an exploitative force in the lives of poor innocent tribes, participating in fraudulent practices to maximize their own gains only. It's the middleman who takes a huge cut from the Birhors'— the excellent rope makers, and use to sells their products in the market at high cost.

One day, interviewing with Mago Birhorin (Chalkari) and Urmila Birhorin (Bangi) who made ropes, she learnt that, because she had no capital of her own, she had to give up more than 93 percent of her proceeds to the middleman.

The middleman in several tanda's found exploiting them by taking money in filling, depositing forms and issuing job cards while in several tanda job card had captured by middleman, found during the study.

On the subject of anonymity two birhor reveals their pathetic tale, that how the middlemen fraudulently taken their money which was allotted them under Indira Awas Yojana.

While studying about the lifestyle of the Birhors at Chordaha birhor tanda in Chouparan block of Hazaribagh district in Jharkhand since 1996 feels that there has been no change at all to their lives. On subject of anonymity several Birhor's complained that all these areas where the primitive tribes stay or move are neglected by the officials and clutched by middleman.

Besides others middleman are the main barrier who prevent them from the government sponsored schemes. Many of them (Birhor's) are not getting the benefits of government sponsored 'Antyodaya Yojana' despite having the 'Antyodaya Card'.

The 'Antyodaya Yojana' commenced in the year 2001 to provide food security to the poorest of the poor. The selected families are given a special Antyodaya card, with which they can claim grain from the fair price shops (FPS) or ration shops, the local outlet of the public distribution system (PDS). This card entitles the selected family to 35 kgs of grains each month free.

Despite having the 'Antyodaya Card' they are not getting rice regularly, though few of them got but it was not mentioned (written) in the card that when and how much rice had been given to them.

During the visit of Chordaha birhor tanda its' found that few middlemen in assistance with the PDS shop dealer regularly exploiting the Birhor. One of the Birhor told that instead of 70 kgs (two monts) of rice he got only 40 kgs rest 30 kgs rise was managed by the middleman and the dealer.

While from another Birhor one middle man bought their rise at PDS shop in Chouparan at the rate of 10 rupees per kgs and sale it off on high cost on the spot.

At Chordaha about 125 members of the Birhor families are still residing in shelters made of branches, leaves and other available materials, which are assembled in cone shape at Chordaha in Hazaribagh District of Jharkhand.

“We are facing tough time and always undergone lot of problems. Life has always been tough and unfair to us. We are not getting even the basis facilities to survive,” told Dashmi Birhorin, a Birhor tribal residing at Chorddaha.

Though few years back about sixteen Birhors tribals from the village were taken by a middleman recently to West Bengal's Hooghly district to work in a brick kiln. They were promised fat salaries, but ended up being exploited by the kiln- owner. A local NGO took up the matter with the deputy commissioner and later all of them were brought back to the village.

Study found that without education and away from civilization, town people have deceived these tribals. Over the past many generations, these tribal people have remained as unskilled, daily wage laborers and their children also becoming laborers. There is neither development in their community nor improvement in their lives.

Lack of awareness, no protection of tribal rights and no concessions have also played a role in their sufferings. There are countless constraints responsible for lower pace of Birhor's development process than desired. Some of the major constraints are Destruction of forests, Lack of awareness, Protection of Tribal Rights and Concessions including others.

Though tribals have been given numerous rights and concessions under various statutes of the Central and State Governments, they remain deprived of the benefits arising out of such statutory provisions due to their ignorance and the apathy of law enforcing agencies.

After independence, central as well as state governments have taken up special programmes for the rehabilitation of primitive tribes having wandering economy in the form of food collection, hunting and shifting cultivation.

Birhor is one of the primitive tribe groups living in the rain forests of central and eastern India including Jharkhand (Hazaribagh, Giridih, Ranchi, Lohardaga, Palamu, Garhwa, Dhanbad, and Singhbhum), Chhatisghar, Odisha and West Bengal (more than 150 years ago and finally settled in 3 blocks of Purulia like Baghmundi, Jhalda-I and Balarampur. At present they are found living in Bareriya, and Bhupatipalli village in Baghmundi Block, Chhotobakad in Jhalda-I Block and Bersa village under Balarampur Block); the total population of Birhor tribe are dwindling day by day.

Government of India has identified 75 tribes across the country as primitive tribes. Among them, Birhor is one of the primitive tribe groups who trace their origin in Jharkhand and reside for ages in different parts of the state. Birhor in Jharkhand belong to the Proto-Australoid stock; linguistically, they originate from the Austro-Asiatic group. Though, their primary populations are found in the states of Jharkhand and Odissa.

The dwindling population of Birhor tribe creates serious concern for Government as the community is facing threats of extinction. Ecological hazards triggered by rampant deforestation and other factors have made the primitive communities, especially the Birhors, living in the lap of nature, endangered.

Along with restoration of ecology, the Birhors need an identity of a human being.

Study found that the life and properties of tribals are under serious threat from existing model of developmental in the country and, therefore, they need to jointly fight against the forces that exploit the natural resources for economic growth of the corporate houses.

Its' amazing that still Birhors are keep moving from one place to another in search of foods and surviving by eating roots, fruits, flowers, leafy vegetables, mushroom and leaves from the forests and compelled to live a primitive lifestyle.

Birhors are highly vulnerable to hereditary hemolytic disorders and have a high degree of morbidity and mortality affecting their health and quality of life across the country; needs genetic study to identify their various health issues for their holistic development, study reveals.

There is an urgent need of their genetic study to identify various health issues for their holistic development at the earliest by the Government.

The Government should immediately constitute a team for the sero-genetic, demographic as well as haemolytic study of Birhors in a bid to protect them from extinction and to diminish their mortality rates.