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No Work, No Food: A Study of Lodha Tribe in South Bengal

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Abstract: *In this paper, we have discussed a field-based study on Lodha to know their real socio-economic life and livelihood opportunity. There is several scheduled tribe in India and as well as in West Bengal. The Lodhas are socio-economically backward than the other Tribes in India. The Lodhas was treated as a criminal tribe by the British Government, and then they were treated as a de-notified tribe by the Pre & Postcolonial era. After independence, they are re-designated as Primitive Tribal Group (PTG) by Central Government. Now again Lodhas are re-designated as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) by Central Government. In West Bengal, Lodhas are mainly concentrated in the districts of Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram. The Lodhas was mostly known as the hunter-gatherer community. Gradually shifting their profession from hunting to agriculture for which they have to leave their houses early in the morning and return in the evening. The present occupation is forest produce collection and agricultural day labourer. A handful of people have their land where they cultivate crops seasonally otherwise they work as labour, work as a mason in big cities, sell handicraft products like baskets. The Lodhas, especially the women, goes to the forest to collect various items like wood, creepers, different types of leaves and plants (some of which are used as food or for their medicinal properties). They keep some for their consumption and sell the rest in the market. The socio-economic livelihood has been shown a chronic situation to survive. According to their views “earning is most essential than education”.*

In the present study authors will try to show the livelihood of the Lodhas were when a family of seven has to survive for rupees one thousand a month, it is only natural that not only Lodha child from the age of seven will go out for work as a labour and will not be sent to school because if they do not work that day, they will have nothing to eat. After all, whatever they earn in a day they spend in their food. So, in that case, every member of the family has to go out for work every day because every member of the family can have at least one proper meal that day. The government has made some welfare schemes so that every family can avail of the benefits of the schemes and can have a better livelihood. Finally, some suggestions would be made for their better livelihood opportunities.

Keywords: Criminal tribe, De-notified tribe, Primitive Tribal Group, Lodhas, Livelihood

I. INTRODUCTION

There is several scheduled tribe in India and as well as in West Bengal. The present study deals with real activities and how the Lodhas survive themselves. “No food for a lazy man” is a common slogan that indirectly originated from the Bible. Because today’s reading tells us to reduce our excessive slept lest we evoke poverty. When a person becomes too sluggish and all he wants is a comfort zone rather than working, then he should be prepared for a lifetime of hardship. In furtherance, the verse went on to say, ‘open your eyes and you shall be contented with bread’. I pray! God shall direct our understanding to see visions and new opportunities, in Jesus’ name. This slogan is suitable for these tribal people because if they don’t go for work and they will not have food on their plate. In this article, an empirical finding has been made to realize the real situation of the Lodha/Sabar tribe in south Bengal. The Lodhas was treated as a criminal tribe by the British Government, and then they were treated as a de-notified tribe by the Pre & Postcolonial era. After independence, they are re-designated as Primitive Tribal Group (PTG) by Central Government. Now again Lodhas are re-designated as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) by Central Government. In West Bengal, Lodhas are mainly concentrated in the districts of Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram. The Lodhas was mostly known as the hunter-gatherer community. Gradually shifting their profession from hunting to agriculture for which they have to leave their houses early in the morning and return in the evening. In the present study authors will try to show the livelihood of the Lodhas were when a family of seven has to survive for rupees one thousand a month, it is only natural that not only Lodha child from the age of seven will go out for work as a labor and will not be sent to school because if they do not work that day, they will have nothing to eat. After all, whatever they earn in a day they spend in their food.

A. Background of the Study

- 1) *Tribal situation during the British Raj and the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871*: Studies into tribal social, cultural and economic life saw light under the British Raj. The British scholars described the indigenous people of the Indian subcontinent as tribes, Adivasis, aboriginals, natives or savages. The tribal population has a long history of suffering exploitation under British colonial rule. The British brought in policies that interfered with the use of tribal natural resources and deprived them of their lands. Their Forest Policy was focused mainly on the commercial exploitation of resources neglecting human considerations.¹ Some forests were declared to be “reserved” giving rights to only authorized contractors to use its resources such as timber for commercial purposes. Such colonial policies uprooted the self-sustained economy of the tribes, which led to widespread rural unrest, tribal armed conflicts, and movements. The British to bring these “primitive people” whom they considered to be “predatory” under their control, passed the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871- which attempted to register, control and put under surveillance certain tribes and eunuchs². These tribes were “notified” as criminals and all members irrespective of their criminal history/precedent branded as having criminal tendencies.³ In the year 1923, The Royal Society of Arts in its Journal published the article, “The Criminal Tribes of India” where Frederick de L. Booth Tucker, a retired British administrative officer wrote, “*Crime in most countries is committed by individuals, In India usually by tribes, communities, and gangs, who are highly organized and trained in it from childhood as a profession. The entire family and the relatives of an Indian criminal including the woman and children are usually associated with him in the commission of the crime. It is looked upon by these tribes very much as we regard to the military profession, and is considered to be both honorable and lucrative.*”⁴ Further Faulkner, another British official of Police, in his correspondence on a remark made by Sir Edward Henry in his discussion relating to Commissioner Booth Tucker’s paper on Criminal Tribes Act, observed: “.....*The chief motive of the act is to save criminal tribes from themselves; to reform and to reclaim them so far as is humanly possible. The Act, as it stands, supplies to the criminal classes a method by which they may be able to improve themselves and to lead decent lives. To the general public, it affords a scheme of protection while it places at the disposal of the Police a lawful means for keeping potential criminals under proper supervision.*”⁵ Faulkner also, while concluding the aforementioned correspondence drew attention on how certain specs if tribes such as the Lodhas of the then Bengal Presidency, came to be designated as the Criminal Tribes. His words, “*If only a part of the tribe is addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences, then only that part of the tribe may be declared a criminal tribe for the Act. This was to my knowledge, done in the case of certain gangs of the tribe of Lodhas in the district of Medinipur.*”⁶
- 2) *Status of Criminal tribes- post Independence*: An era of statutory stigmatization came to an end as post-independence, the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 was repealed in 1949 and further replaced by the Habitual Offender Act 1952, where all the “criminal tribes” were de-notified in the year 1952. But there still has not been a substantial change in their social and societal footing. The people from these communities still form the poorest and most undeveloped sections of the society, largely unaware of their rights and deprived of their basic living necessities. Though the Criminal Tribes Act 1871, has been repealed these erstwhile criminal tribes still are branded by the society as well as the law enforcement agencies to be possessing “criminal tendencies.” Even now, whenever any crime takes Place in a village, during the investigation all the members from such de-notified tribe including women and children are rounded up, harassed as they are always under Suspicion.⁷ After independence, many of such tribes were classified under the Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribes or the Other Backward Classes, but still, many de-notified tribes have not been classified into any of these social categories and neither have they been given recognition by the Constitution of India. With time these communities became “invisible” as they did not have leaders voicing for them and giving them a politically central stage, this ‘political quietness’ and lack of patronage led to their further being neglected and marginalized.⁸ The National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes constituted

¹ Problems of tribal communities, Sociology Guide-A Student’s Guide to Sociology, (7th February, 2020, 11.30 A.M), <https://www.sociologyguide.com/tribal-society/problems-of-tribal.php>.

² Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 (India).

³ Ajay Varghese, British Rule and Tribal Revolts in India: The curious case of Bastar, Modern Asian Studies, Modern Asian Studies, Volume 50, Issue 5, 1619, 1619-1644(2016).

⁴ Santanu Panda & Abhijit Guha, ‘Criminal Tribe’ to ‘Primitive Tribal Group and the Role of Welfare State 4-5 (2015).

⁵ Id.

⁶ Supra note 8.

⁷ National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes: Report – Volume I, People’s Archive of Rural India, (17th February, 2020, 11.15 A.M.), <https://www.rgnul.ac.in/PDF/f7ff0636-9075-47f2-8e17-a5ba7be7a3cf.pdf>.

⁸ National Commission for denitrified, nomadic and semi nomadic tribes, Report of 2017, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, (17th February, 2020, 12:00pm), socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/Idate%20Commission.pdf.

by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in 2005 reported that in present days Denotified and Nomadic Tribes constituted nearly 10 percent of the population in India as there were around 150 Denotified tribes and around 500 different Nomadic Tribes⁹ and their presence can still be found out in the SC, ST, and OBC lists. Furthermore, it is to note that the Commission found the lists compiled by the states and union territories of Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes incomplete. It prepared its state-wise lists of 647 Nomadic communities after extensive literature reviews and these lists were to be sent to the states for the inclusion of the missing communities in their lists¹⁰, this clearly shows that even after independence till now the government of India doesn't have a clear picture of the numbers of de-notified tribes. The commission has further stated that the states have to avoid derogatory names and insulting prefixes while making the list. Upliftment of these denotified tribes is a long, exhausting and tough process however through various positive central government as well as state government policies, schemes this mountain has to be climbed for the betterment of the society.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective is the root or way of any scientific research. The study is required to promote the true position of Lodhas livelihood as PVTG in West Bengal to uncover the challenges of primitive tribal groups. The survival strategies of Lodhas need a proper relook to provide them the impetus to take up challenges the 21st century has unraveled. The objectives of the study are also to find out ways to protect their indigenous way of life and promote healthy livelihood.

- A. To study the livelihood of the Lodha Tribe;
- B. To study the occupational activities of the Lodha Tribe;
- C. To assess the impact of government welfare schemes beneficiaries;

III. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Mixed-method cross-sectional research design has been followed and both the quantitative as well as qualitative data have been collected. This cross-sectional study has been carried out at Nayagram, Binpur II & Jhargram blocks in Jhargram and Narayangarh & Medinipur Sadar blocks in Paschim Medinipur district.

The study area has been selected based on more concentrated Lodha blocks in both districts. Under these blocks, we have selected more Lodha concentrated villages.

Another criterion was a block is situated a far distance from district town attached with forest, a block which is situated very near to the district town & a block is situated very near to the BDO office also attached to the forest.

Primary data has been collected through a household survey from the respondent households. Certain qualitative data has been collected through case study and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Apart from that, in-depth interview and participant observation has been conducted with key informants like village heads (formal or informal), villagers, Gram Panchayat, for qualitative data collection.

Additionally, the required number of case studies from each village has been collected to capture the qualitative data. The data has been collected based on random cluster sampling. The survey unit was a village and/or *para*¹¹. It depends on the availability of the participant. Those who are available during the survey all are our participants.

A different source of secondary data has also been utilized like previous studies, research papers, development reports, web-based materials, etc. for validating and authenticating the information.

The ethical permission has been taken from the Lodha community. According to their direction, the original name is used in the case study has been changed.

A. Research Question

- 1) How many occupations involve the Lodha community?
- 2) Have your community occupied the MGNREGA job?
- 3) Have you faced a critical situation to survive?
- 4) Have you received any Governmental assistance?

⁹ *Supra note 9.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ It is a separate settlement of a village.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Census of 1981 showed that the total population of the Lodhas including the Kharias and the Kherias of West Bengal was 53,718. The Lodhas were concentrated in erstwhile Midnapore District and their total number according to the Census of 1981 was 16,534. Besides West Bengal, they were also found in the Mayurbhanj and Baleswar districts of Orissa. Originally, they inhabited hilly rugged terrains covered with jungle. Their mother tongue is Lodha, which is close to Savara, an Austro-Asiatic language. They are fluent in Bengali. Traditionally, they were forest dwellers but now they have started cultivation either as owners of land or as agricultural laborers and are also engaged in hunting and fishing. More than 80 percent of them follow Hinduism with the traditional belief in spirits and nature.¹²

According to the Bhowmick, the Lodhas was depicted as a semi-nomadic community who used to move from one place to another in search of livelihood. According to Bhowmick, the Lodhas of erstwhile Medinipur district depended mainly on food gathering and hunting and some of them were found to be engaged in agricultural as well as non-agricultural activities as hired laborers of the higher caste and wealthy families of the villages. By and large, since dependence on forest produce is not sufficient for them, the Lodhas were also found to be engaged in a variety of occupations to sustain their livelihood.¹³

Mahasveta Devi has firsthand personal experiences of the survival strategies of the Lodhas in South Bengal "How they survived themselves day by day, she has tried to bring them particularly for the woman through some economic activities in rural areas. She also describes the real scenario of the Lodhas that they went to various places to search for work only because of evening food, even they did not know that tomorrow they will get food or not."¹⁴ (Devi 1983, 1985:948). A study was done by Panda & Guha to know the impact of development inputs among the Lodhas of erstwhile Midnapore district, why the development inputs failed to deliver the beneficiaries and non-utilization of development inputs.¹⁵

The empirical and policy-focused study had been done by Panda and Guha in a book, the study revealed that an attempt to observe the Lodhas in various blocks in two districts (including the one in which Panda did his fieldwork for Ph.D. oriented studies) in the context of the development efforts undertaken by the Government. Their study includes the distribution of agricultural land under traditional land reform measures as one of the development inputs. Their study finds that the distribution of land to the Lodhas was rarely taken up seriously as one of the major and fundamental tasks towards their socio-economic development, although in Narayangraha block the distribution of land to the Lodhas was found to be in better condition.¹⁶

Another article written by Panda and Guha on the health and disease among the Lodha, the study revealed that most of the Lodhas suffering epidemiological disease due to lack of knowledge awareness. Health is very poor due to the lack of proper and valuable food. This scenario shows the poor economic condition.¹⁷

The Lodhas do not live exclusively in the forest-covered areas, but have spread out in other deforested regions and are found to work there as agricultural and non-agricultural labourers. But their main economy is still based on a collection of minor forest products, such as leaves for preparing leaf-plates for sale. According to Bhowmick, the Lodhas were found to collect edible roots and fruits for household consumption and sell the surplus in the local markets. They are also found to be engaged in the collection of tussore cocoons and sell them in the market for cash. Lodhas also catch snakes and lizards and sell their hides and consume the flesh of these animals. They also catch fish and tortoises from the water bodies for domestic consumption as well as for sale.¹⁸

Mr. Nalini Bera, a Government official has written an excellent Bengali novel on the life of the Lodhas which was dedicated to Chuni Kotal. The name of the novel is Sabar Charit (2005) which means 'The nature of the Sabar'. In the novel, which is based on the personal experiences of the author, the daily lives of some Lodha women are depicted in painstaking detail. The characters in the novel were mainly found to eke out their living through the collection of various forest products. The author, however, did not deal with the problems of implementation of the development schemes as narrated by Mahasveta Devi in her articles.¹⁹

Mahasveta Devi's long experience of working actively for the cause of the Lodhas led her to recommend certain concrete solutions that she thought should have been adopted by the policymakers and government functionaries for the development of this small and

¹² Mandal, H. et.al. 2002. West Bengal, in *India: An Illustrated Atlas of Tribal World*. Anthropological Survey of India: Kolkata.

¹³ Bhowmick, Probodh Kumar. 1994. *The Lodhas of West Bengal*. Kolkata: Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology (ISRAA).

¹⁴ Devi Mahasveta. 1983. Lodhas of West Bengal-I. *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 18. No. 22: 947-949.

¹⁵ Panda, S. 2014 "Educational Scenario among the Lodhas of Paschim Medinipur District: A Comparative Account" *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention* Vol.1 No.9 pp-875-890, 2014 [ISSN: 2349-2031]

¹⁶ Panda, S. and Guha, A. 2015. "'Criminal Tribe' to 'Primitive Tribal Group' and the Role of Welfare State: The Case of Lodhas in West Bengal, India" NOVA Science Publishers Inc. New York, USA. ISBN: 978-1-63463-685-8

¹⁷ 'Patterns of disease and treatment among the Lodhas in a Village of West Bengal' Santanu panda & Abhijit Guha in the journal *Tribal health bulletin*. Vol.21. No.1 pp. 64-71, 2014 [ISSN No 0971-4677].

¹⁸ Bhowmick P.K. 1981. Rehabilitation of a 'Denotified Community' The Ex-Criminal Lodhas of West Bengal. *Royal Anthropological Institute Newsletter*. 44: 6-8.

¹⁹ Nalini Bera, *Sabar Charit* (2005), Karuna Prakasani, Kolkata

marginalized community of Bengal. According to her, plans with big budgets may not work for the real development of the Lodhas and secondly, development inputs for the community should be executed and managed by the Lodhas themselves. In another article published in the Economic and Political Weekly, Mahasveta Devi narrated her experience of observing the enthusiasm created among the Lodhas when in 1982-83, they revived their community organization (Lodha-Sabar Kalayan Samiti). We quote from the author

“The Lodhas had revived the Samiti in sheer desperation for physical survival. The awakening of the Lodhas surprised the state government. The sluggish serpent eternally in winter hibernation covering the Lodha name seemed to stir a little. Six Lodhas were appointed as Lodha cell social workers, including Chuni Kotal. And three boys were appointed as village welfare supervisors in Chakua, Chandabila and Pranabpalli, on a contingency basis, at ten rupees a day. All were employed in September 1983. This encouraged the Lodhas, through their devotion and dedication Lodha and some non-Lodha children came to the community centre for studying. These workers could persuade the Lodhas to give up drinking, to save from their wages, to live hygienically. They felt that the state government was coming forward with schemes for development and the Lodhas should be prepared to reap the full benefit of such schemes.”²⁰

After the long discussion of the literature, we have found the Lodhas origin, development, socio-economic life, nature of life but have not found any specific economic life or daily survival strategies.

V. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study revealed that the Lodhas socio-economically backward community in West Bengal. They are standing separate from all other tribal groups. So, their social life is interesting to reveal. Their social life includes their settlement, their house types, their literacy and education, their social organization, food habits, social customs, work participation, their political organization and so on. It is vital to discourse these after another. The villages are either separately or with other communities. Most of the Lodha villages are situated far away from the human reach inside the dense forest separately. But some of them are found living in multi-caste villages. The financial condition of the Lodhas was not successful. It was almost pathetic. Since the Lodhas are mostly forest dwellers, their economic events centre in and everywhere the forest.

House Types: The house of Lodha has been made here and there in a scattered manner. These houses appear as a shapeless cluster. They build a single-roomed house made of mud and straw-thatched. Some well to do Lodhas families have multi-roomed houses with country yards and gardens fenced with bamboo poles and twigs. They live with their pet animals.

Food, drinking and Smoking: The main food of the Lodhas is rice. They take meals twice and thrice a day. In the morning they eat soaked water rice from the previous night. They take it with burnt potatoes and tomato with mustard oil, roasted drumstick leaf. During lunch, they take boiled rice with different vegetable items. Sometimes they did not take lunch because they went to the forest early morning and came back after sunset. In the evening they are prepared the rice and chicken. They prefer to eat vegetables which are grown from their homestead land like potato, tomato, drumstick leaf, chilly, cauliflower, cabbage, bitter guard, ladies finger, radish arum and brinjal etc. Besides vegetable food, they also eat non-vegetable food like chicken, fish and dried fish. Sometimes they stored the vegetables and chicken as dried for their lean period. Consumption of liquor is more or less a part of their food habits. Both male and female drink country liquor when they feel tired. Both men and women are having the habits of chewing the betel leaves along with tobacco. Men are smoking bidi and *Hunkoo* for pleasure.

Education and Literacy: The social life of the Lodhas is reflected through their discouraging literacy position. The following data prove their literacy status. The literacy situation of the Lodhas is below the state average in the case of both males and females. The literacy rate of the Lodhas as reported in the 2011 census is 28.0%. The percentage of matriculates among the Lodhas is below 5% in the case of males and below 2% among the females. According to their point of view “earning is the most essential aspect than education”. The Lodha children went to the forest to collect forest produce around the age of ten.

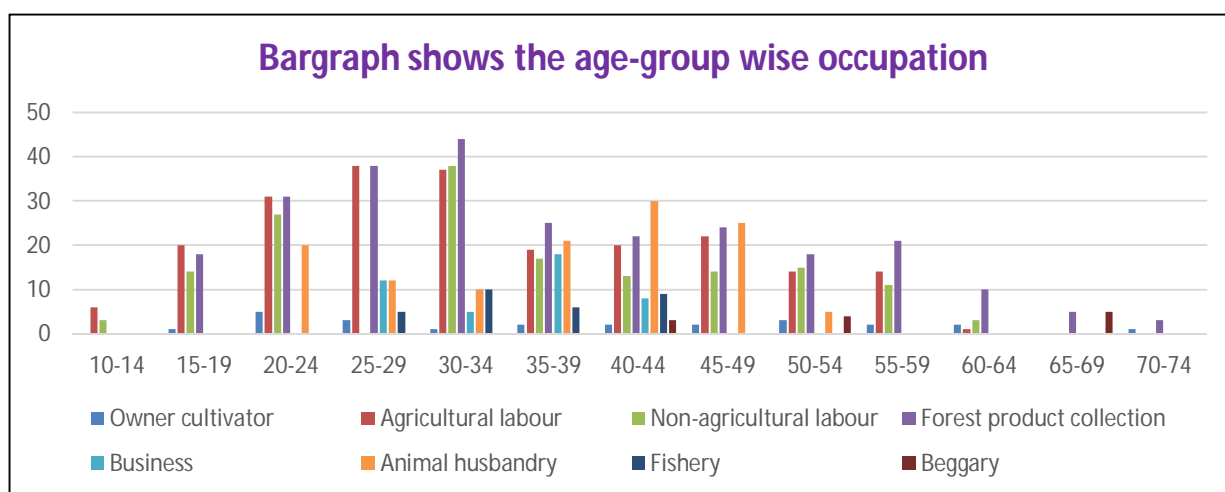
Economic Life: The economic condition of the Lodhas depends on forest produce collection and day labour. Since the Lodhas are mostly forest dwellers, their economic events centre in and everywhere the forest. Their main work was childhood the tussar silkworm in the host trees of Sal and Asan. As well as tussar cultivation they pursue hunting, food gathering, and collecting forest products in the forest. Apart from the collection of fruits and roots for their consumption, they collect Kendu leaves to make bidi. They used to collect Sal and Siali leaves to make leaf cups and plates and Sabai grass to make ropes. They also collect forest products like honey, Laxa, Sal, Seeds, Roots, Gum, Mahua flowers and firewood which they sell in the local market or *hut* to earn for themselves.

²⁰ Panda, S. and Guha, A. 2015. “‘Criminal Tribe’ to ‘Primitive Tribal Group’ and the Role of Welfare State: The Case of Lodhas in West Bengal, India” NOVA Science Publishers Inc. New York, USA. ISBN: 978-1-63463-685-8

Age group-wise occupational pattern of the Lodhas

Age group (in years)	Owner cultivator	Agricultural labor	Non-agricultural labor	Forest product collection	Business	Animal husbandry	Fishery	Beggary	Total
10-14	0	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	09
15-19	1	20	14	18	0	0	0	0	53
20-24	5	31	27	31	0	20	0	0	114
25-29	3	38	0	38	12	12	5	0	108
30-34	1	37	38	44	5	10	10	0	145
35-39	2	19	17	25	18	21	6	0	108
40-44	2	20	13	22	8	30	9	3	107
45-49	2	22	14	24	0	25	0	0	87
50-54	3	14	15	18	0	5	0	4	59
55-59	2	14	11	21	0	0	0	0	48
60-64	2	1	3	10	0	0	0	0	16
65-69	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	5	10
70-74	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	04
Total	24	222	155	259	43	123	30	12	868
%	2.76%	25.57%	17.85%	29.83%	4.95%	14.17%	3.45%	1.38%	100%

The above table shows the working-age group of the Lodhas. The study revealed that nine-person started their work from the age group 10-14 and about 53 people adolescent Lodha engaged agricultural, non-agricultural day labour and forest produce collection during the age group (15-16). The most interesting aspect is both the age group is the school going age group. When we asked the younger Lodha people that “why you are not going to school?” they replied, “ we have no food in the morning for surviving, after collecting some forest produce and sold in the neighboring villages or sweet shop then earn few money to eat something”. They farther added ‘earning is a priority than education’. All types of the occupation have been found in the age group 40-44. But the highest population engaged in the earning from the occupation in the age group 30-34. We can see that 2.76% of villagers are engaged in owner cultivator, which is very few in number, those who have own agricultural land. Most of the population are engaged as forest produce collection and very few i.e. 4.95%, Then come to engaged as agricultural labor i.e. 25.57% and 17.85% are engaged as non-agricultural labor. We have also found about 14 % are engaged as animal husbandry. Few families are engaged fishery (3.45%), business (4.95%) and beggary (1.38%.) respectively. They are also engaged in other occupations like the preparation of handicraft products as their traditional occupation.



VI. DISCUSSION. (AUTHORS OBSERVATION FROM THE FIELD)

Lodhas live a life of extreme poverty coupled with extreme health issues. The adult members; for sustenance, of the family usually leave the house very early in the morning leaving the kids and the aged members behind. They come back late in the evening, at around 4:30 pm, and engages in household chores like cooking, cleaning, clothes washing, etc.

Their living conditions were extremely poor and unhealthy. The male and female member of the family usually leaves the house very early in the morning leaving the kids and the aged members behind. They come back late in the evening, at around 4:30 pm, and engages in household chores like cooking, etc. Very few of them have their land. Paddy is the major food crop that they cultivate. The majority of the population works as daily agricultural labor in other's land and gets paid around Rs.190 to Rs 220 during the season. In the off-season they have mainly engaged in forest produce collections like woods, sal leaves and roots and stems of different species of trees and creepers and sell them in the market, *hat* and neighboring upper-class villages. Many of them also make brooms from date leaves, *chiru* sticks, *jhandu* grass and bamboo, baskets, rice cleaner (*kulo*) and mats from bamboo strips and date leaves. They purchase these bamboos from the neighboring village at a hundred fifty to two hundred rupees per piece. Then they cut off strips from these bamboos and make baskets, brooms. Roughly from one bamboo, they can make three to four large baskets which they then sell in the market at forty or fifty rupees per piece. They can make around four to five large baskets per day. Regarding mats, it takes around three to four days to make one large mat which they sell in the market at three hundred to four hundred rupees. Some of them are also engaged in animal husbandry but their numbers are very few. In matters of animal husbandry, the Lodhas are primarily engaged in fishing. They catch fishes from the nearby rivers and other water bodies and sell them in the local market. They also catch them for their consumption but they are generally small fishes, crabs, and snails. Very few of them have cows. Most of them possess goats and pigs, chickens and ducks whose meat they sell in the market.

Besides these, there are various other occupations in which the Lodhas are engaged. Some of them work as plumbers in Kolkata or other major cities of West Bengal. Some of them are engaged as drivers, security guards or works in the Railways as Group D staff. Some works as a mason and are engaged in various construction activities. Some of the women are employed as cooks or teachers in the local ICDS (Anganwadi) under State Governmental Service. Some of the villagers also engaged in liquor selling. They used to prepare country liquors like *chuloi*, *pachau*, and *haria*. Those drinks were supplied in the local markets as well as to the nearby villagers. The traditional *haria* preparation and selling are alone done by Lodha women in the Jhargram district of West Bengal. The women sell one bowl of *haria* at the rate of rupees five. They sell mostly on the day of weekly markets and earn around two hundred rupees. This job is done by aged Lodha women only. The major part of the cash earning is spent on purchasing rice beer or *haria*. This is a general trend of the male Lodha community. The drink is consumed by both women and men. The rice beer of *haria* is associated with all their ritual offerings and considered as sacred. Regarding education, the conditions are even more tragic. There is an ICDS (or Khichudi school as they call it) in the village where the parents send their kids for informal education and mainly for nutrition (khichuri is provided). The ICDS was in very poor condition due to a lack of helping hands. The teacher who was posted there had to do all the work including cooking and cleaning. Most of the adult members are uneducated and only a few can sign their names. The proportion of school dropouts is staggering. But if we compare then the literacy level of girls is quite less than the boys. The reason behind this is that the girls are married off at a very early age around 15 or 16 years. Some of them even have one or two children at 16 or 17 years of age. A few of them got school stationeries like school bags, copies, and pens from the Government of West Bengal under the Tribal Welfare Department. Regarding their living conditions, it was quite poor and unhealthy as already mentioned above. Most of the houses are kutcha made of mud, soil and have thatched roof. But there are exceptions as well. Some of the houses had tin roofs and their condition was better than the kutcha ones. Only a handful was lucky enough to get a pacca house from the Government under various schemes like *Indira Awas Yojana*, *Geetanjali*, and *BCW* schemes, etc. Many houses had electricity but the lines were hooked. A few of them also got a DTH connection in their houses. Another important aspect regarding their living condition was the bathroom. The majority of the houses don't have one. Few of those who got it from the government use it as a storeroom for grains and straw and still defecate in the nearby forests.

In matters of getting benefits from Government welfare schemes, the main item was the Ration Card. Almost every household has got ration cards, be it Below Poverty Line or Antyodaya Anna Yojna. The ration cards are very functional. They get a regular supply of subsidized food items like rice, wheat, sugar and kerosene from the nearby fair price shops. As mentioned above a few of them got houses from the government. Many of them also got job cards but very few of them have got any jobs from the government like the construction of roads, *mathir katha*, etc. We also found a Lodha Community Hall where women of the village were given sewing training. All the concerned authorities along with the BDO organizes meeting over there at regular intervals to find out if they are having any sort of problem. The village also got a few SHGs (Self Help Groups) but they aren't still very helpful. The villagers complained that they haven't got anything from these groups so far (no money or animals). In matters of health, the

majority of the households got health cards (under Rashtriya Sasthya Bima Yojana or Sasthya Sathi) but they are unaware of its utility. ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activists) workers visit the village quite consistently and provide them with medicines and also immunize the children. Except for this, there was also a health center very near (around 500m) to the villages where they visit mainly for primary treatment of some basic ailments like fever, cough and cold, dysentery, etc. In these areas, the villagers suffering from diseases due to malnutrition, no proper diet, no proper drinking water, unhygienic conditions and lack of awareness regarding the Government health care facilities. During our field visit, we have found a child aged 10, he was sleeping in front of the door alone. We asked him, what is your problem? No reply, but another person from a different house told us that “he is suffering from fever from last two days but nobody is worry about the matter because his mother went to the forest in the early morning and his father went for labour work, another problem is there is no health centre within walking distance that the villagers help him.

Case Study 1

Name of informant: Jiban Sabar

Age: 44

Sex: Male

Village: Amlasole,

JL. No: 25

Block: Binpur-II

According to the informant, there are six members in his family. They are dependent on forest resource collection and daily labor. He had received a record of right on *patta* land from the Block Land and Land Reforms Department in 2008. The family has also received financial assistance for house building in 2008. All the family members are living in the house but it is not suitable for living as the roof is damaged. Jiban (name changed) said that ‘Our house is in a very poor condition because it was built by bricks with mud and thatched by tin with a single door made by a plain sheet of tin and there is neither any window nor any ventilation system. The house was constructed by a contractor under the supervision of some government official and they did not consult us regarding the planning of the house. Moreover, if the house requires repair we will not be able to do it without the help of the contractors who made the construction.’ Jiban also added, ‘I have received *patta* land on paper in 2009 and the amount of the land is 0.15 acre only, but till now I have not seen the land or the plot which has been allotted under my name. Maybe some other person is cultivating the land. The government official who gave the *patta* paper to me did not show the actual spot where my piece of land is located.’ He farther added ‘daily activities are most essential for our community. When we did not get any work that day we did not prepare any food or did not purchase any food and food preparation material. Our children got cooked rice from ICDS, some time we ate all members in very little amount. During summer and autumn is our lean season. That time actual ‘no work no food’ scenario has been found.

Case Study 2

Name of informant: Ghanashyam Bhakta

Age: 65

Sex: Male

Village: Parasia

JL. No:

Block: Nayagram

Ghanashyam Bhakta(name changed) lives in a joint family. His old father and mother reside with him. He has one daughter and a son. His brother and brother’s wife and son also share the same household. Formerly they were dependant on forest product collection and daily labor. In 2003, Ghanashyam received about 0.82 acres of *patta* land with the record from the Block Land and Land Reforms (BLLRO) Department and he has been cultivating paddy in the land. Only one crop is grown in this land since there is no irrigation facility. According to Ghanashyam, ‘I have received *patta* land and cultivating it since 2004 with the help of my family members. In the early stage, I could not procure plough and bullocks, but I have been able to hire them from my neighbours in exchange for money. In 1999, I bought a pair of bullocks. I earned the money by selling paddy grown in my land. Then I also bought a plough. Since 2000, I have been able to cultivate my *patta* land in every agricultural season.’ Being encouraged in agriculture he purchased 0.10 acres of agricultural land from a Mahata farmer of nearby Malam village. Ghanashyam received financial assistance for house building under the IAY scheme in 2004 from the Government. He said, ‘After receiving financial assistance for house building in 2004 I made my house according to my plan and employed some members of my community for the construction of the house. The officers of the government department came to inspect my house and they were satisfied. I am now living comfortably in my house.’ Ghanashyam also received an old-age pension for his parents in 2010, which is Rs.750/- per month. He receives the pension money twice in a year from the local post office and according to him ‘the cash helps him to cover a lot of expenses for his large family.’ He also told us that forest is our only livelihood opportunity, sometimes we are unable to enter the forest, In a year 2 month is our lean period, that time we cannot collect FPC and/or did not get any work so we ate food once in a day and few families have no food.”

VII. CONCLUSION

In lieu of a conclusion, the study revealed that the lodhas tribes are the most hardworking tribes and people, where their life is not so easy. They are fighting every day to survive. Every family member is going for work to have a meal at least one time a day otherwise they have to sleep without having any food. Their livelihood is very tough as most of the people are not having proper houses.

These houses are in very bad condition, it looks like that anytime roof can fell. It has also been found that the majority of the villagers do not have their land where they have to work as labor on some other person's land where they are paid very less amount by which they buy food for them and nothing left for savings so that they can repair their houses. From the above study, it has also been found out that forest produce is also one of the major occupations during the off-season but due to middlemen who buy these forest produce collection at a very low price.

Even after getting benefits from the government welfare schemes like Indira Awas Yojana, Gitanjali Housing Schemes, BCW department, RSVY scheme, PMAY, Job card, Health Card, Ration card, widow pension, old age pension, ST pensions under NSAP, their life doesn't seem improving the way the government planned to uplift them. They are still in that position where they used to be in the past. The education rate is very low even after opening sarvya sikhsha abhiyaan to educate the children till the age of 14 years but it is still the same as before. The housing schemes don't seem so beneficial to them as they keep complaining about it that some of the houses are being received a long back and it has not been repaired and some of them are complaining that having a family of eight to ten members the size of the house is not sufficient to live a sustained life as their family is increasing by years. According to them, the financial assistance for the house building is not sufficient to prepare double room houses, it was possible if the Government gives the money to us, not to the contractor. The model of the houses is not appropriate for living, because of a single room with a door and a single window but no ventilation. The government has given them *patta* land for cultivation but not yet given the right of possession and *patta* record.

Finally, we have made an attempt to enumerate a list of recommendations which may be considered by the concerned departments of the Government and the policymakers for the betterment of the Lodhas;

- A. A separate cattle shed and kitchen with two-room houses will be made in consultation with the beneficiaries, this is the minimum requirement.
- B. The Lodhas are forest dwellers and it is their traditional occupation, so they need official engagement with Joint Forest Management (JFM) as a member like other tribal groups. Permitted them for acquiring non-timber firewood for domestic uses and wood from forests to build different things. Otherwise need proper licensing to acquire wood from the forest divisional offices.
- C. The road transport and public communication systems should be improved in all the study villages. Governmental efforts towards the supply of safe drinking water and minor irrigation systems should be initiated immediately in all the areas inhabited by the Lodhas.
- D. The skill development training should be arranged by the government to trained cattle and bird rearing. The dairy industry should be introduced so that it will encourage them to raise their income.
- E. The scheme like ICDS and Mid-day meal for providing food to the preschool and school-going children is not carried out successfully in this area, so, the government should take initiative to properly functioning the schemes.
- F. The Government should take initiative to improve insufficient health centers.
- G. A proper environment has to be created to attract children for education. The number of ashrams, schools, colleges has to be created where hostel facilities should be there free of cost.
- H. The skill development training should be arranged by the government for the male to learn new methods of cultivation and for the female technical method of handicraft products.
- I. The BPL survey should be done in these villages properly so that these should not get left out from any benefits.
- J. The government should create employment opportunities according to their skills. A legal awareness camp should be an organized village wise regarding the benefits of Government welfare schemes they should receive.
- K. The Lodha families to whom *patta* land has been issued on paper should immediately be given the actual right of possession with full protection against all kinds of disturbance by the district administration and the panchayat.
- L. The financial assistance for house construction plans should also have been made in consultation with the beneficiaries themselves to give honour and importance to their specific needs.

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