

**AMLAGARHI (VILLAGE OF PAHARIA TRIBE, PGTs) –
A CASE STUDY OF SANITATION INTERVENTION UNDER GSF**

The Paharias, as the name indicates, are a hill tribe settled in the hilly ranges of the Rajmahal Hills and the neighboring region in the Santhal Parganas. The Rajmahal falls in the old Santhal Parganas district, which was later on divided into the districts of Dumka, Pakur and Sahibganj. Racially, Linguistically, and culturally they are close to the Birhors. Both the Birhors and the Paharias belong to the Austro-Asiatic sub-family of the Austric family of languages. They are of the Dravidian origin, like the Mundas, Oraons and other members of the Austro-Asiatic sub-family.

They have been identified as Primitive tribal groups (PGTs). This identification is based on three characteristics are

- (i) pre-agriculture level of technology,
- (ii) low level of literacy and
- (iii) stagnant or diminishing population.

Different anthropologist has defined on the basis of different characteristics. For example famous anthropologist L.P.Vidyarthi (1964) made three fold classification of the primitive groups like (1) forest hunting type (in food gathering stage) (2) settled agriculturists (proto-cultivators and the hill cultivators), and (3) artisan communities of rural craftsmen.

On the other hand Sachchidananda (1981) characterized PTGs, by and large by (a) absence of written language, (b) relatively simple technology (c) social institution being caste in a simpler mould (d) small numbers (e) relative isolation and (f) slower rate of change. Evans Pritchard (1951) characterized primitive societies as those that are small in scale with regard to numbers; territory and the range of social contacts and which by comparison with more advanced society have simple technology, economy and little specialization of social functions. Working upon the same theme, Redfield (1961) gave the concept of "Little Community" which was characterized by distinctiveness, smallness, homogeneity and self-sufficiency. These four factors are by and large found in all the primitive societies although there may be exceptions.

“Due to the mounting socioeconomic and cultural pressures on them there is little chance of their number growing; unless radical measures are adopted and a positive atmosphere is created for them the Paharias will perish in a matter of few decades”, opines scholar.

The Amlagarhi (Amlagharia) village of Rajbandh Panchayat of Dumka Block in Dumka District has all the traits which characterise a Paharia village. It has a small population of around 96 persons. This village is having 24 families.

The Amlagarhi village is situated on hilltops. Since most of Paharia villages are situated on the hilltops and slopes, they are devoid of bare necessities & minimum amenities. The houses are densely situated, with just a small path in between two houses. Thus they are very susceptible to fire, which in no time can spread and engulf the entire village.



There is a primary school in the village. This has only structure of rooms. These rooms are completely bare- no furniture even for the name shakes. There is no teaching tool available to the teachers. The structure for the toilet has been constructed but no pan has been installed. School has no drinking water facilities.



A study of S N Roy on the Paharia villages shows that the average distance of a *Paharia* village is 11.7 km from *Pucca* road, 8.2 km from hospitals, 6.9 km from high school, 6.9 km from doctors, 6.3 km from middle school, 9.8 km from high school, 2.3 km from the small permanent markets. This indicates the terrible life the *Paharias* have to put up with. In emergencies, they have to cover a long distance for medical help.

Medical facilities in our village Amlagarhi are almost non-existent. There is a two-kilometer upward climb to reach the village. This last two-kilometer is not motor worthy. Actually for any vehicle to reach there is a herculean task. In the rainy season situation become more critical. For any medical help one need to go to the Dumka Town which is around 15-16 kilometers away. In the rainy season taking any person to such a distance for medical emergency is extremely difficult.



General health of the people of Amlagarhi appeared to be very weak, manifested by poor body built lazy habits, lack of enthusiasm and indifferent attitude. Several water borne diseases such as Diarrhoea, Dysentery, liver enlargement and stomach disorder are frequently found due to the use of such polluted water which is affecting their general health. Majority of them appeared very weak with lean and thin body built suffering from the effects of under nutrition, mal nutrition and acute diseases like malaria and kala-a-azar in the epidemic form. In general such poor impression of their general health with so many diseases appeared very alarming among the *Paharias*. A critical analysis of the basic reasons of their poor health status indicated the lack of preventive measures and Sanitation facilities, adequate medical facilities and awareness. Besides their compulsory and hard manual labour related to their daily livelihood in the hilly areas and serious addictions of *Mahua wine* were also seriously affecting their health.

According to the report of the assembly committee, the population of Paharias fell by 9,000 during 1960-70 and by another 6,000 during the decade 1970-80. The committee observed that the main reasons for the decrease were malnutrition and use of polluted drinking water and the resultant diseases.

In this context, Global Sanitation Fund (GSF), a programme of the UN Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), has appointed NR Management Consultants India Pvt. Ltd. as Executing Agency for India to execute the project "Promoting Sustainable Sanitation in Rural India". Aident-Social welfare organisation has been selected for implementation of this project in Dumka district of Jharkhand.

When the team of social workers of Aident- Social Welfare Organisation visited Amlagarhi they were treated with complete indifference that was very natural. Although being a part of the same system, this village has no basic amenities provided by the state.

The drinking water was fetched from two wells and a natural water spring. One of the wells was almost dry and in other also the water level was very low. Defecation in the open was a norm and there was hardly any home, which was having even a makeshift toilet. It required lot of patience and empathy to engage the villagers in any sort of discussion. The accessibility was also a problem. The workers were required to come back before sun set. On the other side it was difficult to get hold of people in the daytime because everyone was out in the forest for getting wood or other forest materials. It leaved a very little scope for interaction in the daytime. By the time the people came back from forest it was time for evening to set in thus, for social worker, the time to come back to their base. In such a scenario team decided that the best time to engage with the villagers will be morning. The team started to visit the village early in the morning. For the villagers it was also easy because their day start very early.

The continuous visit by the team early in the morning to Amlagarhi starting to show the result. Now at least villagers were willing to listen to the team. The established a rapport with the village chieftain, convincing him with their sincerity. The chieftain started to believe that the team is not a fly by night operators who are here to fill the files and once that is done they will vanish in the thin air never to show their face. What made the chieftains more convince that the team was not offering any dream of quick solution to their problems like drinking water but willing to work with them on finding solution.

The team explained to the village community the purpose of their visit. In an early morning community meeting through the PRA a village map was developed and the point was underlined that how their habit of defecating in the open is creating havoc with the quality water they drink, the air they breathe and the food they eat.



Through demonstration it was shown that how they can construct a toilet without spending a single penny. It was decided that till the toilet was not constructed people would start covering the shit with the soil thus minimizing the harm. Once the ball was set in motion villagers took upon the task of constructing toilet.

The idea that their village may be the first village in Dumka district that is free of open defecation also made them works harder. But there were homes where the young members have left the village in search of work and no able body member was there to construct the toilet. In such case the other villagers pitch in. with the help of Aident team those toilet were also constructed.



Once all the toilets were constructed the village chieftain called another meeting to impress upon the villagers to start using the toilet religiously. But it was easier said than done. The age-old habit of defecating in the open was something, which was difficult to get rid of. To ensure that defecation in the open is being stopped community it starts taking thing in its own hand by forming watch committee.



The whole effort got a new boost when the villagers were informed that the team of Global Sanitation Fund will visit there village to inspect the use of toilet and if satisfied there village will be one of the few villages of the Dumka district which will be declared open defecation free.

For a community where for years no officials have paid a visit this information was a great moral booster. When the day they all were waiting for came the villagers welcomed the visitors with all the traditional dance and gaiety. After a thorough inspection of the village when the Programme Manager of GSF Mr. Oliver Jones declared the Amlagarhi ODF the pride on the face of the villagers was very much visible.



What made the matter more memorable was the presence of Mr. P. K. Choudhry, Director, Sanitation (PMU), Jharkhand. He took a keen interest in the proceeding and also visited the natural water spring of the village. He assured the villagers that his department will use this water spring to provide safe drinking water to all the villagers by installing an overhead water tank where the water will reach with the help of a generator run on solar energy.



Unlike other promises made to the population of Amlagarhi it did not end with the promise itself. Later on a team of engineers visited this village to make a detailed project report and the preparation is on to realize this plan on paper. The day is not far when every household of Amlagarhi will have drinking water facility in their own home. All this created a buzz in the district and consequently the electricity department has started the process of installing a transformer and connecting every household to it.

This whole process is a great learning experience to all of us in the social sector that with perseverance we can win the trust of the community. And with the help of the community many remarkable changes can be brought in the life of people living at the margin of the process of development.