

Jharkhand Notes

Swami Satyabodhananda (Chiranjib Maharaj) of the Ramakrishna Mission had told me about the plightful condition of the Birhore tribal community in Singhbhum (East) district of Jharkhand. For the last few months, Chiranjib Maharaj was posted at the Ghatsila Centre of the Mission and he was striving to uplift the condition of these tribesmen who lived in the region. He suggested that I should first visit this place and then see if something can be done in this direction. Consequently, we planned a visit on 3rd and 4th April. From our Parivaar Ashram along with me came Pulakda and Nirmal (our Jeep driver) and we proceeded in Jeep to Ghatsila in Jharkhand about 280 km from our Parivaar Ashram. We stayed at the Ghatsila Ashrama of the Ramakrishna Mission. We were taken by Chiranjib Maharaj to a number of highly impoverished villages in this area like Bhadua, Chhatardanga and Tumankocha.

The condition in these villages cannot be described in words. That these brothers and sisters of ours have been languishing for thousands of years in darkness and continue to be in the same condition was the foremost thought that struck us. The children were all naked and malnourished, women half-clad, old-aged persons were like living corpses. They live in conditions that can hardly be called human. Generation after generation, these people live in the same conditions with no better conditions bequeathed to their posterity. In any progressive society material and cultural conditions improve from one generation to another. One could not see any such progress here for the reason that the most important resource, namely, the human resource, has remained completely undeveloped. In such material conditions it is no wonder that the lamp of education has not been lit here which has further kept the region in such material conditions. To my mind this perpetual misery cannot be broken unless a whole generation of these people is shaken up, quality education given, a total regeneration and unlocking of their human potential happens. The lives transformed in one generation shall surely make way for further progress in future generations once they through education break free from this bonding orbit of ignorance and helplessness. It is something like the concept of Escape Velocity in Mechanics, the velocity with which a body can get past the downward pull of earth. In their case quality education and human-resource development is the only force, which can nullify the downward force of ignorant helplessness and resignation, and is capable of lifting an entire generation and thereby transforming the lives of future generations too. Thus one should see this not only from the point of view of so many people of this generation but countless future generations of these brethren of ours. Lift one generation, the following ones would surely be in better conditions.

A lot was needed to be done there on an ongoing basis to have a life-transforming effect. The idea strengthened in my mind to start a full-fledged Seva-Ashram in this area where highly dedicated young workers can take the vow of service and make

upliftment of these people their only mission. While for Parivaar to do something there in this way could take time, I suggested to Chiranjib Maharaj that we can at least do something by admitting some children from this area to Parivaar Ashram's Residential Institution for Education and Overall Development of Destitute children where 225 erstwhile destitute children are marching towards gifted manhood and life-excellence possibilities. Chiranjib Maharaj was very jubilant at this idea and began to place this idea before the villagers and articulating the transforming effect it could have on their children if they could be admitted to Parivaar. The villagers were very enthusiastic about it and wanted to know more. We therefore thought it best that a few senior villagers should accompany us to Parivaar Ashram and stay there for a few days to see how Parivaar is redefining the entire meaning of the term 'Destitute Home' and what people commonly visualise when they hear this. That the children who till the age of 9/10 years did not even know alphabet could within 2 years or so could start outperforming children coming from regular households influenced our 4 guests. They said on going back they would convene meetings in various villages of the Birhore tribal community and compile a list of children from the community who can be admitted to Parivaar. We told them we would again visit the area in 2-3 weeks time and would then finalize the children to be admitted.

On 25th we again visited the area. This time Nimaida accompanied me along with Nirmal. On our way to Bhadua village we took a wrong way and landed up at another village by name of 'Bhadua'. It took us a while to realize that this was not the Bhadua where we had intended to go and again jeeping our way from one hillock to another in an area reputed to have wild elephants roaming around we finally reached Bhadua during late evening when it was completely dark. Our village brethren at Bhadua heartily welcomed us. The grown up men can speak Bengali with fluency and we conversed with them in Bengali. In fact most of the tribal men here are fairly fluent in 3 languages – their own Birhore dialect, Hindi, and Bengali. It is interesting to note this as only a very miniscule percent of world population can speak 3 languages and living in forests they have learnt these languages. After treating the children and womenfolk with biscuits (we had brought about 200 packets of biscuits) we got distributed the 50 odd Sarees that we had brought with us for the womenfolk. The village Pradhan Shri Samara Birhoree who had been to Parivaar Ashram had already compiled a long list of about 50 children from 8-9 different villages of the area who were keen to be admitted to Parivaar Ashram. He said that on the following he would convene a meeting of all these children and their guardians where we could note the details after interaction with them and finalise the particular children to be admitted. We told them in the first phase we would admit 15 children in May and once they get settled we would admit remaining children in phases. We therefore shortlisted 15 children in the age-group of 6 to 9 years.

We also thought that it would be helpful if we could take a couple of moderately educated young men from these villages who could be trained as Housebrothers for caretaking of these boys at Parivaar Ashram so that at least initially for this group there would be someone who could understand their dialect, habits etc. There was one in Bhadua village who had studied till Class 10 and he readily agreed for this. We asked him to accompany us to Parivaar Ashram where his training as Housebrother would start. He is at present at Parivaar Ashram with us. We decided 15th May as the date for bringing all the 15 children to Parivaar. 3-4 villagemen have taken responsibility to bring the group to Howrah station in train from Ghatsila. We shall receive the group at Howrah station and from there bring the children to Parivaar. We left a sum of Rs 2000/- for covering the costs of the journey of this group to Howrah. Thus, this is the beginning we have made in this direction, which can open a new chapter in Parivaar's work and mission. I think everything has gone in the best possible way till now but the real challenge starts from 15th May when this group begins to settle in Parivaar. The challenge is how quickly they shall successfully respond and settle in a routine of education and overall development. We have no doubt that they surely will, as all our Parivaar children have started from zero and a good number did not have exposure in Bengali before they came. We have geared up for this new challenge.



Swami Satyabodhananda (Chiranjib Maharaj) at Bhadua village during our first trip on 3rd April



Villagers at Bhadua village



Children at Tumankocha village



Children at Chhatardanga village



The four Jharkhand villagemen at Parivaar Ashram with Vinayakda and Pulakda (5th April)



Common Meal of Rice with live red ants (picture taken at Chhatardanga village)



Vinayakda with the villagers at Bhadua village during second trip on 26th April

