

## Health Problems of Lodha Community in Villages of Paschim Midnapore District, West Bengal

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### ABSTRACT

India's official record in poverty alleviation is quite impressive with only 25 percent (official estimate of 2002) of its population living below the poverty line. However, when the grassroots-perspectives from rural India are probed, it is observed that the rural India is more affected by the problem of poverty than the urban areas of the country. This project seeks to clarify from a field study conducted in the three blocks forming parts of the southern villages of Midnapore District in West Bengal State that the widespread corruption and manipulation accompanying India's BPL have led to sheer perpetuation of poverty and social exclusion. There is considerable concentration of an ancient Lodha tribe in the study area.

This tribe occupies the remote areas in the States of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar. The tribals live in villages as a community where they keep distance from other communities. Some of the tribals live in the forest. They hardly mingle with other sections of population. They are branded as criminals. They indulge themselves in stealing, looting and killing people. As such, they are hated by the members of other communities. This particular tribe is neglected. They experience acute poverty. The government has allotted in recent years to each family a piece of land for cultivation. But their meagre resources prevent them from benefitting from the lands. The health of this people is worn-out. The people hardly manage to get one full meal a day. Among the 50 respondents 38 of them (76 percent) of them are GHQ Caseness as they have scored 5 and above in the GHQ-28 Questionnaire. It reveals that most of the respondents may experience probable emotional disturbances and they may have the chance of developing further mental health problems if the present trend continues. The researcher data collected indicates that 47 percent of the respondents value spirituality high as they attach meaning to religion and their life. Only four percent of the respondents refer to their benefitting from the public or private services. It could be discerned from the study that most of the days, many of the women, children and old family members go hungry. Many die in their early age. Primary facilities, provided by the government and the Voluntary Associations are not reaching them.

This study adopts a multi-sectoral approach to trace out the general health problems of the Lodha tribe. It attempts to examine the various types and dimensions of corruption that affect the poverty reduction programmes initiated by the state government. It is the health status of the Lodha tribals that prevents them from becoming productive citizens of India. The present methodology adopted by the government for identifying the poor is very weak.

A way to tackle this problem is suggested in this project. Greater accountability and transparency of the governance at different levels are called for. Strong commitments of political parties and also poor peoples' participation for self-targeting are yet to be established. These will progressively eliminate social injustice and the social cost of corrupt practices occurring in the efforts at alleviating poverty and improving the health situation of Lodha community.

This project data refers to the presence of a large majority of the tribals not getting sufficient nutrition for their daily existence. With a limited income, the families cannot afford to take care of the siblings. Nearly one third of this tribal population cannot afford to have three meals a day because their income is too little. It is like the Maslow's theory where it states that Physiological needs, Safety needs, Love and belonging needs, Self esteem and Self actualization are to be fulfilled to live a healthy life

**Keywords:** Lodha community, Problems of poverty, Branded as criminals, Multi-sectoral approach, Improving the health situation and healthy life

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Midnapore District located in the south of West Bengal State in India. The district contains a large area of the forest and dry lands of West Bengal State. Many indigenous communities such as Santhals, Lodha and Sardar inhabit in and around the forest areas of the southern parts of Midnapore. India's population as on 1 March 2001 stood at 1,027 million (531.3 millions

males and 495.7 millions females). Population as per census 2001, West Bengal with population of 80,221,171 is the most densely populated state in India. It has a population density of 904 persons per sq. km. The Lodha population in West Bengal is 84,966. Among those, the rural population of the Lodha is 82,761, male 42,002, female 40,759 and literacy rate is 34.45 percent. Whereas, the urban population is 2,205, male 1,119, female 1086 and the literacy rate is 48.00 percent.

The strength of Lodha population in Midnapore is 36,624 (Census 2001). It is widely accepted that the health status of the tribal population in general and the Lodha tribe in particular is very poor. These tribals suffer severely from dengue, malaria, sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, and genetic disorders like sickle cell anemia as also nutritional deficiency diseases. This research report attempts to focus on the multi-sectoral factors that affect the health status of the Lodha tribe.

**1.1. The Statement of the Problem:** The wide-spread poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, absence of safe drinking water and sanitary conditions, poor and inadequate maternal and child health services, ineffective coverage of National Health and Nutritional Services and superstitious practices account for the dismal health condition prevailing among the Lodha tribal community. Many of the infectious and parasitic diseases which can be prevented with timely intervention cause several deaths among them. The Lodha tribals are unaware of the non-communicable diseases like diabetes and hypertension. In spite of the development of science and technology, the cultural practices like child marriage and consanguine marriage continue to cause genetic disorder, chromosomal aberrations and suppression of immunity. The Lodha tribe needs to be strengthened to achieve the goal of Health for All.

**1.2. Importance of the Study:** A multi-sectoral approach incorporating the social, economic, political and spiritual aspects of life affecting the health of the Lodha tribals adopted in this study is expected to highlight the various aspects of the health problems of the Lodha tribe. The findings of the study are sure to be of assistance to the Udayani Action Forum and Lodha Kalyan Samity of Bengal in their various programmes implemented for the betterment of this backward tribe in this area.

### 1.3. Objectives of the Study

**1.3.1. General Objectives:** To know the health problems of the Lodha community inhabiting the villages of Paschim Midnapore district in West Bengal.

#### 1.3.2. Specific Objectives:

1. To present the demographic details of the Community;
2. To understand the common psycho-socio-politico-economic condition of the community;
3. To identify the common health problems at individual, family and community levels;
4. To assess the health status of the community;
5. To appreciate the health awareness of the community;
6. To identify the social and cultural factors relating to the health condition of the community;
7. To examine the factors relating to the involvement of the Voluntary Associations and Government Agencies in the health care system among the Lodha Community; and,
8. To know the types of resources the poor people can access

## 2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The Methodology adopted in this study forms the second section of this chapter.

**2.1. Field of Study:** This study on the Lodha tribe is conducted in three blocks situated in the villages of Paschim Midnapore District, West Bengal. These blocks house a total of 9,651 Lodha tribals, according to 2001 Census. The tribals live in villages but away from the other communities. They are labelled as criminals and are not considered trustworthy due to their misbehaviour. These tribals live also in the forest.

**2.2. Research Design:** A Descriptive Research Design and a Qualitative Research Design are adopted to investigate the various objectives of this study.

**2.3. Sampling Strategy:** *Convenient Sampling Method* is adopted in this study. The respondents numbering 25 couples and belonging to the age group 14-30 are selected from different villages of the three blocks referred to Jhargram, Nayagram and Kharagpur.

**2.4. Sources of Data:** Primary data are collected from the respondents. Personal interview method was adopted. Discussions with the village panchayats, Pradhans, teachers, Voluntary Agencies and Government officials clarified the objectives and sharpened the focus of the study. The books, articles from the journals relating to the problem studied are also referred to.

**2.5. Tools of Data Collection:** A list of questions prepared for the purpose of conducting the interview was approved by the research guide. The interview schedule method was selected for the collection of data as the quality of information gathered thus would be more appropriate for the analysis. The interview schedule consists of 148 questions, both close-ended and open-ended. Free and frank expressions were expected from the respondents for the questions raised. GHQ-28, Spiritual and Community Health Care Availability scales were intrumentalized in data collection. The researcher conducted a meeting with the Kabiraj to gather information with regard to sicknesses and medicine used by the Lodha community.

**2.6. Pre-testing:** Pre-testing was done on five Lodha couples who live in Balarampur village. Based on the feed back provided by the respondents, necessary modifications were incorporated in the interview schedule. A final questionnaire approved by the research guide was administered.

**2.7. Actual Collection of Data:** The respondents were chosen through a neatly worked-out process. The researcher met the district secretary of the Lodha community who, in turn, introduced the village headmen. The latter narrowed down the list of the respondents.

The approved Interview Schedule was administered to 25 couples in the age group 14-30 living in the different villages of southern parts of the District of Midnapore in West Bengal. The one-month stay of the researcher among the tribals perfected the art of administering the interview schedule in the villages referred to. Further, it facilitated the speedy collection of the data. It offered an opportunity to the respondents to clarify the doubts in the questions raised. The personal approach adopted in asking the questions individually helped in the recording of the responses of the participants with greater clarity. Actual living conditions of the respondents were registered, thus enhancing the utility of the study.

The researcher had conducted to a meeting with the village doctors (Kabiraj) in Ladha Kalyan Samity to find out the different type of sicknesses and medicine of Lodha Community.

The researcher conducted a day programme with the Kabiraj to gather information with regard to different sicknesses and Herbal medicine used by the Lodha community.

**2.8. Definition of Terms:** Health problems of Lodha Community – A Multi-sect oral Approach refers to social, economic, political and spiritual factors that affect the health status of the Lodha tribe who are deprived of basic necessities for good health. They constantly struggle for their survival, neglected by the primary facilities of the government. They further suffer from numerous diseases due to malnutrition which reduces their longevity.

### 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**3.1 Introduction and Background:** Anthropologists studying the Lodha tribe in 1951-56, observe that they are a people with a pre-agricultural economy mainly dependent on forest products, either consuming these for their sustenance or engaged in exchanging the products in the market to procure other essential commodities for their daily use. With the gradual control of the entire forest by the kings and zamindars who secured it on fixed revenue from the British Administration, the Lodhas are driven out of their homeland, the forest areas. The forests are cleared and converted into agricultural fields to obtain an increasing income. With such an encroaching, the forest area shrinks in size. The inhabitants are further strictly restrained by the Law-enforcing authorities, i.e., the forest guards and others from using or benefitting from the forests. This reduces the means of their livelihood. And this forced them to adopt criminal and uncivilized ways of behaviour for a prolonged period.

Their successive anti-social activities created a serious law and order problem and ultimately in 1871 the then British Administration declared them to be Criminal Tribe. Since then they were under serious police surveillance. Their movements were restricted. There were also occasions of this community getting accused every time a crime is notified. Thus, at times, due to no fault of their own, the members of this Lodha community were punished. Their being sent to jails made them get acquainted with other confirmed criminals and skilled dacoits. Most of the Lodha tribals became criminal-minded, 'anti-social' and dangerous elements.

Some well-to-do people instigated them to commit a crime. They bought the stolen articles at a very cheap rate. In this way for a long time upto 1952 they had to bear with this infamy. But it is unfair and adverse to humanity to call a whole tribe as criminal or branded, because no man is born as a criminal. After independence, all the Criminal Tribes of India were considered to be ex-criminals, and in 1953 the Criminal Tribes Acts were repealed so that all such groups are now designated as *Denotified Communities*. So, in independent India, laws were made to relieve them from this stigma. At present they are in the same category with other Adivasis.

With the disorganization setting in, the equilibrium of the community was upset. There were territorial and economic displacements. Time and again the Lodha tribals bore the brunt of outside invasions, and hostile historical forces keep them out of a life of settled agriculturists.

These days, they do not live exclusively in the jungle areas. They spread out into other deforested regions also to be employed as farm labourers. But their main economy is still based on: collection of minor forest products, such as leaves for preparing

leaf-plates for dining, for producing country-cigars or bidi, and faggots for sale; collection of edible roots and fruits for household consumption and selling the surplus. A few of them get involved in collecting tussore cocoons and selling them for cash. Catching snakes, lizards etc is done to market their hides. The flesh of these creatures is consumed. Besides these trades, catching fish and tortoises both for domestic consumption and for sale is undertaken.

Some references exist to point out that these people are lazy. Though they live below subsistence level, their very low aspiration prevents them from improving their condition of living. The police records abound to refer to their indulging in extra-legal activities such as robbery, dacoity, theft and burglary in the neighbourhood. Attempts to restore them to agricultural activities during the recent years have in many places not been successful. The Lodhas, thus, are a problem-ridden people, and their problems are not studied. The government now seeks ways to tackle their problems and find ways of uplifting them.

Some of the following problems of this community are brought out in a recent study: 1. Economic and territorial displacements have caused them to lose their livelihood and self-confidence; 2. Without having specialized in any gainful profession, the members of this community find it extremely difficult to fit into the existing economic structure; 3. The stigma of 'criminality' lowers their social status and prestige in the society and this is acting as a bar to their earning a livelihood; 4. Their group cohesion is disturbed by the frequent police oppression, punishment and torture. This makes them migratory. Arrests and confinement in jail shatter their family bondage, generating an atomized or individualistic mentality; 5. Their overall poverty exposes them to rank exploitation by neighbouring groups and makes them surrender to many undesirable situations for the sake of survival.

**3.2 Demographic Features:** According to the 1951 census, the number of Lodhas in West Bengal was 8,348. In the later period no such account of their population is found separately. Another community called Kheria (also called Kharia) was grouped together with the Lodhas, and in 1961 census the total population of Lodha and Kheria together was 40,898 although a great difference is found between the two tribes. In 1981 census, this number rose to 53,718 – among them males were 27,751 and female were 25,976. As far as known, nearly 20,000 Lodhas reside in West Bengal.

The Lodha tribals are not very much aware of the governmental family planning methods. More than sixty percent of them are yet to grasp the role of various family planning strategies adopted by the government.

**3.3 Livelihood:** The poor households pursued diverse sources of livelihood. They are largely wage-earners in the villages studied. With separate domains of livelihood-related activities for women and men and with a sprinkling of a few common ones, those assigned to be done by the women include making of Sal leaf plates, growing homestead vegetables, making puffed rice, backyard poultry, selling eggs, bamboo craft, weaving mats etc. The cultivation of *Aman* paddy, the major crop, was no longer profitable with an average surplus of about Rs.200 per bigha of land. Those endowed with irrigated lands grew three crops, rice, pulses and vegetables. Contract cultivation or leasing-out land on fixed rent was on the rise especially by those migrating outside the State.

**3.4 Seasonality of Livelihood:** Most livelihood-related activities were highly seasonal in nature and induced periodic vulnerability in poor households mainly in terms of food insecurity and health care. This was in addition to their endemic vulnerability through their continuous conditions of poverty. In rain-fed areas farming is undertaken. Seasonal migration was a pronounced strategy in the non-farming community. Forestry served as a Safety Net. A Sustainable Livelihood Approach is made to study the topic of forests as safety net for the local communities. Such a framework accounts for the factors that cause poverty and vulnerability, given the several types of resources, such as forests, the institutional framework and the governmental policies.

**3.5 Habitat and Dwellings:** Generally, the Lodha villages are found near the forest or far away from the towns. Small huts, made of mud or plastered with mud are covered with palm leaves or straw. Poverty is visible in every hut. There is only one door for each house and it is made of bamboo or palm leaf. It is kept open when necessary.

The cooking stove is inside the room. An elevated place called *Isan* is beside the stove, where something is offered to the ancestors. Those who earn their livelihood by farming have better huts. They have more than one room, a courtyard in front, and a vegetable garden beside.

**3.6 Furniture and Clothing:** The Lodhas very seldom keep furniture – except a few earthen vessels and at best aluminium plates and bowls. The better off among them use bronze utensils. There are other articles like mortar and pestle for grinding the paddy, spade, axe, crowbar, sickle and several hunting equipments. Not more than two or three pieces constitute their clothing. While the men-folk wear *gamcha* (woven towel), the women wear sarees. With not much money to spare for buying gold or silver ornaments, the women do not wear ornaments or if they wear the ornaments are either brass-made or German silver-made. Glass bangles also serve as their treasured possessions.

**3.7 Profession:** The Lodha tribals are generally hard-working. They work from the sunrise to the sunset. While some collect fire wood, fruits-roots, honey etc from the forest, some others go hunting. As they return home fully exhausted after the day's labour, they have their meals in common. At times, they do not have any food. Fasting is not uncommon. But they are least bothered. It is surprising that, a decade after independence, these sons of the soil are neither settled nor feel secure.

The Lodha society is patriarchal. A Lodha family consists of parents and unmarried children. Father is the head of the family, he interacts with outsiders. In the social sphere, the responsibility of a male or a female is the same, and both go out in search of food or work. But in the domestic sphere, the female plays a major role. The males generally don't interfere in their affairs. The gatherings from the forest resources are sold in the market by the women. Once the trade is over, the women follow their spouses' home.

**3.8 Clan (Gotra):** The Lodhas are divided into nine clans. Each clan has a god of its own. The kindred follow the religious taboos. The Bhukta people are more in number among the Lodhas. They are divided into two groups: Bhukta Major and Bhukta Minor. The former group considers itself superior to the latter. The matrimonial relationship is not established between these two groups. However, there are instances of a bridegroom from the Bhukta Major taking a bride from a Bhukta Minor's family. The former rarely sends their girls to the latter clan.

**3.9 Village Organisation:** Every Lodha village has a panchayat of its own. This panchayat finds ways to make community life stronger and happier. In the event of a problem arising, it settles the problem and also administers justice for taking place in the community. But this type of panchayat is not found in those places where the Lodhas live with other communities. The Lodhas select the members of the panchayat and females are not given entry. Among the office bearers, the *Mukhia* (panchayat chief) and *Dakua* inform the villagers the date and time of the hearing when a dispute arises. Generally, the court sits in the Mukhia's house. At the time of the hearing both the accuser and accused are present and they submit their complaints to the panchayat. The Mukhia asks for general opinion and gives the verdict. The guilty of social crime is imposed a fine. Sometimes the guilty is ordered to arrange a feast to please the villagers.

### 3.10 Lodha Rituals

**3.10.1 Birth rituals:** A Lodha girl has to abide by some rules and regulations during her pregnancy. Prayers are offered to god for the safe child-birth. In the seventh month of the conception, *Shadh-Bhakhsan* (wish-feast) is observed. At the time of delivery, a cloth is hung as a covering, and an old lady acts as a midwife. A wizard is sent for only to seek his help as he applies black magic to obviate a problem cropping up during the delivery. Twenty-one days after the child is born, a ritual called *Ekusha* is observed. That day a ritual bath is taken by the mother of the child; her nails cut as a sign of purity. The child is also given the ceremonial bath. The new mother enters the kitchen after the inauspicious period is over.

After the first six months, rice is given to the child during a ceremony called *Mukhe-bhat* (Rice eating). That day a dessert is prepared by mixing fine rice, sugar and milk in a new vessel and is offered to the goddess *Shitala*. The child's head is shaved. A ritual bath with oil is given to the child. The child is presented with a new cloth, a waistband and a garland. The grandmother of the child puts the dessert in its mouth. From that day the child is entitled to enjoy the common meal of the community.

**3.10.2 Marriage rituals:** The Lodha get married when they become adult. Generally the Lodha girls are married after they are 12 years old. Marriages are prohibited in the same clan – like a Mallik to another Mallik or a Kotal to another Kotal. Similarly, marriage among cousins and relatives are not in practice. Inter-caste marriages invite punishment. The Lodhas do not follow any script in their marriage. There are no written prayers recited either individually or in common. Putting vermilion on the head and forehead of a girl signifies the action of marrying her. While the presence of the superiors of the village is essential to approve of the marriage ceremony, a priest invokes the blessing of god to grant happy life to the couple.

With the marriage being over, a solemn ceremony of the groom climbing a tree or the roof of a house and announcing to the bride now standing below saying that he would fall and die. He remains in that place until the bride promises to him that she would fetch *tunga* (a kind of wild potato) to feed him. After this, the bride takes the responsibility of her husband's life.

A solemn feast where liquor is served in plenty follows for the entire village. Then, the mother bids farewell to her daughter by questioning her saying *Where are you going my child?* The daughter replies three times saying *I am going to serve.*

Another ceremony connected with marriage takes place in the groom's house. The groom puts an iron bangle around the brides' wrist and both tie the sacred thread. The villagers are invited for a meaningful meal also at the groom's house. A second marriage (*Sanga*) is common among the Lodhas. When a person marries a widow or a divorcee it is called 'Sanga' and the wife is called 'sangali.' A 'sangali' is not given that much recognition. In the Lodha community if a girl's menstruation cycle does not start before the marriage, she is not allowed to live with her husband. After her puberty starts, she has to stay secretly in a neighbour's house. After seven days, a ceremony is held in the groom's house. In the presence of all, the husband and wife stand face to face in a courtyard, covered with a cloth. Three times red and white flowers are exchanged in a ceremony called *showing the flower*. After that the society gives them permission to live together.

In the event of the death of an elder brother, the younger brother can marry his widow. But if the younger brother dies, the elder brother can never marry his widow. Again the younger sister-in-law can be married even when the wife lives, but the elder sister-in-law cannot be married.

In the case of divorce, there is no law or ceremony in the Lodha community. If the wife is an adulteress, the husband leaves her. But the wife cannot leave her husband so easily. If she cannot adjust with her husband, she comes back to her father's



house. After staying for sometime in this way, both leave each other. They can marry again according to their own choice, but for that, they have to obtain permission from the panchayat.

**3.10.3 Last rituals:** While cremation of the dead bodies is the general practice, the practice of burial also is accepted. Infectious disease victims and children are buried, and the dead due to natural causes are burnt. In the case of terminal illness when there is no hope to survive, the eldest son puts water in the person's mouth and then others follow. They regard it as natural death.

When a person dies, his body is laid on a mat and is covered with an old cloth. The relatives seek the advice of the elders and make preparations for the last rites. An iron scathe is kept beside the dead man's head to ward off the evil spirits from tormenting him. The dead body is kept on a bamboo cot covered with cloth and carried by the relatives to the burning ghat.

After reaching the ghat, a funeral pyre is arranged. The dead body is placed on the pyre with head placed northward. The eldest son of the dead person performs the last rites and says, *Father (or) Mother, I am putting fire into your mouth. This is my duty.* After this others do the same thing. When they come back from the burning ghat, they fasten the cot with a tree and step over the rope. Addressing the dead they say: *Here is an obstacle for your coming back.* They believe that the spirit of the dead will not come back as a ghost. Finally, they bathe in a pond or a river and chant *Haribol* thrice and come back home.

The 'unholy' period is observed for ten days. Everyday the eldest son cooks rice in a new vessel for the dead and immerses it in the water. On the tenth day, the dead person's sons go to a river or a pond and shave off their heads. On the eleventh day the last rites are performed. Mango leaves and ghee are burnt in the place where the person died. Four generations along with the dead-man are worshipped. In the evening of that day the eldest son wearing a new cloth takes a potful of water and goes to the village square and calls by the names of four ancestors. He sprinkles water all around. In this way he pleases the dead souls and comes back home. He puts the pot on an earthen dais *Isan* in the name of the ancestors in the north-west corner of the room. On that day a fowl is killed and cooked along with rice in a new vessel. Eight separate bowls are made of shal (*Shorea Robusta*) leaves and rice and curry are served in them and placed on the *Isan*. The son worships and respectfully offers the food to the ancestors. After that he comes out of the room. The rest of the food is shared by others.

When a pregnant woman dies, she is buried according to the Lodha custom. A vermilion is put on the head and a red liquid is put on the feet of the dead body and taken to the burning ghat. The mourners bring out the embryo with the help of the knife and bury the dead facing east; the embryo is also buried beside. Wizards use that knife for black magic. This type of death does not require any penance or funeral rites. When a child dies, he is buried. The unholy period is observed for three days or five days.

### 3.11 Religious faith and deities

The Lodhas worship many deities and have great faith in them. The Lodha priests perform the rituals in different places. The supreme god of the Lodha is the *Boram God*. According to them, the god preserves the people from all dangers. So, whenever they go to the forest to collect fruits or food materials, they remember this god. They believe that, *Boram* is a powerful forest god and he roams on the back of a tiger to cover his devotees from wild animals.

The altar of *Boram* is built under an old tree in the forest. The Lodhas believe that, god *Boram* is as tall as a human being - his body covered with hair, he has wide eyes and he carries an axe in his hand. In order to please him, the people offer earthen elephants and horses on the last day of the month of *Paush* (Dec 15 – Jan 15) and *Chaitra* (March 15 – April 15). The priest then cleanses the altar and sweeps it with cow-dung; then he puts a vermilion dot on the altar. Sometimes vermilion dots are put on stones to symbolize the deity. Tulsi leaves are placed on the dot and over the leaves, forest fruits are offered. The priest prays --*"O god! Please see that no wild animal attacks us. If you protect us, we will worship you like this next year."* In this way they ask for their god's blessings.

*Chandi* is a powerful goddess of the Lodhas. *Chandi* is known by many names like – Jaichandi, Boramchandi, and Bhairavechandi etc. *Chandi* has three eyes glitter at night. She protects her devotees from wild animals and poisonous snakes. Generally, her altar is built under the tree. Earthen horses are offered to her. *Chandi* is worshipped three/ four times a year. Offering of rice, fruits, vermilion, oil, sweets are made to please her. Goats and hens are sacrificed.

Another goddess of the Lodhas is *Ma Sitala*. She takes care of infectious disease. So, she is worshipped two to three times a year. Unboiled rice, fruits, sweets are offered in her name and sometimes goats are sacrificed. Besides, they worship *Pasumata* and *Dharam* at every auspicious occasion.

The Lodhas believe in spirits and ghosts. According to them, the spirits are everywhere, always trying to harm human beings. The chief of the ghosts is *Jugini*. To please this ghost chicken are sacrificed in a field or by the side, far from the road village. Among other ghosts *Kundra*, *Pretsini* and *Gomua* are famous.

The Lodhas believe in Black magic. The wizards, who perform this, are called *Ojha* or '*Gunin*'. In case of disease they seek the help of these people. Having profound knowledge about the herbs, the wizards use herbs and extracts for treatment. In fact they are very much proficient in the Ayurveda and do the same thing what a *Kabiraj* does.

**3.12 Festivals:** The Lodhas do not have any such characteristic festival of their own. So they have accepted the festivals of their neighbours. They celebrate *Tushu* on the last day of the month of *Paush* (Dec. 15 – Jan. 15) and *Badna* during *Kalipuja* or Diwali. Like other Adivasis, the Lodhas are very fond of dance and music. They roam about in the forest and change their habitats from one place to another, may be that is the reason they cannot practice dance and music. Their nomadic life obstructed them from achieving aesthetic excellence.

**3.13 Economy.** Even after India became independent, this Lodha community meets with brutal tortures, as the members are treated as criminals since the British days. They were rendered homeless and they were victims of inhuman torture. Homeless, they roamed in thick forests without food, without shelter fighting with wild animals. On the other hand, pucca houses were built for land-lords and hoarders on their lands. Even the missionaries hesitated to work among these people. The Lodhas are deprived of all the benefits which the missionaries provided for other Adivasis. The environment where they were forced to live in did not favour any development work from any NGO.

There has been no development on forest resources. But due to the implementation of the *Forest Preservation Act*, the means of their livelihood was completely closed. It was just a meagre amount of wood or fruit that they collected from the forest. According to the Government records collected from the Lodha Kalyan Samity shows that only 18 percent of the Lodhas lived on forest resources or are day – labourers. They are aware of availability of food from the forests. Unlike the people considered responsible, they do not want to devastate the forest. They do not collect any thing from the forest that is beyond their need. But no attempt was made to recruit them even in the post of forest guards. The Government showed extreme empathy to them.

In 1958, Bharat Sivashram Sangha in cooperation with the Government started social service in Dhollat – Pukuria region. The work is carried out with utmost sincerity and sympathy. Records maintained at the *Lodha Kalyan Samiti* refer to Probodh Kr. Bhowmik promoting developmental works among the Lodhas in 1965. In later years, centres like Bamunmara Lodha colony, Lower Jhaurhi development centre and Santigarh colony were formed. They are yet to exhibit success. Even the Government fund earmarked for rehabilitation is not properly utilised as concern for the community is generally absent. Not much development efforts are perceived even during the Left Front regime.

### 3.14 Politics:

Man is a social animal with his personal needs and social needs. Politics enables the citizens to elect people to govern the people. Human as they are, there are successes and failures at the political level in every group of people at varying times. Each elected group administers certain programmes motivated by the policies of the parties to which the government members belong. The various programmes undertaken, thus, are appreciated or at times rejected by the people for whom they are intended.

In the actual implementation, elected leaders (or sometimes appointed) carry out their responsibilities to the satisfaction of the people concerned. The local leaders generally neglect the poor households. The poor for their part lack the capacity building. There are instances of neglects of even the specially deserving cases. The agricultural economy is generally backward.

Party affiliations could matter for political gains. Political party is controlling the elected representatives. Local governance dominated by the rural middle class and upper strata of society who control and decide on local resources. Even geographical distribution of assets favours the rural middle class and upper strata of society.

**3.15 Prevailing Diseases:** The diseases are grouped under two headings: common and specific Health generally is presented and examined by the absence of diseases and disease producing germs. Hence, in this section to highlight the health status the common and specific diseases of the three sections of the community; men, women and children are presented.

#### 3.15.1 Common Diseases:

The prevailing diseases of the Lodha Community are fever, colic, diarrhoea, dysentery, gingivitis (inflammation of gum), Hepatic diseases, influenza, malarial fever, pneumonia, and skin disease like ringworm, scabies, ulcer, venereal diseases and others. Some of these diseases, such as hepatic, skin diseases, etc., are caused mainly through the consumption of country liquor like rice beer, mahua liquor and others and want of proper sanitation.

#### 3.15.2 Specific Diseases:

Men occasionally suffer from ansarca, apoplexy, eczema, orchitis etc. Constipation and appendicitis are practically uncommon. It is possible due to consumption of leafy vegetables which contain some cellulose fibre and makes the bowel clear. On the other hand, it may sometimes be the cause of colic, dysentery, indigestion, etc.

Common female diseases are amenorrhoea, anaemia, menorrhagia, dysmenorrhoea (painful menstruation), hysteria, mastitis, leucorrhoea etc. The practice of abortion is not uncommon. But the tetanus is associated with it and brings mortality to pregnant women due to unhygienic condition.

Disease among the children are acne, anemia, bronchitis, caries of teeth, cough and cold, orrhins, eruption like measles,

harpies, itch etc. gripe, ichthyosis, intestinal parasites, mumps, night blindness, otitis, otorrhoea, rickets, scurvy, strangury and whooping-cough. Diseases like paralysis, urticaria, jaundice, conjunctivitis and others are not uncommon. Malnutrition, dysentery and diarrhea among the Lodha children are very prominent. Round worm, thread worm and hook worm are the common cause of biliary diseases among the children.

Diseases like cholera, pox and conjunctivitis occur as epidemic or in sporadic forms in winter season. Diseases like elephantiasis, goiter and haemophilia are predominant. In comparison with other ethnic communities rheumatism is more prevalent among Lodhas.

### 3.15.3 Magico Religious Beliefs

The Lodha tribal community expresses its religious beliefs on certain plants. Again, it holds the view on certain plants have a magical power to effect a cure for some specific diseases. The totem behaviour, such as plants associated with customs, religious, taboos, myths, legends, festivals, tattooing purpose and body ornamentation are termed as magico religious beliefs.

1. Amulet: Plants associated with curing or preventing ailments and safeguard against evil spirits are included in it.
2. Magical cure: It includes the plants associated with curing ailments through charms, divinity and others.
3. Sorceries and witchcraft: It covers the plants used in witchcraft.
4. Magic: Plants related with certain magical performance for determination the causes of ailments.

Magic and magical beliefs play a significant role in the life of almost all the ethnic groups particularly in the life of the Lodha community.

## 4. CONCLUSION

We can identify the following as crucial issues that need to be addressed:

- Discrimination of the Lodha tribe within the Indian society is assuming gigantic proportion and also in disguised forms. Hence, upholding the rights of the Lodha tribe means protecting them from every form of exclusion, segregation, exploitation and subjugation.
- Land alienation and displacement have become the central and crucial issue of the tribal of India today. Under the pretext of public projects, the livelihood resource of the tribal that is land, forest and water are alienated from them. This reduces them to non-beings in their own surroundings. If this process is not stopped, the tribal will be wiped from this part of the world.
- It is stated that the well being and progress of society depend on the extent to which both men and women of Lodha community are able to develop their full personality and are cognizant of their responsibilities to themselves and to each other. But in reality patriarchy continues to dominate interaction between men and women in India. This male domination mindset needs to be squarely tackled to enable the rightful place and role of women.
- Ownership, access and control over resources (*jul, jungle aur zamin*) are becoming central issue of the Lodha communities.
- Two interrelated processes are taking place among the marginalized communities. On the one hand, they continue to be subjected to exclusion, deprivation and discrimination. On the other hand, they have been protesting against the oppression and exploitation they are subjected to and are asserting their rights to be citizens of the nation and member of the society like anyone else. It is these interrelated processes which have led to identity formation and assertion of them. At times, this identity formation is exclusive and at other times it is inclusive. NGOs and civil society have to address these two processes.
- In a welfare society the government should express its concern towards the sick especially of the Lodha tribals by preventing the private agencies from exploiting the down trodden.

In brief, it can be stated that the culture of corruption, criminalisation and complacency are on the increase in India. These have added to the culture of dominance and subjugation and have added to the culture of silence. Against this trend, the marginalised are evolving culture of assertion. Every attempt by the NGOs and civil society to respond to the development and social action issues of the marginalised is to enhance their capacity to build their lives and their society

The villagers expect that each and every problem should be solved by the Panchayat. However, they are aware that such machinery could become flawed causing exclusion of the poor groups often due to party favoritism and class prejudice. These two leakages tend to act as the main constraints for the poor from getting benefits. The discriminatory practices in selection of the beneficiaries from poverty reduction programmes and schemes tend to bypass the potential needy, illustrations for which abound in providing Indira Awas, hand pump, BPL cards, old age pension, toilet support etc.

The following problems and issues need to be redefined and addressed to the Lodha people as earliest as possible to make them productive citizens of India along with the general people.



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