

Poverty Portrayal in the Context of Rural Bengal: A Case-Study of Purulia District of West Bengal

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ABSTRACT India in the post –Independence years has not witnessed adequate advancement in her economic set- up. Poverty was rooted in Indian soil as far back as in the 18th century and rural Bengal particularly is the victim of bruises of poverty. The present paper unleashes the portrayal of poverty in one of the worst affected Districts of West Bengal, i.e. Purulia. This is a picture of daily struggle for existence shouldered by the tribals of Purulia. The paper also uncovers some of the remedial measures that have been launched by the Participatory Forest Management Team in order to annihilate poverty to a certain extent at micro level. The authors have attempted to show how the tribals of a certain area of Purulia have been largely benefited in raising their socio- economic standard by these experimental measures.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty in India is a deep- rooted malady which can be traced back to the middle of the 18th century, when India lost her glorious destiny in the Battlefield of Plassey in 1757 at the hands of the Britishers. On that day, the gate of India, particularly that of Bengal was opened for the merciless onslaught of the Britishers. Dadabhai Naoriji, in his book called ‘ Poverty and Un-British Rule in India’ (Naoroji, 1902) has described that the roots of poverty lay deep in the soil and soul of Plassey and it was from this time onwards, that the ‘Drain of Wealth’ began in India. The ancient pomp and splendour of India received a rude shock, when the Britishers began to fulfill the coffers of Manchester and Lancashire with the riches of Bengal in a ruthless manner. The agricultural as well as the mineral riches of Bengal were emptied due to the unstinted lust of the foreign intruders. Jogesh Chandra Sinha, in his ‘Economic annals of Bengal’ (Sinha, 1966) wrote that between 1757 to 1780 Bengal wealth amounting to three crores of rupees had been transferred to England. According to the English Historian, Sir Theodore Morrison, it was an age of ‘Economic Transition’ (Morrison, 1911) in India and according to the Indian Economic Historian, Dhiresch Bhattacharjya, it was an age of ‘Mercantalism’ in India (Bhattacharya, 1972). Thus poverty left a deep scar in the land of Bengal

and Bengal became a victim of blemish and anguish for ages.

Poverty Dimensions

Poverty has many dimensions such as economic, sociological, psychological, cultural and political. The Economists define poverty in terms of persons living below the poverty line. The concept of poverty line again based on the income- consumption approach is a relative explanation and differs from place to place, region to region and nation to nation. The Sociologists describe the phenomenon mainly because of culture of poverty. The poor are not poor because of the paucity of the financial resources or scarcity of physical comforts, but because they hail from low socio- economic status. These conditions adversely affect the intellectual, motivational and emotional aspects of its victims. The Politicians consider poverty as social injustice. The different governments in the world have been speaking about a war against poverty, which has been hardly conquered. Psychologists have defined poverty in terms of deprivation and helplessness. The poor are deprived not only of the minimum necessary provisions of physical life, but also social and economic stimuli necessary for the development of a normal individual. The poor do not have any control over their circumstances, which are controlled by others. The behaviour

observed among the poor is the result of the environment in which they live. Thus poverty dimensions are important in deciding the deprivation and helplessness among the poor people (Sharma, 1987). "Poverty thresholds and lines have a long history extending back into and beyond the Poor Laws in England, with the modern debates initiated in the 1950s. In the context of Indian Planning, there is virtually a library of reflective and policy analysis, as well as operational tool kits and manuals on them." (Saith, 2005).

There are six approaches of the definition of what constitutes the bare necessities of life. In the first approach, the basic elements of the basic needs basket are specified ostensibly on scientific grounds, determined by the intake or consumption necessary for the basic survival of human being.

A second approach would use a norm or specification of basic needs that reflects or arises from a community or a societal view of what constitutes the socially acceptable minimum levels of living and associated way of being.

A third approach could be called inductive empiricism, where the level is derived from observed consumer behaviour.

A fourth approach would rely on the subjects themselves to define the notion of poverty through their lived experience. Hence, the division between the poor and the non-poor is based on the self-perception of the population concerned.

A fifth approach could be labeled the politico-administrative definition, where the poverty line is specified with one eye on political implications and another on budgeting one.

A sixth approach, somewhat mindless approach, which simply sets an approximate universal level for the poverty line (Saith, 2005).

Among all these approaches in measuring poverty, the economic approach is the most important. A common approach in delineating the poverty line is to specify a minimum calorie intake, because above all things, hunger can be taken as the greatest criterion of poverty. This calorie level is then converted into food-stuffs adequate to meet the level, according to the typical consumption pattern in a society. The cost of this amount of food is then determined to yield a poverty level. It has been the practice to take a measure of constant calorie for everyone. In the poverty level prescribed by the Indian Planning

Commission in the early 1960s, 2250 calories per day per person in rural areas was specified as the minimum level. The conversion of calorie intake into a commodity basket must be culture specific, no matter how absolute the standard is. In pricing the consumption basket to arrive at a level of expenditure for the poverty level, non-food items, necessary for subsistence needs are to be considered. The absolute approach though popular, is not free of conceptual problems. But, its narrow economic and physiological basis made it subject to criticism to the assumption of a common, constant calorie intake related to individual personal characteristics (Watts, 1968). Ashok Rudra, in his essay, 'Minimum way of living- a statistical examination', says, "a minimum level of living is an elusive concept that is vaguely associated with the culture of a people and level of development of the economy to which they belong. For India, however, the minimum would have to mean the absolute minimum—a standard of living such that anything less is incompatible with the maintenance of physical well being. It has to be in certain norms in regard to food, clothing, housing, medical and education facilities etc. On the items that belong to private consumption proper, it is only with regard to food that a normative approach can be taken—a consideration of nutrition. As to non-food items, like clothing and housing, the concept of minimum requirements is far away from being totally irrelevant. But no yard sticks have been worked out for them on any scientific basis. Quite a lot of work has on the other hand been done on low-cost dietary patterns for meeting minimum nutritional needs." (Rudra, 1974).

Poverty, as a concept is also closely related with inequality, as opined by Amartya Sen. According to him, given the average income level, a higher level of inequality (reflected by the usual measures) will tend to be associated with a higher level of poverty. Furthermore, the so called 'poverty line' may sometimes be drawn in the light of the socially accepted 'minimal' standard of living and the latter can be influenced by the average income level, so that the poverty measures, thus defined, may catch an aspect of relative inequality as well. Amartya Sen also points out that "poverty can be identified not merely with inequality, but also with unemployment. This has occurred recently in many studies across the globe, e.g. in the 'ILO Countries Reports', especially in the 'Kenya Report'. In

India, a somewhat similar view has been taken by Dandekar and Rath which have defined “an adequate level of employment..... (Dandekar and Rath, 1971) in terms of its capacity to provide minimum living to the population” (Sen, 1974).

Again, Pranab K. Bardhan, in his essay on ‘The pattern of Income Distribution in India: A Review’ has commented “In recent years, there has been a growing literature concentrating not so much on the inequalities of income or consumption across the various groups of population, but more on the absolute poverty of certain bottom groups of population.” (Bardhan, 1972).

Pronab Sen, in his recent article called, ‘Of calories and Things: Reflections on Nutritional Norms. Poverty Lines and Consumption Behaviour in India’ has remarked, “the change that the current value of the poverty line does not permit line class to consume the calorific norm is a serious one, one suggests that the periodic price connections that have been carried out to update the poverty lines are inadequate and indeed may be even inappropriate. Consequently, it may be the case that the poverty estimates made in the subsequent years understate the true incidence of poverty in the country. If this is true, it provides a compelling case for re-estimating the poverty lines. Over time, changes in various factors, such as age- sex occupation structure, tastes and preferences, relative prices of different goods and services etc, would certainly lead to alternatives in the actual consumption basket, but if it can be shown that there exists a feasible basket of food products which would allow the poverty line class to meet the caloric norm from its actual expenditure on food, then the validity of the poverty line gets established (Sen, 2005). The class-wise cost of food baskets will exemplify the fact (Table 1).

The table 1 shows that with the exception of Kerala and Pujab, West Bengal cuts an image of sorry state of affairs as far as BPL and APL categories are concerned.

The relative approach defines requirements not merely for existence, but for leading a full life as members of a social community. The living standard can be defined by conducting a survey of actual consumption practice or by surveying a sample of households for what they consider adequate consumption practices. The problem of related poverty is to consider poverty as a type of inequality. According to this approach,

Table 1: Class-wise cost of food baskets (1999-2000)(in kilo / calories / Re) rural scenario

S. No.	State	BPL	Poverty Line	APL
1.	Andhra Pradesh	397	272	213
2.	Assam	267	209	177
3.	Bihar	308	270	223
4.	Gujarat	308	236	173
5.	Haryana	316	239	182
6.	Himachal Pradesh	358	256	186
7.	Karnataka	347	248	195
8.	Kerala	193	184	143
9.	Madhya Pradesh	389	284	234
10.	Maharashtra	355	271	205
11.	Orissa	340	287	231
12.	Punjab	307	232	181
13.	Rajasthan	396	263	212
14.	Tamil Nadu	318	222	169
15.	Uttar Pradesh	349	306	241
16.	West Bengal	311	229	189

Source: Computed from Government of India Document, 2001.

specific groups of population are treated as poor depending upon the location of their community. The other economic dimensions of poverty, called inequality are described in a number of ways, such as health, class differentials etc. The European and Western countries claim to have eliminated social inequality from their society. The Socialist countries hold that they have brought equality to same level by reducing the disparity of income and status. Some of the countries like U. S. A. and some European nations have the problem of poverty confined to minorities where as the developing nations, including India have problem of handling of majority of population and the connecting maladies (Sahoo, 1999).

Condition of Rural India since Independence

In the decades since Independence, India has made progress in terms of improvements in basic social indicators, such as health, nutrition and education- life expectancy has nearly doubled, infant mortality has been halved and literacy rates have risen. However, considerable proportion of the population still lives in conditions of extreme poverty. After Independence, much effort has been made for eradication of rural poverty through various Five Year Plans, but most of the Plans are nipped in the bud due to lack of proper planning, lack of fund, lack of proper monitoring etc. The Sixth and the Tenth Five Year Plans particularly chalked out ambitious plans for annihilation of rural poverty. Both Government

and Non- Government Organizations are taking up novel ventures towards this end and in order to cope with the problems of poverty, unemployment, mal-nutrition and illiteracy, several schemes have been undertaken like IRDP, JRY, ITDP, NREP, RLEGP, TRYSEM, NWD PRA, DWCRA, PMRY, SGSY etc. Besides, Government Organizations like C & SSI, KVIC, TRIFED etc. have undertaken lofty measures to heal the wounds of rural mass of India. In spite of these laborious and wise endeavours, poverty remains to be a somber sore.

The majority of the poor in India are landless agricultural workers. The incidence of poverty is also linked to caste members of socially disadvantaged groups like Dalits and Adivasis who constitute a large proportion of people below the poverty line. Apart from lack of access to productive assets, poverty is characterized by lack of access to information and knowledge, to natural resources, to basic rights and services, such as education and health and to the structures and processes of governance. Poverty thus results in exclusion and marginalization from the development process.

When poverty is defined in these terms, it is obvious that women, especially rural women, who are already subordinated by social norms, carry the burden of meeting survival needs of food, fodder and fuel in the face of environmental degradation and diminishing access to natural resources. This also forces the children to be part of the labour force.

The experience of many developmental agencies and workers over the last decade indicates that economic growth and targeted interventions alone are not sufficient to eradicate poverty— poor people must themselves act collectively to change the circumstances of their lives. The Approach Paper to the Ninth Five Year Plan calls for participatory planning as an essential pre-condition and identifies the role of Government as supportive and facilitative of people's own initiatives and holds that participation must become the key element in the process of development.

Rural Development is a unique experience in India's attempts towards development planning in order to overcome economic and social backwardness in its vast wide-spread village society by inducing growth in agriculture and industry and checking demographic profligacy through appropriate measures within an open demographic framework. Development of a

nation's economy, as has come to be understood, does not merely rest on its capability to generate and sustain rapid gains in the growth of its GNP (including per capita). That growth and distributive justice should constitute prime elements in the development mix in developing societies and that the character of growth process itself needs to be tilted in favour of the poor who should be enabled to participate and share benefits of development is now part of the new cumulative view in growth and development. India's development planning is passing through such an experience. The low levels of living of the masses, their low income and the ever-growing menace of unemployment with their 'circular and cumulative causation' in the words of Gunnar Myrdal, pose as of date, a formidable challenge to planning and growth in our country. This challenge becomes greater in the rural regions, where inequalities of income and wealth abound (Myrdal, 1968).

Study Area

This study is mainly based on a tribal area of West Bengal. This area is identified for its tribal intensity and for some tribal characteristics. "The use of the term 'tribe' to describe people who were different from those of the mainstream civilization has been viewed as a colonial construction. There is no doubt that the use of the category 'tribe' to describe people so heterogeneous from each other in respect of physical and linguistic traits, demographic size, ecological condition of living, regions inhabited or stages of social formation and level of accumulation and development was put forward by the colonial administration" (Xaxa, 2005).

Some of the Districts of West Bengal, particularly unfold a picture of utter poverty and distress, like Purulia, Birbhum, Midnapore etc. From different secondary sources, it is known that the approximate age of Purulia is 2 million 50 lakhs of years. Different gazetteers, journals and books prove the fact that this area was known as Jungle Mahal or it was better known as tropical moist deciduous forest. The inhabitants of this area regard forest not only as a symbol of property and livelihood, but as a symbol of revered God. The tribals (Lodha, Santhal, Bhumija, Baiga, Mahali, etc.) in the District of Purulia have been found to be mostly forest-dependent. The Sabar (Lodhas) usually try to abstain from the massive

task of cultivation. In summer, the forest-fringe people do not get much forest products to eat or collect from forests. During this time, they hunt birds, snakes, many types of reptiles, snails, rabbits, wild boars, frogs, crabs, small fish etc. In monsoon, they get some vegetables and leaves from forests and in winter they collect wasted paddy and rats from lands. Mushrooms like, 'Durga', 'Bali', 'Karan' are widely popular. The fruits that are available in the forests of Purulia are Piyal, Blackberry, Kend, Bakul, Tunt, Bahera, Bel, Siakul, Amla etc.

People in general, are mostly dependent on cultivation. But in the lean season, the people leave their villages and migrate to other villages in search of alternative livelihood and they mostly work as agricultural labourers in this region. The children of the hilly areas collect the twigs, Sal leaves, Kendu leaves etc and by selling them, they try to earn some additional money for their family. Sometimes, the males work as wage-earners, women make broom-sticks, prepare earthen pitchers and images, engage themselves in lac culture, work in coal mines, do works of tailoring, weave towels and 'lungis', prepare 'bidis' from Kendu leaves and in this way the forest-fringe people try to explore various means of livelihood out of dire poverty, distress and anguished despair.

Poverty Profile

Keeping in view the above-mentioned aspects of Poverty Dimension, a big task has been shouldered by the Participatory Forest Management Unit of IIT, Kharagpur, sponsored by the Ford Foundation to probe into the roots of poverty and assess the present economic status of the common people of the Bandwan-Manbazar Blocks of the District of Purulia in West Bengal. Among the villages which were

taken for Household Survey, (the Survey was undertaken during the years 2001 - 2003) a pilot scale picture is given in this paper.

The analysis was done on structured questionnaire basis dividing the entire pattern of questions on the level of past status and present status. The nature of questions that were put before the villagers for answering the questions of past status were mainly like this:

1. Condition of the village 25 / 50 years ago
 2. Main source of livelihood
 3. Types of food taken by the tribals
 4. Major forest produces used by them
 5. Whether migration was existent or not
 6. Level of Literacy
 7. Level of status of Women
 8. What were the forest edibles that were available in the forests
 9. Type of clothing used by them
 10. Dependency on herbal treatment
 11. Knowledge about family planning
- The questions on present status put before the tribal villagers constituted of
1. Family particulars (Family size)
 2. Occupation
 3. Income
 4. Land particulars
 5. Daily Diet
 6. Housing
 7. Recreation facilities
 8. Literacy
 9. Health
 10. Household expenditure
 11. Service facilities
 12. Status of pension
 13. Rate of mortality of children
 14. Diversion of children from education to part-time work
 15. Expenditure per item per annum etc.

The answers received though of different types, the basic pattern was almost same. Regarding the past status, the answers concerning the condition of the villages reflect the current stress and strain of poverty experienced by the villagers some 25 or 50 years ago. Agriculture was the mainstay of living in the past years and it remains to be the same in the current years also. The migratory trend reveals the same scenario of shifting to Burdwan, a District of West Bengal. India, just after Independence, could not exhibit any polish in the level of literacy, particularly in the rural areas. The status of women was in a pitiable condition some 25 or 50 years ago. After

Table 2: Categorization of FPCs in Purulia

S. No.	Range	Beat	Name of FPC
1	Bandwan-1	Paragora	Gangamanna
2	Bandwan-1	Bandwan	Kendapara
3	Bandwan-1	Bandwan	Udalbani
4	Bandwan-1	Bandwan	Khoyerboni
5	Bandwan 11	Kuchia	Asanpani
6	Bandwan 11	Latapara	Rajagram
7	Jamuna	Kuilapal	Susnikanali
8	Jamuna	Dhadka	Madhuban
9	Jamuna	Nanna	Latajharna
10	Bandwan-1	Paragora	Ghatihuli

much strife and struggle, women have been able to acquire a stable position after the promulgation of the Joint Forest Management Regulations of 1988 and the 73rd Amendment Act of 1994.

As regards the dependency on forests, the people as today, used to collect a lot of resources for their living from the forests. But it is to be admitted that the people were quite unaware of the usages of Non Timber Forest Produces (NTFPs) as an art or technique of improving their living standard. From the forests they not only got food, fodder and fuel, but also edible fruits, mushrooms, tuber crops etc. Use of herbal medicine and herbal treatment had their roots in forests. Apart from all these, growing hunger was a persistent problem of the people. The paucity of proper clothing, proper food, proper education, proper health, proper living standard and proper family planning led the people in this part of the country to die out of agony everyday.

Conditions have not much improved after almost 60 years of Independence. The villages in Purulia, Bankura and Midnapore display the same picture of wanton poverty and distress. The people in the study area are either unfed or half-fed, clothing are strikingly scanty, the living accommodation consists of a kuchha house of 1/2 shabby rooms with no electricity and proper drinking water. There is no scope of separate sanitary condition or cooking space in the houses.

As far as literacy level is concerned, sometimes it is found that among 5 members of the family, all 5 are illiterates and sometimes among 4 members, 2 are literates and 3 others are illiterates. The number of schools are very few. Usually, there are 2 to 3 Primary Schools in a Block and the number of Dropouts is also adequate. Sometimes, it is for financial problem and sometimes it is for apathy in study that these Dropouts occur. In the case of girls, marital problem serves to be a genuine cause of Dropout. Social pressures also compel the parents for the Dropout of their daughters from schools.

Occupation of the people remains to be cultivation from the very ancient times. Trade and service in different sectors sometimes add financial support to the village families. Family income varies from Rs. 500/- to Rs. 800/- per month in general. The maximum level of income is Rs. 1000/- to Rs. 1200/- for a family. There are large tracts of non- irrigated lands, which if cultivated properly, can provide with handsome amount of crops.

The food intake is not sufficient for most of the families. The village people usually take meals twice daily. In the morning, before getting out for site, the male members take full rice meal with salt and pepper. For the whole day, they work at site and after coming back home in the evening, they take the same type of meal with an extra item of maximum Sak (leafy vegetable – collected from forest). The other members of the family also take same type of food. Sometimes, if they cannot afford to eat plain rice meal, they either have to borrow rice or they remain half-fed or starved. Food- shortage sometimes takes a very acute turn and it so happens that the entire family finds no morsel of food to eat. Recent cases of Amlasole, Dulukdi or some other villages can be cited as examples. There is no question of getting any food subsidy or there is no provision of distributing free food among the villagers. 'The absolute minimum of food intake theory' of Ashok Rudra, as mentioned above, also does not match with the food intake reality theory of Purulia District of West Bengal. The calorie level of food intake per person in rural India, as mentioned in the Indian Planning Commission Report in 1960, as mentioned above, is not also matching with the food intake pattern of the rural people of Purulia. The fact is to be admitted that the poor remain poor because they hail from low socio-economic status, as has been explained in the Sociological Approach to Poverty.

Due to acute poverty and anguish, the villagers of late have become conscious of reducing the family size and are adopting family planning measures to cope with the economic standard. They are also taking advices from the medical practitioners of Local Health Centres. Infant mortality rate was very high in the region and the children used to suffer from diseases like Polio, Malaria, Typhoid, Stomach Ailment, apart from skin disease, eye disease, worm infection etc which mainly occur due to mal- nutrition. Child mortality rate has of course decreased to a great extent due to the fact that the parents are taking care of giving iron folic tablets almost regularly to their children in order to check mal-nutrition and ill- health.

The poverty stricken people of Purulia have no recreation facilities as such. Only on occasions, they are engaged in dancing (folk-dance) and hunting. The children, besides education, do not find any diversion of work,

apart from cultivation, cow/ buffalo rearing and some kind of labour activities. Though child labour is prohibited by law, the children are very often compelled to take up labour-oriented activities.

Household expenditure, is not much, but probably it is too great a strain for the poor households to afford. It is for food perhaps that the poor villagers are spending most, that is approximately Rs. 1200/. For clothing, they are spending Rs 200/, they are spending Rs. 100/ for medicine and health and another Rs. 100/ is allotted for home rituals, small travels etc. These people in Purulia are so much pressurized with pains of poverty and hunger that they are ready to perform any kind of laborious work for meeting their everyday gnawing hunger. In the terrible winter season, the villagers, in particular the children have to remain in bare body. They do not have a single garment to protect themselves from the biting cold. As a result, they fall victims to pneumonia or bronchitis very easily.

As far as village facilities are concerned, the villages are deprived from all possible waxes of life. The villagers who are accustomed with the very mundane way of living, cannot even imagine to have separate facilities of kitchen, electrification, sanitary latrine etc. They cannot have allopathic or homeopathic medical facilities for treatment, they cannot have safe drinking water, they cannot even avail the opportunity of having a glance at a newspaper. They seldom listen to radios, which are often installed in Pan-Stalls. Television is of course a fanciful dream for them. The villagers mostly depend on ayurvedic treatment for any kind of ailment. They very often succumb to occultism and witchcraft and diseases like Jaundice is often cured by this kind of occult treatment.

The village people in this part of the country are not service- holders, so there is no question of old- age pension. The village households are knitted together with the same stereotyped pattern of living, which offers no hope, no variety, no stimulus for better living, no security, no sanctity. The rural scenario, which is being exposed after the empirical study at Purulia, exemplifies pain, poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, anguish and utter despair. The picture remains to be unparallel in the historical perspective of the Third World countries. The best way to cope with this kind of situation is to accept the modern version of tribal identity –

“the people who are different from the mainstream of civilization”, as given by Virginius Xaxa. The table 3 shows a comparative analysis between the past and present status of poverty in Purulia.

Table 3: Comparative analysis of poverty status

S. No.	Component	Improved/ Increased	Not Improved	Remains same
1	Occupation		X	
2	Income	X		
3	Housing	X		
4	Literacy	X		
5	Health			X
6	Rate of mortality of children	X		
7	Service facilities		X	
8	Expenditure level	X		
9	Condition of villages		X	
10	Migratory trend			X
11	Dependency on forest			X
12	Family size	X		
13	Recreation facilities			X
14	Household facilities			X
15	Clothing			X
16	Food intake			X
17	Status of women	X		

ATTEMPTS TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY AT MICRO- LEVEL IN STUDY AREA

The Participatory Forest Management Study Team of IIT Kharagpur has taken up a stupendous job of annihilating poverty of grass-root people of a particular Block of the District of Purulia and the job has been proved to be successful to a certain extent. There are too many impediments which the Team had to overcome and the tale of success can be related in the following manner.

1. Sensitizing the Forest-fringe People about the Usage of NTFPs: The process of depletion of greenery had been initiated in Purulia right from the Colonial Age and this slow process of depletion led to a large scale disaster and the worst victims were these forest- fringe people. Though the Joint Forest Management Regulations introduced in 1988 brought about remedies in the stagnant forest frame- work, the JFM administrators could not penetrate deep into the layers of agony of the grass-root mass. The PFM Team of IIT Kharagpur undertook the tough task of sensitizing the forest – fringe people about the usage of Non Timber Forest Produces (NTFPs) for leading a better livelihood

generation. There are ample NTFP resources hidden in the forests and forest-stand lands of Purulia, like Sabai grass (*Eulaliopsis binata*), Sal leaf (*Sorea robusta*), Atari (Combretum decandrum), Sisal (*Agave* species), Mahul seeds (*Madhuka indica*), Bamboo (*Bambusa tulda*), Mushroom, Honey etc. The people so long, were quite unaware of the fine usages of these NTFPs as craft making mediums. Previously, they were only interested in wood collection, but when wood collection came to a halt due to the new JFM Regulations, their distress increased and they did not know the path to redress their stress in any way. The PFM Team surveyed each and every village / FPC of the Block, undertook Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) method to assess the needs of the people, took up extensive household survey for in-depth study of poverty and appraised the FPC members of the usage of NTFPs for reduction of levels of poverty. Beautiful craft items of Sabai grass, Bamboo, Atari, or Sisal can be made possible with different shapes, colours and designs which are of totally ethnic character. By selling these products in the market, the respective beneficiaries or artisans can gain a handsome income and can gradually find the way for sustainable livelihood earning. The artisans there, have already captured the national market at a massive scale and they are also having the opportunity of exposure at the international market.

2. *Transfer of Technology*: The next step in the path of motivation of the forest-fringe people towards livelihood generation was that of Transfer of Technology, as initiated by the PFM Project of IIT Kharagpur. The technologies devised for these poverty-stricken grass-root people of Purulia had been low-cost and simple, so that the people could adapt with the existing infrastructure and could use the local resources that are available in plenty in the nearby forests. The transfer of technologies had been done from laboratory to land and this process of transfer was of course time-taking and laborious. There were a number of hurdles in the process, for example, transport and communication problem, selection of trainers and trainees, the simple yet scientific methods to be imparted to the trainees, the traditional skill and knowledge of the artisans to be tested etc. Numerous technologies were experimented from lab to land basis, for example, dyeing and processing of Sabai grass to make it free from fungus infection, colouring the grass

with the help of eco-friendly produces and different chemicals, treatment of Bamboo or Atari, processing and production of hygienic and protein-rich mushroom, processing and extraction of honey from local honey-rich species like Eucalyptus, Mango (*mangifera indica*), Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) Sajina (*Brassica juncea*) etc. In the long run, it was found that the experiments proved fruitful and the procedure of adaptability also bore fruit in the sense that the selected beneficiaries could produce heaps of products with new expertise and confidence.

3. *NTFP Trainings*: The transfer of technology could be translated into reality through a series of trainings that were organized at the field-station as well as at IIT Campus by the initiative of the IIT Project personnel. These NTFP trainings varied in items and duration. The Sabai, Bamboo and Atari trainings, for example needed one month duration, where as Apiary, Mushroom and Sal Leaf trainings needed a week only. Sabai and Sisal trainings in particular always require one month more for follow-up action. In the initial stage, trainees were selected from among the FPC members by the drive taken by the PFM personnel and the Panchayat. Later, selection was made from the responding FPCs with the help of Forest Department alone. The essential credentials for selection of a trainee depended on the basic traditional knowledge of the special craft and minimum academic qualification. The in-house trainings mostly comprised of Mushroom, Apiary, Sal Leaf etc.; the out-station trainings usually were of long duration and these trainings demanded the involvement of both the staff and the trainees to a fair extent. Trainees coming from distant direction were provided with food and accommodation at the field station. Separate arrangements were made for women trainees with care. The trainees have been definitely benefited from these trainings, because many of them have become self-reliant by this time and they are earning independently of their own. Women, particularly have come out of their secluded den and they have taken up a long and promising stride towards a better destiny.

4. *Exposure to Markets*: As a consequence of these trainings, a selected and skilled group of artisans have been formed, who are now capable enough to despatch their products for marketing. Various items of Sabai and Sisal are made possible by these artisans, like, sofa sets, ottomans (three-legged stools), carpets, bags of

multiple designs, coasters, ornament boxes, tea-containers, flower and fruit baskets, hats, bottle-holders, shoes etc which have not only national markets, but also export or international markets. Apart from that, Bamboo structures, (idols and buildings), pen stands, ashtrays, vanity bags, baskets are also very much in demand in the market. Atari furniture, which serves as a substitute for cane are also very popular items of transaction. Sal leaf plates and bowls are procured mostly in the regional markets and they are demanded mostly on occasions, like marriage, 'sradhha' or 'upanayan' ceremony. Mushrooms, particularly the oyster variety are purchased both in the rural and urban markets. Dried mushroom, and even products made out of mushroom, like, pickle, jam, jelly etc are very delicious and are highly appreciated by urban people. Similarly, honey of different varieties, made from extracts of Mango, (*Mangifera indica*), Eucalyptus, Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) Sajina (*Brassica juncea*) have proved to be nutritious and nourishing and bottles full of honey are now there in the regional markets and hats. Wooden ties of carved designs are made by the artisans with much care and perseverance. This wood variety is available from the nearby forests only and wood is from trees like, Pyne, Eucalyptus, Gamar (*gmelina arborea*), Sagoon etc. Wooden ties are of exquisite quality and are largely purchased by the sophisticated section of people in metropolitan cities. The marketing of products is done by the joint venture of the Artisans' Team and Project Team by creating the NTFP Developers' Consortium, because without the proper assistance and advice of the Project personnel, the task could not be accomplished in such a methodical manner. The buyers and agents are usually contacted by the Project staff and accordingly orders are placed among the artisans with the understanding that they would be in a position to give the supply in due time, keeping an eye to the quantity and quality of the products. In this way, the artisans are slowly becoming self-reliant and are also earning confidence of their own for leading a sustainable livelihood.

5. *Exposure to Melas, Exhibitions, Expos and Competitions*: A simultaneous process of exposure of NTFP products has been made possible in different Melas, Exhibitions, Expos and Competitions at national level. By the initiative of the IIT Project Team, this kind of exposition of artisans' skill and craftsmanship

has been met with much applauses. That the upgradation of the standard of expertise has reached an excellent level can be proved by the fact of the receipt of awards by the down-trodden artisans coming from the lower brackets of society. This has not only increased the quality of craftsmanship of the artisans, but this has also helped in the path of confidence-building among the artisans. Every year, during winter time DIC (Directorate of Cottage and Small Scale Industries) Midnapore and Purulia and other Districts are arranging Expos at the Kolkata Maidan and a good number of artisans from Nayagram (West Medinipur) and Purulia are participating in this Expo for sale and exhibition of their products under the secure umbrella of the IIT Project Team. In this way, the artisans of the remote corners of rural Bengal are being exposed to the urban hemisphere and the path for decent and handsome earning is also open for the poverty-stricken people of rural Bengal. (Dasgupta et al., 2006).

6. *Formation of SHGs*: An adequate number of Self Help Groups have been formed in the Study Area depending on the skill and craftsmanship of the concerned artisans. A selected group of artisans have acquired the stimulus and zeal to give shape to such SHGs with the assistance of the Project Personnel. The SHGs have been formed keeping in view the idea that the different crafts should be given due importance and accordingly the division of skill has been done and distribution of skill has been made in almost uniform manner. A cluster of SHGs have been formed in different parts of Bandwan and Manbazar Blocks of Purulia and the working tone has been kept up largely due to regular monitoring of the PFM Project Team. They themselves have taken up much initiative in this direction and it is very fortunate that a big section of tribal ladies are steering the gear of woman entrepreneurship in this part of rural Bengal. The women have not only become self-sufficient, but they are also undertaking different jobs of business transaction in a firm hand. Not only that, some of the little educated ladies are also noting down the minutes of meetings and maintaining the Bank transaction books in perfect order. As a result of this, huge export orders are available these days and the financial gain as well as the social gain are also quite bountiful.

7. *Disbursement of Loans*: Every year, since 1999, the Directorate of Cottage and Small Scale

Industries has taken up the move of disbursing fair amount of loans among the tribal artisans of Purulia under the safe custody of PFM Project. A group of artisans are being chosen every year by the Project Personnel on the basis of their skill and craftsmanship for loan benefit. This screening is done with lot of care and perseverance judging the tenacity of artisans' merit. Fifteen artisans of excellent merit are given the BSAI (Bengal State Aid to Industries) loan every year in a ceremonious way either at DIC venue or at the field venue, as the situation would permit. These loans have not only given ample incentive to the artisans, the artisans have found adequate opportunities to procure many types of home facilities through these loans. It is also worth mentioning that none of the artisans have been found to be defaulters so far. By accruing loan benefits, the artisans are also placed in a secure and confident position in rural society.

OBSERVATIONS

Srinivasan states that there is one school of thought which maintains that nothing significant can be achieved in respect of establishing an egalitarian society until revolutionary changes in property relations are brought about. Another school attributes the failure of the past to the particular strategy planning and the policy instruments adopted in attempting to implement the chosen strategy. In this view, it is still possible to achieve in good measure the eradication of abject poverty of the masses in the foreseeable future by an appropriate reconstructing of planning, methodology, priorities, strategy and instruments of policy. (Srinivasan, 1974). Many other works have been done on this subject in recent times, like that of S. Subramnian, who has revealed some aspects of Welfare Economics, Social Choice theory, Distributional Analysis and Poverty Assessments, which are all important ingredients in problems of concept and measurement (Subramnian, 2006). A current literature on poverty assessment, named 'Policy Windows and Livelihood Futures, Prospects for Poverty Reduction in Rural India' also suggests many remedial measures for poverty alleviation. (ed. by John Harrington et. al, 2006) Tuning with the ideas of Srinivasan, it can be said that the measures so far taken in this remote part of West Bengal by IIT Project Team are laborious and time taking, but these measures have

definitely shown a bright and resourceful path of livelihood generation for the poverty stricken people of Purulia.

The above-mentioned factors reveal the fact that in Purulia District, where poverty remains to be a cruel malady and is one of the most acute jeopardy to the path of progress, it is very difficult to poise something fruitful and gainful for the grass-root mass. Yet, some rudimentary efforts have been attempted to heal the wounds of the forest- proximal people. It is worth-mentionable that the bulk of the work- load and the responsibility too are being shared by the women folk. The level of acceptance of the work pattern of course varies from community to community and the skill and acumen too vary according to their ethnic legacy and heritage and over and above the willingness for work. The entire study has been carried out at a micro- level and it is not expected that a marvellous result would come out at the outset. Time, patience and monitoring would probably lead the way to success and the paths shown above will definitely help to erase the deep- set layers of poverty, if not wholly but partially. The promise for a path of sustainable way of living has been suggested through this paper. The promise is based on empirical study that has been carried out in this region with much confidence and optimism.

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