

2021

A brief report on Aakanksha Project

(In collaboration with `Smt. Kamla Jain Fellowship`)



TATA STEEL FOUNDATION

Project ``Aakanksha`` aims at humanizing the adverse conditions of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups by educating their children.

I. Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs):

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), or aptly known as Diminishing Tribes are those sections of the Tribal Community whose culture and existence is under threat of extinction. Settled mostly in remote areas, inaccessibility to the basic amenities, makes their living very much like that of hand to mouth living. In order to ensure the development of these communities, certain groups were identified for the first time in 1975-76 & thereafter in 1993, which are regarded as the poorest of the poor (POPs) amongst the STs & were called as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). The criteria fixed for the identification of such PVTGs are;

- a. Pre-agricultural level of technology
- b. Very low level of literacy
- c. Declining or stagnant population.

Based on the above-mentioned criteria, 75 tribal communities have been identified as PVTGs spreading over different States & UTs, Out of which 9 PVTGs have been notified in Jharkhand namely, Asur, Birhor, Birjia, Korwa, Mal-paharia, Paharia, Saura-paharia, Sabar & Bilkharia. In Jharkhand, the main problems of these PVTGs are ;

- a. Low level of literacy amongst the PVTG children
- b. Poor health –facilities
- c. Poor electricity facilities
- d. Limited livelihoods sources etc.



II. Background of the Project: Tata Steel Foundation works for the development of the PVTGs living in its operational areas. There are nine PVTGs in Jharkhand out of which three live in the area of Dalma Hills and Patamda. The 'Sabar' and 'Birhor' are two prominent PVTGs in the vicinity of Tata Steel's manufacturing base of Jamshedpur. These tribes are extremely backward, and are on the verge of extinction. The living conditions of these tribes are appalling. The tribal survive by collecting dried wood and leaves from the forest and sell it to earn their living. Their earnings are spent on food and alcohol mostly. These tribes do not have any vision for future and live on a day to day basis. Education level is close to 'nil'. Looking into the need of education the department started a pilot programme to educate the PVTG children which started in the year 2011 with 10 students. The initial success of this pilot program gave a way to the further expansion of this program.

The 'Project Aakanksha' was formally launched on 21st April, 2012. This project is uniquely designed for the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) with focus on admitting, facilitating and supporting Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) children from the operational areas of TSF for their education up till matriculation. The project intends to bring about education-induced, positive changes in the mindset of these children, so that they can emerge stronger & confident to face the world, and join the mainstream.

III. Approach & Strategy:

It was not that the children were picked up & sent to the residential schools and our job was done. At TSF, we believe that every child should grow up in a strong family environment; hence our work focuses on providing the best care possible to these children. All the things pertaining to the child's needs were provided. The items ranged from toileteries to books, to edibles. Since children are quite young to do their daily chores all by themselves, a caretaker has been appointed exclusively for the support of these children in the schools. She not only helps them in their personal hygiene by helping them keeping clean, wash, bathe but also helps them with their studies. Their school is like a "home away from home". Besides, our team makes regular visits to the school and is in constant touch with the school administration and the caretaker to monitor the well-being of the children very minutely. This is done to ensure that a strong, supportive environment is built so that the children develop the confidence and resilience to face life's challenges. It is our constant endeavour to reach out to as many PVTG children as we can and not only to provide them with basic education but in a home like ambience that will enable them to become contributing members of the society.

IV. Facilities given to the Children:

- (i) Caretakers were deployed at each of these residential schools for taking good care of these children. These caretakers do not only look after their hygiene but they were also given responsibilities of supporting them in their academic matters.
- (ii) The academic –fees, hostel-fees & other necessary expenses etc are being taken care of by the TSF.
- (iii) The children are also supported with all the necessary items like stationery-items, toiletries, sleepers, uniforms, eatables, winter clothes, new clothes during festivals etc.
- (iv) Free pick-up & drop facilities for these children at the time of vacations & festivals etc (to/from their respective schools & dropping them back at their homes)
- (v) In case of any medical emergencies, these children get free medical treatment & services at TMH, Jamshedpur.

Besides the above, TSF puts in maximum efforts to focus on all the children so that they do not feel that they are away from their home. We try to provide a stable & supportive environment for these children to live & learn together.

V. Enrollment of the PVTG children & their academic-performances:

TSF has partnered with 09 residential schools with the aim to provide formal education to 241 PVTG Children. The school-wise enrollment break-up is here as under;

S.n.	Name of the School	No of the enrolled students
1	Loyola School, Chaira (Dhalbhumgarh)	61
2	Sidhu-kanhu Siksha Niketan, Dimna	35
3	Madusudan Mahato High School, CKP	43
4	Carmel Girl's Middle School, CKP	29
5	Holy Cross School, Chowka	25
6	St. Thomas School, Gandedungri	5
7	St. Robert's School, Hazaribagh	34
8	St. Xaviers School Inter College, Lupungutu	6
9	St. Xavier's College Ranchi	3
	Total	241

VI. Challenges overcome:

Over the last years of the project intervention, we came across some of the challenges which have successfully overcome over the years;

- (i) Earlier children used to hide or run away when TSF staffs went to collect them after vacation. But now they come on their own on the prescheduled date & time.
- (ii) Though the students have picked up the language Hindi but still they are a little hesitant to mix with other children.
- (iii) These students were given sessions on basic personal hygiene & now they take good care of themselves.
- (iv) They have adjusted well to the disciplined life in the hostel.
- (v) Greater participation is being noticed in school activities like sports, elocution & cultural activities etc.

VII. Project-impacts / improvements:

- (i) The school principals feel that these children have come out of their shell & they are making them do more such activities which helped them gel with other general students. As a result, an increase in the level of their confidence has been clearly visible.
- (ii) Earlier, a lot of persuasion was required to bring these students back after vacations & the drop-out rates were high. Gradually, as these students have understood the importance of education & its benefits, they themselves return to their respective schools. Thus, not only bringing the drop -out rate down but also giving a hope that the project is moving towards sustenance.



VIII. Srimati Kamala Jain Fellowship:

Tribal Steel Foundation & Mr Ajay Jain, a Tata Steel vendor collaborated in 2012 to establish the Srimati Kamala Jain Fellowship for the education of PVTG children. The Kamla Jain Fellowship Program gave a boost to the “Aakanksha” Project of TSF, TSF had piloted the “Aakanksha” project of educating the PVTG children & its success made us replicate the project in a bigger way post 2012.

We are in collaboration with this unique educational program aimed to give support to the PVTG children for their education. 40 PVTG girl children have been given support for their education under this fellowship program since the beginning .This year too, we have supported 40 PVTG girls from 3 different schools mentioned below. These children will be an inspiration for many children and steer the growth of the community in the coming years through their sheer hard work, dedication, sense of accountability and aim for a better, more equitable future.





This year due to pandemic the schools were closed as per government rule and therefore the academic preformation has got effected, the children are back to school again post COVID situation and we are hopeful that they will get into their normal routine very soon.


There has been remarkable achievement by PVTG students who were supported

through this Fellowship programe. Students have left the community spellbound with their hard work and sheer dedication. These students namely- Balika Birhor, Sonamani Birhor, Rohini Birhor, Agni Birhor, Phulmani Birhor and Shakuntala Birhor achieved commendable marks in the matriculation examinations of FY 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 achieving a milestone like never before. With an objective of promoting unhindered lockdown learning in the face of COVID-19 crisis, students were equipped to digital learning with an aim of bringing education to their doorstep so that they can inspire more children to pursue education and become a catalyst of change for their community.



The details of the students who successfully completed their matriculation examination and have joined different schools/college for higher studies are given below:-

Sl.No	Names	Address	School	Matric (%)	Career Plan	Stream	Picture
	FY 2020-2021						
1	Shakuntala Birhor	Vill- Chotabanki, Pipla, East Singhbhum	Carmel School, Ckp	77	Doctor	Science	
2	Agni Birhor	Vill- Chotabanki, Pipla, East Singhbhum	Carmel School, Ckp	61	Nurse	Arts	
3	Phulmoni Birhor	Vill- Chotabanki, Pipla, East Singhbhum	Carmel Girls School, CKP	52			
	FY 2019-2020						
4	Balika Birhor	Chhota Banki, P.O Pipla, Police station M.G.M, Dimna, 832105	Carmel High School, Chakradharpur	82.80	Engineer	Science	
5	Rohini Birhor	Chhota Banki, P.O Pipla, Police station M.G.M, Dimna, 832105	Carmel High School, Chakradharpur	71	Doctor	Bio-Science	

6	Sonamuni Birhor	Chhota Banki, P.O Pipla, Police station M.G.M, Dimna, 832105	Carmel High School, Chakradharp ur	72.20	Doctor	Bio-Science	
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The students supported through Smt. Kamla Jain Fellowship are mentioned below:-

School	No of the enrolled students	No of girl children being sponsored through `Smt Kamla Jain Fellowship`
Loyola school Chaira Dhalbhumgar	61	
Sidhu kanu siksha Niketan Trust Dimna	35	
ST. Thamos High School Gandedungri	5	
Carmel Girls Middle School C K P	29	29
Madhu sudan Mahto High School Asantalia C K P	43	6
ST. Xavier's Inter college, Lupungutu	6	5
ST. Xavier's Inter college, Ranchi	3	
Holy Cross, Chowka	25	
St.Robert, Hazaribagh	34	
Total	241	40

IX. Way forward:

“Education is this civilization’s greatest leveler.” It has the power to empower the weakest of the weak, bring peace to the world & alleviate poverty. It is often seen as the only lit path in the pursuit of happiness.

Keeping the above philosophy in mind, Tata Steel Foundation has committed & facilitated such an environment for educating the children belonging to the PVTG communities.

It may take a few generations before the PVTGs start reaping the benefits of education, and become a part of the mainstream of the society. These children will continue their education upto Matriculation and become capable of rubbing shoulders with the rest of the society. We see them as the potential North Stars of their society who will set an example for the community to take them forward in the journey of development.