

Depletion of Forests in Punjab and the Bangala Tribe

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Abstract. This paper is an attempt to focus on the plight of Bangala tribe in Punjab who are not only subjected to marginalization and increasing pauperization but bear the brunt of shrinking resource base that endangers the very means of their livelihood. Their problems are multidimensional and multifarious and their mode of expression in different parts of Punjab led me feel that we need a composite picture of these people so that their problems of life and livelihood are redressed. Such project cannot be launched without a comprehensive knowledge of the spatial, economic, socio-cultural aspects of this community. The official misrecognition of the tribe as has been made in the Punjab might prove unfortunate and dangerous even for the very existence and sustenance of this and other tribes.¹

1 Introduction

The present state of Indian Punjab is one of the smallest states in the north-west of the country with a total geographical area of 5.036 million hectares. It is a small fraction of the area that it initially covered, and was spreading right up to the border of Afghanistan in the west, Jammu and Kashmir in the north, Uttar Pradesh in the north east. It was named after five rivers, *punj* means five and *ab* means water, hence *punj+ab*, that is Punjab. Its politico-territorial division in 1947 left larger fertile area and three rivers in the Panjab of Pakistan.² The Indian counterpart got further divided into two states when Haryana came into existence in 1966 while in 1971 the hilly tract of the state was merged into the state of Himachal Pradesh that got the major forest cover of the undivided Punjab.

The British Empire had declared the Bangala a criminal tribe under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1872 that was later modified in 1911. According to David Arnold, ‘the Criminal Tribes Act was used against “wandering groups”, nomadic petty traders and pastoralists, gypsy tribes, hill and forest dwelling tribe, in short, against a wide variety of marginal who did not conform to the colonial patterns of settled agricultural and wage labour.’³ The Criminal Tribes Act remained enforced even after India’s independence on 15 August 1947. Finally, the derogatory tag of

'criminality' was removed from all such tribes of the country on 31 August 1952. Now they are called denotified tribes or *Vimukt Jatis*. It is ironical that the tribes of Punjab along with others celebrate this day as the day of their 'independence' and not 15th August. However, in Punjab, this independence did not promise any special facility to educate these people to bring them into the mainstream and the state government has hardly any programme to rehabilitate them with the guaranty of livelihood.

1.1 Introduction to the tribe:

Thus far information regarding the Bangala tribe is sparse. There are some details available in *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Provinces (Vol. II)* published in 1883 and reprinted in 1970.⁴ A meager detail is also available in the *People of India (Punjab)* volume edited by the former director general of the Anthropological Survey of India, K. Suresh Singh.⁵ The people of this tribe are easily identified from their long robed attire of saffron (*jogia*) colour carrying a long shoulder bag with them hence named *ik jholiwale jogi* while others who carry two such bags are named *do jholiwale jogi*. These *jholis* (bags) serve many purposes such as for carrying one or two snakes contained in a *patari* (cane box) and a *been* (a musical instrument made of gourd pipe). They collect alms and donations in the form of grain or wheat flour (*atta*) given by the viewers who may sometimes prefer giving such items to cash reward or payments especially in the rural areas while in the cities or towns they are given coins instead or other currency notes sometimes.

The people of this tribal community are distributed all over the country which is why they are known by different names at different places. K. Suresh Singh in his enumeration and identification of communities in his multi volume project mentioned above notes that these people are also known as Bangali, Sapera, Sapela, Sapado or Jogi in different parts of the country.⁶ In Punjab they call themselves Jogi Naths the followers of Machhandar Das who was himself a Nath jogi. They do not like themselves to be known as Bangala though for people at large they are one and the same thing.

1.2 Population:

According to the *Census of Punjab* (1981), the total population of Bangala tribe in the state was 1600, that is, 846 males and 754 females. This figure rose to 7765 in 2001 out of which 2722 persons were living in rural areas and 5043 in urban areas. Contrary to this, if we go by the

estimate of these people themselves, their number is no less than 15000. They have maximum concentration in the Ropar district (3304) and lowest in the districts of Gurdaspur (47) and Amritsar (38). Otherwise they are spread all over the state. Since a large majority of them are nomads still, it is rather difficult to know their exact population. They do not have any village or city of their own though some of them especially of the younger generation are settling down. The government too puts pressure on them for settlement as also the modern market. They have made their own settlements (*bastis*) in and around various cities and towns of the state. In the villages their population is ranging from 38 to 500 persons as per the *Census of Punjab 2001*.⁷ At a few places like Dugri and Machhiwara in the Ludhiana District and Rampura Phul in the Bhatinda District they have permanent settlements comprising of nearly 60 to 70 houses each. They are also fairly distributed in the districts of Sangrur, Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Muktsar and Hoshiarpur.

1.3 Costumes:

The males of this community wear Rajasthani type turban, a long shirt (*kurta*) with jacket and *dhoti* (wrap around legs for males). They also wear *mundran* (ear rings) and *mala* (a string of beads) around their necks. When they move out on their *pheri* (rounds), they usually choose *jogia* (saffron) colour for their dress. But when they are at home they wear clothes normally worn by the Punjabi people such as a *kurta-pajama* (loose shirt and trousers as of night suit). The younger generation prefers pants-shirt. The women wear *salwar-kameez* (trousers and shirt) with a *dupatta*, a head scarf of large size.

1.4 Habitat:

Their habitation is always away from the local population mainly on the deserted places, vacant plots or along the roads or railway tracks. Some of them do have concrete (*pucca*) houses as the government has also allotted them some small plots under such schemes of the government of India as the *Indra Awas Yojna* and advanced them some money too for building one room houses but most of them live in *kullis* or *jhuggis* (huts) made of bamboo. This is the low level of their poverty.

They vertically cut the bamboo sticks, mould them into half circles and fix them in the ground. Its roof is made with pieces of split bamboos put together covered with *godri* (a quilt type cloth made out of cut pieces of cloth and used for various purposes like bed sheets, blanket,

carpet, cover of *kulli* etc.) or coarse cotton cloth or sacks etc., whatever is easily available to them. To make it water-proof it is further covered with polythene or a tarpaulin. These huts are round, plastered with clay and a hearth inside. At the back of each there is a bathing place. Earlier the Bangala people used to sleep on the floor but nowadays many of them use folding cots as well. They have their own story to narrate as to why they are nomadic and sleep on the floor as would be clear from their history below.

1.5 History:

They do not know much about their history but one thing they are sure about is their Rajput ancestry, a warrior upper caste in the hierarchical caste system. They narrate that their ancestor Gandhila Chauhan, who was murdered by the Muslim invaders from Iran, once ruled Delhi which subsequently came under the Mughal rule. Maharana Pratap of Chittor in Rajasthan an important principality of the Mughal period in Akbar the Great's regime was defeated by the latter, much before the advent of the colonial rule. Thence started the miseries of Chauhan Rajputs. In order to survive they migrated from their native place and took shelter in the jungles. A few of them came to Punjab as well. Since these people owe allegiance to Maharana Pratap, a legendary Rajput known for his bravery who gave stiff resistance to Akbar, they were chased by the royal army. They fondly narrate that when they moved out from their native place they took a vow neither to live in the concrete houses nor to sleep on the cot (as they sleep on floor) till they regain their lost kingdom.⁸

This is how destiny made these people wear a yogi's (*jogi*) dress which is usually a saffron coloured long gown (*chola*) as explained above. They claim to have disguised themselves as snake charmers holding a *been* in their hands and making a snake play on its tune. They did not settle at a place because they could not, thus they became nomadic, roaming here and there in search of livelihood. These people consider themselves Kshatriya Rajputs, a warrior caste and believe that their ancestors belonged to Bikaner, Ganganagar and Jaisalmer districts in Rajasthan. Now they consider Sirsa in Haryana as their native place.

Though they call themselves Kshatriya but they do not have intra-community caste divisions. They claim the Rajput status probably because it would give them prestige. This further, shows that they have imbibed some mainstream cultural understanding of caste hierarchy and higher status of the Kshatriya. They probably feel that in the larger Punjabi society of brave

and warrior men, their claim of high caste origin would enhance their social status. It is pertinent to note that during field investigation it was found that they do not have any social relations with other communities. They are a 'closed' community. One dominant feature of this tribe, as mentioned by B.P. Singh is 'that it neither has caste like hierarchy within this social structure nor does it operate within the caste system.'⁹ He further mentions that 'As a matter of fact, it operates outside the mainstream caste system or on its periphery. The patron–client relation characteristic of caste is absent within and outside the tribe as well as in their relations with other communities. An old man of the tribe aptly puts the relationship of his community with other communities as that of *mangan khan di sanjh*, literally a tie or bond of begging to eat.'¹⁰

1.6 Food, Occupation and the Forest:

For the tribal community forest is not only a home but a storehouse of their daily routine food as well. A forest is a rich source of food for both the vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Furer-Haimendorf writes about the Indian tribes:

All the tribal populations Andhra Pradesh were traditionally closely associated with forests, and there are some who even today spend the greater part of their lives in the proximity of trees. It is for this reason that aboriginals were often referred to as *jangli*, today a derogatory term standing for "uncouth" or "uncivilized" but literally meaning "forest dweller". Tribal communities living in settlements surround by forest regarded these woods as much their own as old style pastoralists considered the grass-lands over which their herds were ranging as their own preserves,... In Northeast India there are to this day tribes among whom specific forest tracts with clearly defined boundaries are claimed as clan or village property, where only members of the clan or village in question are allowed to hunt or cut firewood. Ownership over forests is there clearly defined and generally recognized.¹¹

The Bangala people are predominantly non-vegetarian though food grain, pulses and cereals constitute their daily routine diet. They hunt out the prey of their choice and make good food out of that. It has been informed by the respondents that they relish *kachhu* (tortoise), *goh* (large lizard), *saha* (hare), *billa* (cat), *neola* (mongoose), *giddar* (jackal), *kukad* (chicken), *jangli sur* (wild boar) etc. that is why they still prefer to settle along the banks of ponds and canals or on the fringes of forests due to the availability of animals for hunting.

The elderly respondents informed that earlier hunting used to be a group activity and the prey was equally distributed amongst all the members of the group. But now when there is a check on their movement in the forest as well as restrictions imposed on them by the forest officials following the Punjab Forest Act, group hunting is no longer possible. Thus hunting has become a personal, at the best a family affair. Despite the government's ban on hunting it is still done illegally since these utterly poor people have no alternative for subsistence but to collect whatever they can from the forest for free. The rising prices of the staple food are sheerly prohibitive. These people who had been meat eaters till late cannot afford to buy meat from the market. It is a different matter that they relish only their own prey since they are keen hunters and are reluctant to buy meat from the market.

The important issue is that the nomadic Bangala people are highly dependent on the forest not only for their food and habitat but also for their traditional occupation which is why their very survival is threatened as a result of shrinking resource base. This tribe depends on large and dense forests for capturing snakes to eke out their living by making public shows for collecting alms/money from people. The snake playing to the tune of *been* attracts all especially children who rally around the snake charmer. These people also help in capturing snakes from households or such places with secure hideouts for the reptiles and inaccessible to the residents there. It might be a storehouse of husk or dry fodder, a granary etc. When a snake is brought out and captured, then some payment is also obtained by them from the resident or the owner of property. So a Bangala charmer walks away with a snake and some payment in cash or kind.

Another source of income is selling medicines made of various herbs found in the forest only. These people consider themselves *hakeems* (traditional doctors or quacks in modern parlance) who make home-made or traditional (*desi*) medicines for various ailments like the bite of a snake, dog or mongoose, dental carries, arthritis, fever, tuberculosis, piles, blood sugar, indigestion and various skin and eye problems. An oil prepared from the desert lizard (*sanda*) by frying it in edible oil and sometimes roasting it alive in the fire is found useful for skin diseases, as well as for arthritis and joint pains. Clove oil is also medicated by adding a few herbs to it which are collected from the forest only for the treatment of various problems related to teeth. A special kind of *surma* (eye powder) is prepared from the snake poison which is beneficial for various eye ailments. Not only that, it also strengthens the normal vision as well. Other types of

oils are also prepared by adding herbs to them that help in keeping the hair black and long. That is why it is claimed by them: 'You will not come across a Bangala person with spectacles and grey hair even up to the age of 80 years.'

They also engage in illicit selling of snake venom which is used in preparation of various *ayurvedic* (Indian system of medicine) and allopathic medicines. It gets them good income. They are aware of this offense of defying the government orders but for want of money indulge in this trade. Recently a member of this community was apprehended for the said offense by the police at the state capital, Chandigarh for keeping about two dozen poisonous snakes. The same is the case with the tortoise carcass which fetches them good price in the grey market. They eat the flesh and market the remaining part.

Three main factors are coming in the way of this community's dependence on the forest. One is the promulgation and implementation of the Forest Act that made forests a property of the state at one stroke. The other one is the project of green revolution which this state implemented with such an aggressive manner that the Punjab peasant became a model for the rest of the country to emulate for its progressive orientation, hard work and patriotism for filling the country's godowns of grain to feed the fellow countrymen. And the last one, a consequence of the second one that led to rapid and expansive urbanization.

2. Forest as state property:

The failure of the 1857 Indian struggle for independence against the British allowed them to treat the people and its resources for the benefit of the colonial empire. The Forest Department was established as early as 1864 and by the stroke of a pen the whole forest land was made the property of the government. The traditional rights of the tribal and other communities stood withdrawn. Furer-Haimendorf writes that

While they were forbidden to take even enough wood to build their huts or fashion their ploughs, they saw contractors from the lowlands felling hundreds of trees and carting them off,... Where tribals were allowed access to some of the forest produce, such as grass or dead wood for fuel, this was considered as a "concession" liable to be withdrawn at any time. The traditional de facto ownership of tribal communities was now replaced by the de jure ownership of the state, which ultimately led to the

exploitation of the forest resources with total disregard for the needs of the tribal economy.¹²

Commenting on the British exploitation of the Indian forests, Ramchandra Guha writes:

Whereas the first century of British rule was characterized by a total indifference to forest conservancy, by 1860 Britain had emerged as the world leader in deforestation, devastating its own forests and the forests of Ireland, South Africa, northern United States, and parts of coastal India to draw timber for ship building, iron smelting and farming. In India, a generally hostile attitude to forest preservation was reinforced by the belief, widespread among colonial administrators, that forests were an impediment to the expansion of agriculture and consequently to the generation of land revenue.¹³

Guha continues: 'The edifice of colonial forestry was inherited by the government of independent India, and immediately put to work in the service of the state's primary goal of rapid industrialization. The national forest policy of 1952 underlies the continuity of colonial and post-colonial policies: upholding the "fundamental concepts" of its predecessor, the forest policy of 1894, it reinforced the claim of the state to exclusive control over forest protection and production.'¹⁴

The independent Indian government's policy is no less different from its colonial predecessor. The forests under state control are leased out to the contractors who let the hell loose on its produce without any regard for the people surviving on these. Furer-Haimendorf cites the case of a south Indian tribe:

For the Chenchus, the destruction of bamboo in their habitat will be catastrophic. They depend on bamboo not only for the construction of their huts and for making many of their utensils, but above all for the manufacture of baskets and mats, which they traditionally sell or barter for agricultural produce. It is no exaggeration to say that the depletion of the stocks of bamboo in the forests of the Amrabad plateau would make the area virtually uninhabitable for its original denizens. The fact that the prospect of such a development is by no means a figment of the imagination is demonstrated by the fate of other forest dwellers of Andhra Pradesh, whose life has

been totally disrupted by a forest policy unmindful of the rights and needs of tribal population.¹⁵

The natural mixed forests provided food, fodder, fuel-wood and shelter to its inhabitants and also for many implements etc. necessary for their survival were then started to be replaced by mono-cultural plantations. Forests were denuded and pine was planted to begin with, for resin, paper pulp and timber. The programme thus launched was faithfully carried out by the Indian government as well. Furer-Haimendorf argues: 'An extreme example of such a commercialization of forests at the expense of the local tribal population is a project in Madhya Pradesh where Rs. 46,000,000 are to be spent on converting 8000 hectares of forest in Bastar Hills to pine forests to feed the paper pulp industry.'¹⁶

The present rules governing the forest are a result of the Punjab Forest Act of 1927 which does not allow anyone to take anything out of the forest for sale in the market since it is the property of the government. The Act defines the 'forest produce as anything found in or brought from the forest'. The forest guards keep watch on any infringement of the forest property that technically speaking is also applicable to the grass as fodder for cattle not to talk of the fuel wood or timber. There had been many protests by the activists of the rights of the tribal people against such provisions of the Act but little came out of them till 2006 when the distinction between the major and the minor produce was made and the local communities were given the right over the latter. In 2006, the Forest Rights Act (FRA) for the first time defined minor forest produce as including bamboo and tendu and many other things. It also gave tribals and other traditional forest dwellers the 'right of ownership, access to collect, use and dispose of minor forest produce, which has been traditionally collected within or outside village boundaries.'¹⁷

The issue is neither settled nor the problem solved with the declaration of the Forest Rights Act. Sunita Narain writes:

As my colleagues found when they traversed the country's tribal districts, the right exists only on paper. Of the 2.9 million claims settled under the FRA, only 1.6 per cent pertained to community rights. Worse, virtually no right of any community has been recognised for minor forest produce. They noted the missing right was deliberate. Governments across the tribal districts ensured no information was ever

provided to people that this right was available. The technique was simple: the form issued to people to ask for rights left out this provision.¹⁸

The *second* issue is the intensive agriculture in the state following the green revolution in the mid 1960s which has drastically changed the overall scenario of the state by pushing it into aggressive agricultural economy which was a consequence of the Government of India's policy to meet the food requirement of the teeming millions and also to ensure the nation's future food security. It thus embarked on the programme of modernization of agriculture by granting it a prime slot in the first Five Year Plan (1951 -56). 'In 1961, the Ford Foundation thus launched its Intensive Agriculture Development Programme (IADP) in India, intended to release Indian agriculture from the "shackles of the past" through the introduction of modern intensive chemical farming.'¹⁹ Subsequently the Intensive Agriculture Area Programme was launched during 1964-65 to focus on area with greatest potential for improving agricultural productivity, providing a ready platform to disseminate green revolution.

This revolution meant intensive agriculture with capital and modern technology whereby land and its produce become commodities for sale and purchase in the market through the medium of exchange called money. Thus land was used for maximization of produce and profit which defied the norms and practices of traditional agriculture. Consequently modern agricultural technology included tractors, ground water harnessing pumps, HYV (High Yielding Variety) seeds, fertilizers and pesticides etc. These developments led to bringing more and more land under cultivation hence the loss of pastures and forests in this densely populated state. It has the average density of 482 persons per square kilometer according to the *Census of Punjab 2001*.²⁰ As a result of these four decades of intensive agriculture the forest cover is reduced to a mere 5.8 percent which is far below the minimum recommended 33 percent area of the state for a viable ecological balance.

The green revolution has not only resulted in the loss of the forest it has increased tremendous pressure on the ground water aquifers resulting in the down fall of water level to the tune of about one meter in most parts of the state. According to some estimates out of the 137 blocks in the state 103 have been declared dark zones where water level has fallen down below the critical levels. According to another estimate, in 1984 out of a total 138 development blocks 53 were dark zones. The number rose to 84 in 1995 and 108 in 2005. The ground water level has

started falling at a rate much faster than assumed. Hira concluded that in 1964 the entire area of central Punjab had water table above the depth of 15 feet. With the inception of GR, the water table started declining and the area having water table below 30 feet depth increased from 3 percent in 1973 to 90 percent in 2004.²¹ Thus paradoxically the very place named after water is gradually running out of this important source of life. The sacred scripture of the Sikhs *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* says: *Pehla pani jiu hai jit hariya sab koi* that water is the source of all life, and it assumes high and respectable status so prescribed by the scripture: '*Pawan guru pani pita mata dharat mahat*' literally that air is teacher, water is father and mother earth is great.

The *Statistical Abstract of Punjab* (2005) notes a spectacular development in agriculture in Punjab during the last few decades. Nearly 80 percent of the water resources of the state are used by the agriculture sector. Of the total cropped area which stands at 86 percent of the total area, 97 percent area is irrigated out of which conventional canals' share stands at mere 27 percent whereas tube wells account for 72 percent. There is phenomenal rise in the number of tube wells which increased from 1.28 lakhs (1,28,000) in 1970-71 to 11.68 lakhs (1,168,000) in 2004-05.²²

This shrinkage of natural resources at such a fast pace is affecting the socio-economic fabric of the Bangala tribe resulting in their temporary migration to other states especially the nearby hilly Himachal Pradesh to collect snakes and herbs necessary for their survival. K. Suresh Singh has also suggested the relation between tribes and forest. He says: '...forest has been associated with the early life of mankind where they domesticated plants and invoked early forms of agriculture and gradually moved from gathering and hunting to advanced and primary modes of subsistence.'²³ Bangala tribe is highly dependent upon forest and as is the wont of tribal people, they are not ready to leave their traditional occupation and accept other modes of livelihood.

Agriculture and forest have always being treated as dichotomous categories as recent studies have highlighted interdependence and continuities. Chaudhary and Band argue: ' Forest has been associated with the early life of humankind where they (tribes) used forest reserves for living, where (tribes) domesticated plants and innovated early forms of agriculture and gradually moved away from gathering and hunting to advanced and primary modes of subsistence.

However, there was no marked dichotomy between forest and agriculture as perceived later. There always existed a continuum between forest and agriculture.’²⁴

Even during the pre-1947 India, as rightly elaborated by Chaudhary and Band, ‘state proposed extension of cultivation which resulted in shrinkage of forest, the colonial period witnessed radical changes in the very concept of ownership of forest and its management, while all states of India, ancient and medieval, claimed ownership of all resources, they in practice left local communities largely in control of their resources. The colonial regime not only claimed but enforced its ownership of its resources; thus forest became for the first time a source controlled and regulated for the benefit of the British empire and British capital.’²⁵

In the present milieu of market economy the state government, is listening to the advice of the economists and agro-scientists about the potential of the ‘farm forestry for the farmers and industrialists’ of Punjab.²⁶ In a move for forestation, the Punjab forest department has worked out a comprehensive plan to raise the forest cover to 15 per cent by the year 2011. The State Forest Minister Tikshan Sood has announced recently: ‘We will be adopting a new scientific technology for mass production of seedlings required for the agro-forestry operations.’ Unfortunately at present no one in the state is thinking about the programme to stop the process of rapid shrinking of natural resources especially the forests which are the storehouse of all types of resources necessary for the subsistence of the tribes in the state. Forest is their home.

According to a report of the state forest survey the dense forest cover in Punjab has decreased by a whopping 80,600 hectares since 2001. It has been reported in *Punjab Newline* by G.S. Bhalla and Hema Khanna that the forest cover of the state is mere 3.14 percent which is lower than the 4.62 percent of the desert state of Rajasthan.²⁷ The worst affected districts in terms of forest cover depletion are Ferozpur (111 per cent), Amritsar (106 per cent), Hoshiarpur (84 per cent), Bathinda (76 per cent) and Ludhiana (55 per cent).²⁸ The data shows that since the depletion of forest cover in the Malwa region of Punjab (there are three socio-cultural tracts Malwa, Majha and Doaba), that is, the districts of Ropar, Sangrur, Patiala, Bathinda and Ludhiana is low, hence the concentration of Bangala community in this area is high which again proves the argument of their dependency on the forests.

Third factor, following the above one is the rampant urbanization which is not only eating into the forest land but also the agricultural area. Over the last few years the rise in the real

estate business is fast eating up the above land uses. This is a matter of grave concern not only for the Bangala and other tribes dependent on the forest but the very Punjabi peasant who had been thriving on this occupation of agriculture for the last couple of a few centuries. Punjab, the peasant and agriculture are virtually synonymous and for a traditional peasant ownership of land provides him all the status and prestige that he expects. A peasant family while looking for a groom for their daughter makes sure that there is some land in his name even if he is drawing good salary from a government office or a corporate house. The peasant had a value till late that selling land is equivalent to selling one's son. So it was never sold out under any circumstances.

The present day market society has changed this value and the growing real estate business is fast encroaching upon the agricultural land. The large peasant generated surplus from the subsidized agriculture as a result of the green revolution. He looked for opportunities outside it. Then there is the ever growing black market economy, a parallel one that looks for investment, and land suits them most. As a consequence of such developments in the country's economy and the flourishing business of the real estate, around each big city sprawling colonies are being developed by the builders with English names and western design, layout and outlook of the apartments, houses and malls so that it becomes a status symbol to own a residence there and be a part of the modern elite.

All these developments have resulted in the loss of the forest cover that has made the tribal people paupers. From a respectable way of earning their living, howsoever bare subsistence that might had been, either by selling herbs and medicines or even by snake charming, these people have been coerced to come to streets for begging from morning till evening. Small children and women start begging early in the morning with bins in their hand to get *lassi* (butter milk), tea or *behi roti* (stale loaf of bread) for their breakfast. They also collect money, wheat grain or flour (*atta*). After having breakfast males wear their formal dress, that is, *chola* and *dhoti* of saffron colour. Carrying *jholis* on their shoulders with *patari* having snakes and a *been* in their hands they move out doing snake charming, selling medicines and collecting alms etc.

The plight of these people is further worsened, so far as adopting alternative means of livelihood is concerned, as a result of low literacy rate. It is virtually negligible. During field investigation it was found that in a large settlement at one place only one person from the tribe

has completed high school. However, a few of them have studied up to the fourth or fifth standards but a substantial majority is not even able to write their names. Many of them admitted during the course of fieldwork: 'It is not the fault of the government. We are not interested in the education of our children since our main occupation is begging, snake catching and collecting herbs from the forest which do not require any formal schooling.' An old respondent supplemented: 'We do not have money to provide education to our children.' Moreover, the most important of all these reasons is the high level of corruption in the state. Another respondent remarked: 'Even if some of our children get education they will not be able to get a job under such conditions of competition and corruption.'

Thus these people are caught in a vicious circle of not getting out of their traditional occupation and begging because of lack of education and they cannot acquire education because they are nomadic and poor. Furthermore the state and the central government's various policies for their upliftment, particularly with regard to education are not reaching this community to convince them about the benefits of modern formal education. Though the Right to Education has recently been included in the list of fundamental rights of the people of India but these people are hardly aware of such rights and provisions.

The Constitution of India contains provisions to give equal rights by protecting their socio-cultural values with the help of Articles from 14 to 30 and 244 (1 & 2), 399, 275 (1), 342, 330, 334, 338, 335 and 46 basically to administer tribal areas, welfare, grant-in-aid, reservation of seats in legislative assembly, appointment of special officer under the President of India, claim for jobs and promotion of educational and their economic interests etc..

In the end I would like to submit that (i) the economic condition of this tribe is to be improved with immediate effect; (ii) the rapid urbanization and deforestation are main causes for shrinkage of their traditional source of livelihood needs to be addressed judiciously; (iii) 'rehabilitation programme' for over all development of the tribe to include them in the mainstream by introducing special education programmes in mother tongue that is, Punjabi in Gurmukhi Script is required; (iv) and there is urgent need to convince them to get jobs of whatever kind; (v) and finally their long pending demand of including them in the list of the Scheduled Tribe be accepted. It may help them to some extent.

References:

1. The state of Punjab does not have the Scheduled Tribe population. This community along with others claiming higher caste status resent their clubbing with the menials, the Scheduled Castes. They have repeated asked the government to grant them tribal status.
2. The Indian Punjab is spelled with “u” while the Pakistan Panjab with “a”.
3. David Arnold, “Crime and Crime Control in Madras 1858–1947”, in *Crime and Criminality in British India*, ed. A. Yang, (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 85.
4. Denzil Ibbetson and H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North – West Frontier Provinces* vol. II, (Patiala: Languages Department Punjab, 1970 (1883).
5. K. Suresh Singh, ed. *People of India*, vol. XXXVII (Punjab), (Delhi: Manohar, 2003).
6. *Ibid.*, 33.
7. *Census of India (Punjab)*, (Chandigrah: Government of Punjab, 2001).
8. Harinder Kaur, “Bangala”, in ‘*Criminal*’ *Tribes of Punjab: A Social-Anthropological Inquiry*, ed. Birinder Pal Singh, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), 51-73.
9. Birinder Pal Singh, “Introduction.” In ‘*Criminal*’ *Tribes of Punjab: A Social-Anthropological Inquiry*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), xlv.
10. *Ibid.*
11. C. von Furer-Haimendorf, *The Tribes of India: The Struggle for Survival*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 79.
12. *Ibid.*, 80.
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