

AN ACCOUNT OF ECONOMIC LIFE OF GANJHUS OF JHARKHAND: AN IGNOMINY FOR THE RICH JHARKHAND AND THE GREAT INDIA

M. K. Joseph. SJ

Principal, St. Xavier's College, Mahudanr, Jharkhand, India

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ABSTRACT

This article is proposed to bring to focus the economic or materialistic life of the Ganjhus belonging to the dalit community of Jharkhand. Material deprivation coupled with social exclusion, caste oppression and lack of material resources have put the Ganjhus in a very disadvantageous position. Material deprivation of the Ganjhus is their inability to afford their consumptions and activities that are typical in a society at a given point of time, irrespective of people's preferences with respect to these items. Inadequate educational opportunities, lack of employment opportunities, unpleasant living conditions in the remote areas and a sense of powerlessness are contributing to their poverty and social status. They are living in a situation that prevents them from participating in important areas of the mainstream society's activities. Therefore, this paper brings forth a comprehensive study of way of living, occupation, different expenditures and many other economical assets of the Ganjhus.

KEYWORDS: *Agriculture, Land Lending, Education, Government Schemes*

INTRODUCTION

Economic life or materialistic culture means the sum total of all the different means and resources by which the Ganjhus live their lives as human beings in the material realm. It includes their occupations, their assets, and their income and expenditures. They have developed their own mechanisms to survive materially like using the forest for getting food materials; occasionally they migrate to other places in search of jobs. They are the victims of a malicious, oppressive system, which helps the rich to become richer, but the poor to become poorer. They have been systematically reduced to the level of sub-human beings. They die of cold, heat, and malnutrition.

When we scientifically search for the roots of poverty, we can no longer limit our study to the different manifestations of poverty in events such as starvation, malnutrition, suicide deaths due to crop failure, selling children to save those children from imminent death, etc., as mere events. We need to look at these conditions, in terms of processes, not as mere events [1]. This would require us to look at poverty caused by a number of factors such as landlessness, illiteracy, health problems, high infant-mortality rate, low life expectancy, debts, lack of irrigation facilities, lack of safe drinking-water and unemployment. The Ganjhus have no money to buy warm clothes during the winter season. Electricity still remains a dream for most of the rural villages in India, especially in North India. Malaria is a killer disease, which takes away the lives of many poor people.

It is in this context that one must look at the economic aspect of the life of the Ganjhus.

OCCUPATIONS OF THE GANJHUS

AGRICULTURE

The Ganjhus habitat is close to jungles surrounded by hills. Their forefathers chose to live in such places. Therefore, the main occupation of the Ganjhus is agriculture. Traditionally they are a farming community and depend on agriculture for survival. According to the census returns of 2001, more than 90% of the Ganjhus are either agriculturists or agricultural labourers. Cultivation is the traditional occupation and land is the main source of income for the Ganjhus [2]. For preparing the fields for cultivation, the Ganjhus make their own ploughs like the Korkus of Vindya Hills [3]. Every Ganjhu house has at least one plough.



Figure 1: A Ganjhu Ploughs the Field

Even though in this modern age farmers in general use tractors or other machines for tilling their land, the Ganjhus use ploughs that are made locally. They use either bullocks or buffaloes to till the land. Bullocks are very important to them mainly because of its use to till the land. Therefore almost every household has a pair of bullocks that are used for tilling their land. The main food crop cultivated by the Ganjhus is rice. Each Ganjhu household has at least some cultivable land that is made as paddy field to cultivate the main crop of the area during monsoon. Their survival very much depends on this crop. Rice cultivation is done once a year as they depend very much on the monsoon rain. As the monsoon starts they prepare the fields for transplantation. The time of transplantation is like a festival for them. All the women of the village come together and help one another. The harvesting of paddy takes place in the months of November and December. It is brought to the threshing floor where it is threshed by bullocks driven around a peg in the centre of the paddy spread out on freshly cow-dunged floor. After threshing and winnowing the rice grain is collected and kept in the house [3].

OTHER CROPS CULTIVATED

Besides rice, the Ganjhus also cultivate maize, barley, wheat, surguja, gondali, madwa, pulses, sugarcane and vegetables. Some parts of their area consist of rocky and stony fields. Such fields are suitable for dry crops like maize and madwa. Wheat and gram are cultivated in winter as they grow nicely during this season. During the pre-monsoon season the Ganjhus cultivate maize which will be ready for harvesting in two months' time. They also cultivate barley, madwa, gondali, potatoes and onions. They make cooking oils from mustard seeds and surguja flowers which grow in unfertile rocky land. These seasonal crops also contribute their own share in the overall annual income of the Ganjhus and help them to survive.

IRRIGATION FACILITY

No irrigation facilities are available in the Ganjhu villages except ponds and wells. Irrigation from wells is confined to cultivation within the baari lands adjacent to the village site. Irrigation from ponds is confined to the lower rice lands.

OTHER SOURCES OF INCOME

FOREST RESOURCES

The forest is another source of income. The Ganjhus have from time immemorial exercised the right to take wood in reasonable quantities for house-building and house repair, for agricultural purpose, and for fuel, free of any charge. Other jungle products such as chop, mahua flower and fruits, and any other fruits grown in the jungle are ordinarily enjoyed as the free-right of the village community. For a Ganjhu jungle is his/her second home. When there is nothing to eat in the house or during famine time the jungle becomes the bread provider as they turn to the jungle to collect eatable roots, flowers, vegetables, honey, valuables fruits and nuts, green leaves (sag), mushrooms, etc. When they have no work at home or anywhere they collect fire-wood from the jungle not only for home use but also for selling. They sell the fire-wood in the nearby markets. During summer beedi leaves are available in the jungle. The Ganjhu women go to the jungle to collect beedi leaves that and sell to the business people. Like the beedi leaves, Sakua leaves are collected to make leaf plates and leaf cups. The Ganjhus make ropes with some strings and sell it in the markets to make a living [2]. The rope-making strings are available in the jungles. They also make baskets and sell them to others. Bamboo shoots are collected from the jungles during monsoon and sold in the markets. Bamboo shoots are used for making pickles and vegetable curry.

WHITE MUD SELLING

In some Ganjhu villages white mud is available which is used to whitewash the mud houses. This mud is in great demand during the Deewali season as the people whitewash their houses during this time. During this season the Ganjhus collect this mud and sell it in the markets. People from the nearby villages approach the Ganjhu villages to buy this mud.

HUNTING

For the Ganjhus hunting is an adventure. The Ganjhus are good at hunting. When the harvesting season is over they prepare themselves for hunting. Hunting starts during the month of Magh (February-March) and lasts for about six months up to June-July. Their main target is wild boars, and apart from wild boars they also hunt deer, jungle goat, neel gai, rabbit, birds including peacocks. For hunting they use weapons like axe, bows and arrows, country made guns and pistols along with a plastic or cotton net. Another way of hunting is to make a few pits in the jungle and the people chase the animals from different directions to the pits and when the animals fall into the pits they are killed. Most of the hunting takes place at night.

WAGE LABOUR

Since the Ganjhus' main occupation is agriculture and it is not sufficient for their survival, some of them migrate to big cities like Calcutta, Ranchi, Patna, etc., as daily-wage labourers, especially during the off seasons. Some Ganjhu parents who are wage labourers and have no other sources of income for survival, get the help of their children to contribute to their families' income. Due to extreme poverty some Ganjhu parents send their male children between ten to fourteen years of age to work in tea-shops, sweet shops, small hotels and restaurants. These children earn between four to five hundred rupees a month, besides food and lodging. But they need to work for a minimum of twelve to fourteen hours a day. They begin their work at five or six in the morning and it may continue up to eight or ten at night.

ASSETS OF THE GANJHUS

LAND

Land is the most important and significant asset of the Ganjhus. Land is life for them. There is a saying among the people, "Land is life, if land is taken away from them, life is taken away". They give much importance to land because power, prestige, dominance and survival are very much linked with it. The Ganjhus own land which gives them social status in the agrarian society of Jharkhand. In an agrarian society landlessness means powerlessness. Land provides social status, economic security and political power and its absence brings dependency on the landlords. There are four types of land which the Ganjhus possess.

RAIYATHI LAND

This is known as the land owned by the people, handed over to them by the ancestors or bought from somebody. They have proper official receipts for this land given by the government and every year people pay tax on this land. This land is also entered in the official register too of the government.

GAIR MANZOORWA LAND (G. M. LAND)

This is government land but occupied by the people of the place. It is possessed by the Ganjhus but no receipt is issued nor is any tax paid. Hence though the Ganjhus occupy such land they cannot claim ownership, in village there are such lands that are occupied by the people.

BANDOBASTI LAND

This land is given to the Ganjhus by the government when landless people lay claim for such G.M land that is available in the village or nearby areas. Once bandobasti is done, legal papers are made and receipts are given after paying the proper taxes.

ARWAR LAND

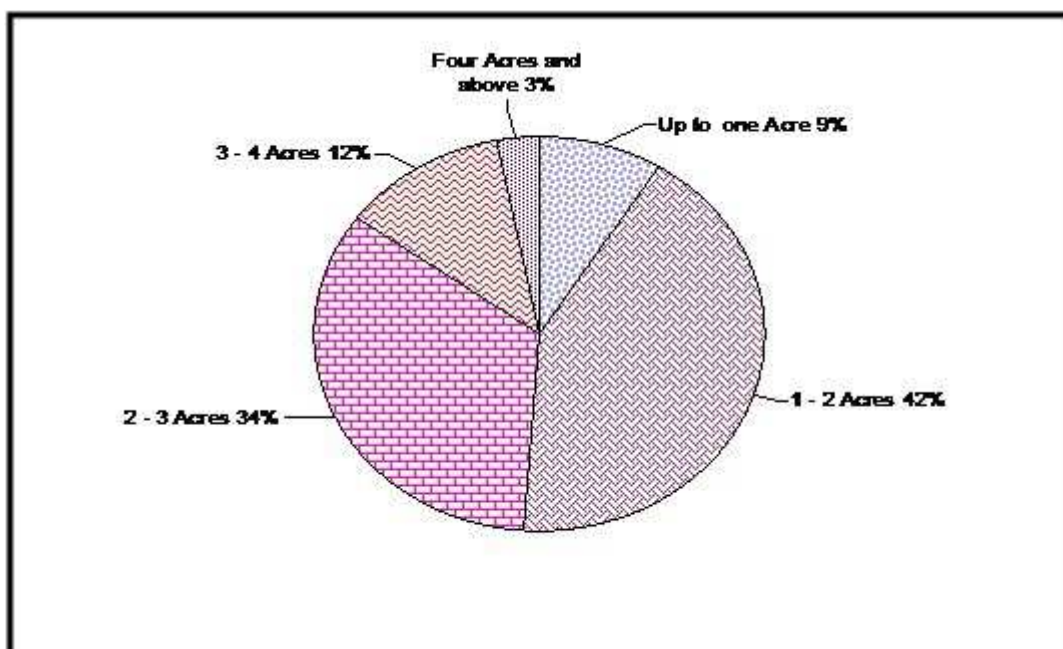


Figure 2: Land Owning Pattern: Registered Land

The Ganjhu villages possess an arwar, a particular area of common land where the village cattle are collected in the morning to be taken to graze by the village herdsman and are brought back in the evening to be given back to their owners for the night. These arwars are recognized common land and belong to the village community.

A major finding of the study is that the Ganjhus have land. Nobody in the Ganjhu community is landless. A good number of Ganjhu families (34%) have at least one to two acres of registered land. The majority of 42% has two to three acres of land. A small minority of 12% has three to four acres of land and another 7% has three or more than three acres. A small minority of 3% has five acres or more of land. But a tiny minority of 2% has less than one acre of land.

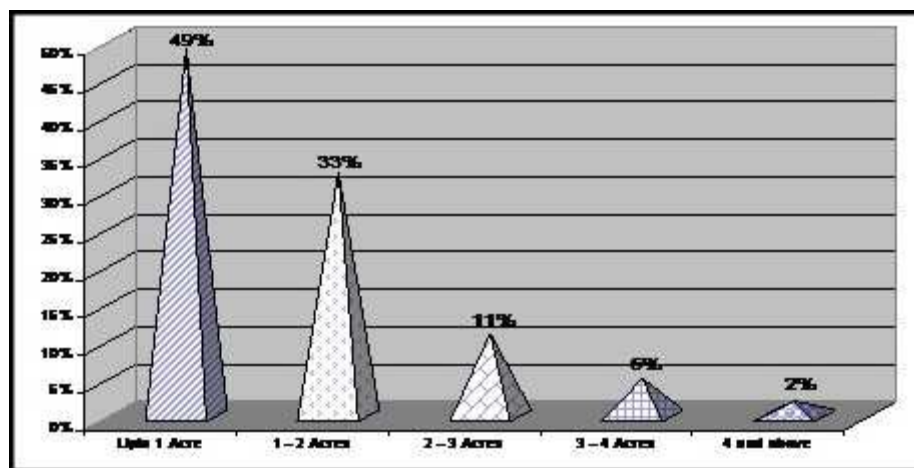


Figure 3: Land-Owning Pattern: Unregistered Land

Along with the registered land the Ganjhus occupy some un-registered land too. They do not have any land documents for this land. For a number of years they have been tilling this land. Some said that they inherited this land from their ancestors but up to now they were not given any document for this land. The majority of the people (53%) have one to two acres of such land. Another 39% said that they have two to four acres. A small minority of them (5%) possessed four to six acres such un-registered while 3% occupy six to eight acres of land.

LOSS OF LAND

Among the many reasons for the loss of land, money-lending, illiteracy and ignorance of the people are the most significant. In earlier days the Mahajans used to lend money and get the thumb impression of the people on a blank sheet of paper. The Ganjhus lost a big chunk of land due to the British land-tax system. During the British period, the Ganjhus refused to pay the new land tax that was introduced by the government. The Ganjhus thought that they were the owners of land and paying tax to the government is an insult to their pride. So they refused to pay the land tax. The government authorities distributed the Ganjhu-owned land to the non-Ganjhus. Thus the Ganjhus lost a big chunk of their land. After independence, with the opening up of tribal and dalit areas through the development process the non-dalits and non-tribals moved into the lands of the dalits and tribals. They went into the tribal and dalit areas like waves in search of jobs, business, and took control over the resources. They not only got some jobs but also established themselves as big business men in these areas. Along with their business they also started another business which is known as money lending. Later they were known as money-lenders or mahajans. Once they get hold of the dalits and tribals through money-lending they cunningly obtained their land and became big landlords.

HOUSES OF THE GANJHUS



Figure 4: A Typical Ganjhu House

The possession of a house is an asset to anyone in any society. The Ganjhus in Jharkhand make their own houses with mud, wood, and tiles. Like the tribals they themselves make their own houses. Each house has a small courtyard and some land including a small vegetable garden around the house. They do not have concrete houses except a very tiny percentage that have made their two-room house under the Indira Awas project. Like the tribals each house has a place for their animals close to the house or even part of the house. Some houses have their own wells for drinking-water but there are common wells in each Ganjhu village. A village consisting of fifty houses may have at least five wells. Since most of the Ganjhu villages are situated in isolated places not many non-Ganjhus are found in the Ganjhu villages.

ANIMALS

Animals contribute their share to the survival of the Ganjhus. They are a big asset for the Ganjhus. Each family rears such animals as cows, bullocks, goats, buffaloes, and pigs. Goats and cows are reared mainly for milk. The cows that are in the Ganjhu villages give about a litre of milk each which is sufficient for a Ganjhu family. Pigs are very common animals being most numerous among the Ganjhus. Buffaloes are also used for agricultural purposes like ploughing, threshing, etc. Bullocks are kept for ploughing the land.

DRESS AND JEWELLERY

Ganjhu women wear the sari which is the common dress for all Ganjhu women. School-going girls wear either skirts and shirts or salwar kameez. Once they are married they will only wear the sari. Dhoti and kurtha are the traditional dresses of the male Ganjhus. But these days pants and shirts are very common. The Ganjhu women and men wear jewelries made of silver. The women wear silver bangles, a silver chain around their neck and anklets. Gold ornaments are not found among the

Ganjhu women and men. Ganjhu men wear silver ear-rings known as kanosi. Hasli is a thick silver chain which the Ganjhu women wear around their neck. A thambhya is another silver chain worn by the women around their neck. A chandisikka chain is made of silver coins and it is a common chain that the Ganjhu women wear. They pierce their nose to wear a special nose-ring made of silver which is known as nakbesar. A pahuchi is a silver bangle Ganjhus women wear above their wrist. It is common to all Ganjhu women and they wear a number of such bangles. They also wear a thick silver bangle which is known as bangori. Another silver bangle the women wear is known as tela. A tad is silver bangle that the Ganjhu women wear above their elbow on both arms. The Ganjhu women wear payal above their feet. Beechya is a silver ring that they wear on the thumb of their foot.

ANNUAL INCOME

The annual income of the Ganjhus varies. The Ganjhu community is economically poor and that they need to raise their income in order to improve the quality of life. At present they are having the bare minimum basic needs like food (two meals a day) clothes that are very ordinary and mud houses, with no other facilities and all of them have BPL ration cards that are indications of their poor material living conditions.

RATION CARDS

There are three different types of ration cards among the Ganjhus. They all fall under the below poverty line (B.P.L) cards. Red-coloured BPL ration-card holders get 20 kg rice per month for seven rupees fifty paise per kilogram (kg), nine kg wheat for five rupees fifty paise per kg, four kg salt for 50 paise per kg and three litres of kerosene oil for 12 rupees per litre. Fifty-nine per cent of Ganjhus have red cards. Green-coloured BPL ration-card holders can buy 20 kg rice per month for three rupees per kg, 15 kg wheat for two rupees per kg, six kg salt for 50 paise per kg and three litres of kerosene oil for 12 rupees per litre. Twenty-four per cent Ganjhus hold green cards. According to the government sources yellow-card holders are living in extreme poverty. These yellow cards are given two different names in different blocks. At one place this card is known as annapurna card and in some other places they are known as antyoday card. Seventeen per cent Ganjhus hold yellow cards.

CONCLUSIONS

From the above study it can be concluded that even after 71 years of independence governments are unable to develop rural India and large-scale poverty remains the most shameful blot on the face of India. The rural poor in India including the Ganjhus of Jharkhand lack basic human needs such as nutrition, clean water, health care, clothing and shelter. Poverty is one of the main problems which has attracted the attention of sociologists and economists. It indicates a condition in which a person fails to maintain a living standard adequate for his/her physical and mental efficiency. It is a situation nobody wants to be in. The lack of access to cultivable land, and the absence of skills for any other jobs, makes the Ganjhus remain poor.

Marriages and deaths in families are occasions that require large sums of money; and the Ganjhus being poor and not able to find enough money to meet with the expenses, they turn to money-lenders for help, and in the process they give away their land to them. Since the British days they have gradually lost their traditional rights and command over their resources. Even though there is a shortage of basic amenities in the Ganjhu villages, their positive attitude to life helps them survive. We need to look at poverty of the Ganjhus in terms of processes not as mere events (Sainath, 1996). There is a need to look into the present state of the Ganjhus who were landlords once upon a time and see how they lost their land to dominant castes. Lack of land, job opportunities, and income-generating activities, educational opportunities and lack of health care facilities will lead to further impoverishment of the Ganjhus.

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