

## **Are The Developmental Projects Is Equal To Improve The Lifestyle of Tribal People Of Ajodhya Hill, Purulia? A Case Study**

**Tarak Mohan Hazari<sup>1</sup> and Sudip Bhui<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology and Tribal Studies, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology and Tribal Studies, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia

Corresponding Author: [bhuisudip@gmail.com](mailto:bhuisudip@gmail.com)

### **Introduction**

Purulia is one of the westernmost districts of West Bengal. The border of the Jharkhand state covers almost the entire western part of the district. Economically this district is one of the backward districts of West Bengal. This district suffering from several problems, among them, lack of water is the main problem of Purulia. Beside it, the people of Purulia had to face a lot of problems. But in spite of so many difficulties, the natural beauty of Purulia is unimaginable and outstanding. And this natural beauty is one of the pillars of economic development of Purulia district. There are many tourist spots scattered in every corner of the district. Among these spots, Ajodhya hill is one of most popular tourist places of the district. Day by day, the popularity of this place is continuously increased. Presently it becomes one of the best tourists place of west Bengal even India. But here it is notable that this hill is not only a tourist place, it is also an inhabitant of many indigenous communities of Purulia. There are live various tribal communities like Santal, Munda, Bhumij, Birhor etc. This is also equally important for the socio-cultural scenario of Purulia. Because of their indigenous knowledge and traditional culture enriched the district. And for this hill, Purulia is one of the largest tribal inhabited districts of West Bengal. Here it is notable that, this popular place of Purulia was almost unknown before just three to four decades ago. Before that time, the Ajodhya hills were almost isolated from modern urban civilization. Such a modern and smooth communication system like today was a dream for the hill people then.

In 2002, there were started work to established a mega hydroelectric power project, which was completed in 2008. The name of this project is Purulia Pump Storage Project (PPSP). This is the first 900-megawatt pump storage hydroelectric power project of India. The cost of this project is around Rs 3,000 Crore, most of the funding was given by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the rest was provided by the then state government. After the establishment of this project, a vast

change came in the communication system of those areas. Due to this improved communication system, a huge number of work started slowly around the Ajodhya hills. In this way, the vast landscape of the Ajodhya hills has changed radically in the last one and a half decade. That developmental work has not stopped yet, but the scope of work has increased. After extensive development of roads, water and electricity, several luxury hotels and restaurants have sprung up there.

However, most notably, after the success of the PPSP hydropower project, the names of three larger hydropower projects cantered on the Ajodhya Hills have been added to the government plan. However, a lot of trees have been cut down for all this, the landform has also changed in many places and lots of trees will be cut down in the future. And here the question arises as to whether these development projects are parallel to the development of the livelihood of the hill people or an obstacle to their normal life.

### **Review of literature**

The Ajodhya hill is a sub-region of the north-eastern part of Chhotonagpur plateau which is located within the dry deciduous forest included within a distinctive agro-ecological zone of West Bengal—the undulating red and laterite zone. There is various hill like Mathaburu, Gorgaburu, Pakhipahar, Ajodhya situated at this hill range. The floral and faunal diversity of this area are very rich, according to the official documents, peoples of that area are dependent on the forest for their life and livelihood. Beside it, the topography, forest wealth and wildlife of the hill attract tourists, wildlife researchers and naturalists in considerable numbers. (Mukherjee and Prokitibadi, 2019). The Ajodhya hill one of the safe refuges of the tribal communities of Purulia. Among them Santal is the largest communities. Mostly without formal education and economically disadvantaged, the Santals of that area fear that the continuous felling of trees of surrounding areas of Ajodhya hill for development would destroy biodiversity in the region and increase the risk of natural disasters in the eco-sensitive zone. (Sing, 2019). There are several advantages of megaproject, like increase of productivity, opening a new market for trade and commerce etc. It can make positive change in an area. It also can accelerate the pace of development of any area. This development improves the quality of life of the people this region. (Prasannakumar, 2014).

### **Objectives**

The present study aims to appraise the impact of the various developmental projects of governments and non-governments on the lifestyle of the tribes of the Ajodhya hill. With these purposes, the study sets following objectives.

1. To understand the Present condition of the lifestyle of the tribes.
2. To understand the status of socio-economic Development and the major impact of tourism.

3. To find out their views and what they know and want about their development.
4. To understand the basic need and demand of the local people.
5. To understand about the impact of the megaproject in Ajodhya hill.

### **Research Methodology**

This is a qualitative research. For collecting empirical data a number anthropological research tools were used. This study is mainly based on the primary data, which are collected through observation, interview of various informants and focus group discussion. The secondary data for the study are collected from the various journal, book, paper, social media and internet. Key Information method and in-depth interviews are the chief methods for data collection for the study.

### **About the Ajodhya hill**

Ajodhya hill is a part of Chotanagpur plateau, especially the part of Dalma hill range, which is situated in Purulia district of west Bengal. This hill is consisting of some parts of 4 blocks of the district, namely Baghmundi, Jhalda, Arsha and Balarampur. The distance between Purulia town and Ajodhya hill is 39 KM. In fact, the real name of this hill is "Ajodiya Buru". This was later changed to Ajodhya hill. Here Buru means hill. There are about total 92 villages. In these villages, live several communities like Santal, Bhumij, Munda, Birhor, Kheriya, Mahato and some General communities. Among them Santal is the largest community of Ajodhya Hill.

The hill is covered by the forest. Somewhere that forest is so deep that it is impossible to get inside. The forested Ajodhya hills are rich in various native trees. Notable among them are Shal, Pial, Mahua, Kend, Vela, Kusum, Bell, Jam, Karayer, Kurit Rama, Tetul, Pakare, Dumur, Amlaki Bohra, Haritaki Shiuli etc. The forest is home to a variety of animals such as Elephants, Deer, Rabbits, Wolves, Foxes, Quail, Forest Cows and Cats, Pigs, Bears, Peacocks, Mongooses, Geckos, Monkeys, Hanuman, Gossips, Hyenas, Hedgehogs, various species of snakes, etc. Notable among the birds are Peacock, Kite, Hawk, Parrot, Koyel, Bulbul, Machranga, Barmesha, Pigeon, Woodpecker, Finch, Buck, Carcass, Cuckoo, Crow etc. There are several small and big peaks in the region. The highest peak of the hill range is Gorga-buru, 855 m. The total area of the hill range is almost 34,517 acre. Ajodhya hill region is one of the busiest tourist destinations of Purulia district. There are several tourist spots like Bamni falls, Mayur Pahar, Seetakunda, Upper dam of PPSP, Lower Dam of PPSP, Khairabera Dam, Muruguma dam etc.

### **Developmental Project of Last Two Decades In The Region**

Once upon a time, due to the lack of communication system, the Ajodhya hill were totally disconnecting from the rest of the district. And today this hill is one of the brightest faces of the district. The region, which was totally economically backward only 3 to 4 decades ago, is now one of

the regulators of the district's economy. The biggest reason for this radical change is various types of developmental project. The main turning point of the starting of this radical change is the establishment of the Purulia Pump Storage Project. The establishment work of this project started at 2002. At this time, this was the Biggest Pump Storage Project of India. After the establishment of this project, a new horizon was opened in the communication system of Ajodhya hill. And due to the improvement of communication system, there is very little expansion of tourism in the area. But at this time, the processes of the development were stopped due to the local political violence. As a result, the pace of development of tourism infrastructure could not be accelerated. After that, when the political turmoil in the state took place in 2011, the political situation in the Ajodhya hills also began to change. Then again huge potential of tourism industry was created in Ajodhya.

Among the developmental programmes, electrification is one of the remarkable steps of this area. These steps help to improve the daily life of the local people. Not only that, it is one of the main pillars of the development of tourism infrastructures of that region. Beside it, another remarkable point is the arrangement of supply of drinking water by the pipeline in several village of this area. Water crisis in the summer is the main problem of Ajodhya hills. One of other most notable point is that, the establishment of government guest house in the hilltop. Presently, there are six guest houses in the hilltop area, namely Malabika, Niharika, Trisha, Upekkhita, Balaka and Bivabari. In recently, there were started a youth hostel in the hilltop area. In recent, there are establish a Tribal Development office beside the Youth Hostel in the hilltop area. But now-a-days this office building used as a branch office of Baghmundi Block. For the convenience of the peoples of the Ajodhya hill, almost all the work of the BDO office is being done here at present.

Until 2016, the entire Ajodhya hills relied on only one health centre, but in year 2017, another health centre was set up on the hill. This hospital is set up in the Teliabhasa Village of Ajodhya. This has benefited the people of many villages in the area. During the COVID-19 pandemic period, this hospital was ray of hope for the communities living around the Ajodhya. Now it is being used as COVID vaccine storage centre of the district. This is undoubtedly one of the new feathers of success in the development of Ajodhya hills. In addition, a new building for Ajodhya Hilltop primary hospital has been constructed. Beside it, Work is also underway to build several check dams and large ponds in the hills to alleviate water shortages and increase agriculture. Efforts are also being made to cultivate tea in the Ajodhya hills on an experimental basis through development programs. There are also several plans at the government level for the future. One of them is the construction of a ropeway in the Ajodhya hills. And if it is implemented, it will open a new horizon for tourism of this area.

### **Positive Impact**

From the above discussion it is clear that the Ajodhya hills have changed radically in the last two decades. With the help of this development, the Ajodhya hills, once isolated from civil society, have

become an ideal place to end the monotony of urban life. Where had not any communication system at that time, Today, there are present the touch of Japanese technology which is the one of most developed country of the world. In addition to this, improved drainage system on the side of the road, road map, guard wall, construction of stone wall to prevent landslides are an integral part of the improvement of that communication system. This has benefited not only the tourists but also the villagers of the Ajodhya hills. This radical change in the communication system has changed the way of life of the residents there.

Growing of tourism industry is one of the best results of various development of the area. The graph of popularity of Ajodhya hills in terms of tourism has been gradually rising in the last one decade. And for this growing popularity, the Socio-economic scenario of Ajodhya hill has changed radically. As a result, employment opportunities have increased, resulting in a gradual improvement in living standards. Improving the quality of life of the tribals has strengthened the path of cultural development of the Ajodhya hills. The positive impact of development on health services is also significant. Not only has the number of hospitals increased, but the total number of seats has also increased. An improvement of the roads has made it easier to take serious patients to better hospitals for better treatment. Marble Lake is now one of the most popular tourist spot of Ajodhya hill, which was created by cutting the rocks for the PPSP project. Now government planning to use this marble lake as a source of drinking water in the future.

### **Negative Impact**

Even after so many developments, the present condition of the Ajodhya hills suggests that not all developments have a positive impact on local human life. The main reason is that despite so much economic exchange in tourism, the economic life of the hill people is extremely uncertain. Despite its growing popularity, people in the vast area of Ajodhya hill are still unemployed. In many cases, tribals are being tempted in various ways to lease their land to build hotels. But then they are not fulfilling all the promises, so the tribals are not only losing land, they are also facing financial problems. Local people set up small shops in various tourist spots like Marble Lake, Bamni Falls etc. But now they are being evicted due to beautification or construction of roads or parking places. As a result, they are losing their jobs. Sometimes they get in trouble with the authorities because of this. In addition to this, Due to the growing popularity of the tourism industry, the names of different places have been changed reasons due to the arrival of people of different languages and cultures. For example, the name of “Ukamburu” of Murguma has become “Suicide Point”, the name of “Murraburu” has changed to “Pakhipahar”, Thurga has become Turga. This is a reflection of the disrespect of the local language and culture.

Despite the increase in the number of hospitals and seats, the ambulance service in the hills has not improved and not enough doctors have come. As a result, although there are infrastructures, there are

several obstacles to making them usable. This means that service delivery has not improved with increasing demand for health care of that area. Ambulance service is also not sufficient. It is right that the infrastructural development has been done in health sector, but the health service has not improved that way. Ambulance service is also not sufficient. Ambulance service is still inconsistent in many villages in the hills.

Deforestation has reduced the amount of forest for the implementation of development projects. As a result, the jungle has lost its solitude. And because of this, the animals and birds of the forest become helpless and attack the locality. This is the biggest problem in the villages adjoining the deep forest. The most notable of these is the elephant attack, which kills people every year. Not only that, the elephants also damage many houses and crops every year. This economic loss makes their lives miserable every year the tourism industry is also affected by this elephant attack. However, not only elephants, but also other wild animals such as hyenas, foxes, etc. often attack the locality. At the same time, on the one hand, deforestation and on the other hand, the construction of large building for resort and office, dams, etc., About 3 lakh trees were officially cut down to implement the PPSF project. According to private sources, the number is even higher. Also, the normal flow of water in the mountains has been blocked by dams. As a result, natural disasters such as landslides even earthquakes are increasing. Excess water from the capacity of the Lower Dam is released for cultivation through Keshtobazar Irrigation System. However, no people in the hills benefit from this project. But some villages adjoining the hills have benefited. As a result, the peoples of hill area are deprived of farming.

### **Suggestion**

However, several more steps can be taken to meet the needs and improve their livelihood of the people of the area. Home stay is a one of the common names in the present tourism system, especially in the development of rural tourism. Also, there are needs to be widely introduced Home stay to economically support the villages of Ajodhya hills. At the same time, keeping in mind the culture and tradition of the place, commercial introduction of indigenous handicrafts is very much needed. There are not yet a suitable number of educational centres in the hills according to the village and population. So, the number of educational centres like primary and high school has to be increased. Efforts can be made to increase the employment rate of educated but unemployed youths by arranging various courses related to tourism management and engaging them professionally in the tourism industry. The rural economy can be developed by planting various plants of fruits on the lands that are still vacant in the Ajodhya hills.

### **Conclusion**

Just as the question "whether science is a blessing or a curse" is still unknown to the people, as well as the various economic developments in the Ajodhya hills are a matter of considerable debate as to whether it is a blessing or a curse to the indigenous people. As the development of the tourism industry has improved the way of lifestyle, the cultural traditions have been gradually disrupted by the onslaught of modernity. And so, just as they have welcomed the development of the tourism industry, they have also started a massive movement to protest the cutting down of millions of trees for future planned hydropower projects. Not only did they protest, they also approached the court. However, despite the social and cultural damage, various services like education and health have become more accessible to them.

But it is also true that in this age of globalization, any ethnic group will gradually fall behind if they do not embrace modern civilization. So let the development of Ajodhya hills be without destroying nature. Let's keep the harmony of tradition with modernity. Only then will the culture and traditions of the indigenous communities of Ajodhya hill survive.

## REFERENCES

Mohanty, R.(2011) Impact of Development Project on the Displaced Tribals : A Case Study of a Development Project in Eastern India, Orissa Review.

Ota A.B. (2008) "Development Induced Displacement and the Tribals": SCs & STs Research and Training Institute, Bhubaneswar.

Nayak, P. K. (1979) Foreseeable problems of displacement a study of the Denizens of Indravati dam Project, process of the research seminar, Department of Anthropology, Utkal University, India

De, D. (2020) Impact of Development-induced displacement on the Tribal community, with special reference to the women in Odisha. ASEAN Journal of Community Engagement. 4(2)

Special Report,(2007) Purulia Jela Sonkhya, Paschimbanga 40 (11)

<https://india.mongabay.com/2019/06/the-ajodhya-hills-are-alive-with-the-sound-of-resistance/>

[http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/65971/11/11\\_chapter%202.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/65971/11/11_chapter%202.pdf)

[http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/59178/8/08\\_chapter%202.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/59178/8/08_chapter%202.pdf)

<https://www.facebook.com/durgadas.mahanty>