APPENDIX

REVISITING THARUHAT (2008-09)

Though I have been visiting Tharuhat since 1987 but for the first time overtly and explicitly, not latently but manifestly, I begin to feel and observe changes taking place in the region when I visited Tharuhat in the second week of December 2008. Shankar Mahto who has always been complaining about the Tharus and Tharuhat being neglected uttered these words with enthusiasm “Sadak Theek ho gaael ba. 2003 mein Nitish ke aila ke bad shikshak ke bhali bhail ba. Hamro patoh ke gaon mein hi shilshak ke naukari lag gael ba. 2003 mein Champaaran ke Tharu ke Janjati banal ke bad aha area mein hamar laika Nawender ke daroga mein selection ho gael ba. Ee cheese pahile sambhav na rahe. Kahe khatir ago health centre rahe per ab u chalu ho gael ba. Saptah mein ek din ab dactoro aawat ba.Bijli ke lain gaon mein aawe lagal. Rojgar mile lagal. Ab kauno bahali mein Tharuan ke 3% reservation milata.Pahilka hali mukhia ago mehraru Sharada Devi bhaael bari.” Meaning thereby that road has been improved. There has been employment also after Nitish government came to power. My daughter-in-law has also become a teacher in the village itself. After ST status being granted to Tharus of Champaran in 2003, my son Nawender has been selected as Sub Inspector (Daroga) for the first time in this region i.e. Ramnagar Block. This we cannot think of earlier. There was a health centre earlier worth the name but now it has started working. Now one doctor is making a visit to the centre once in a week. The village has now started being connected with electricity poles. People are getting employment. Now the Tharus are getting 3% reservation in any
government job. For the first time a woman Sharada Devi has become Mukhia (Indicating empowerment of women which will lead to gender sensitization in the area.) Sumi Krishna (2007) suggests that feminist politics has to network strategically with other struggles to counter the resistance of traditional and contemporary patriarchal structures and to work towards recasting citizenship for a gender-just development that ensures women’s livelihood rights and thereby position them properly in the society. It will not be out of place to mention that the State Government, in January 2009, has cleared a proposal of Rs. 125 crore Integrated Tharuhat Development Project for the development of around two lakh population of Tharus in the State.( TOI : January 20,2009)
Further he says which I am reproducing after translating from Bhojpuri to English. “But there is no bank in the village or nearby places. We have to go all along to Ramnagar for loan or any such things related to bank. But still people are taking loan from mahajan may be due to the distance they have to cover for reaching a bank or due to the paper work involved in transacting in bank. There is neither landline phone connectivity nor proper Post Office. Yes now improvised motor vehicles called “Jhajha” in local parlance have started plying on Ramnagar –Gobardhana road on which Bakhari Bazar is situated but no regular transport system. Due to unemployment and economic hardship after being uprooted or alienated from their own land now the Tharus of this village as well as other villages have started moving out of the Tharuhat. Thus money – inflow from outside in the form of earning has started helping in improving the condition of some of the families. This has also been possible because of improved road connectivity and Harinagar (Ramnagar) railway station being connected from almost every part of the country through rail.”
"The terror and horror of Maoists have reduced to a large extent and so those of Dacoits. They have fled across the border in Nepal. A number of people of this village have been kidnapped earlier. Police force has been doing regular patrolling. (While coming to the village and going back to Bettiah via Ramnagar I was also surprised to come across patrolling party with full force at many points in the area which was not to be seen or found during two decades of my regular visit to this area.) There is comparatively much peace in the region. Earlier it was very difficult to even sit in one's courtyard. Incidents of dacoity and kidnapping have remarkably reduced. Now one can reach village any time. Earlier it was difficult to reach village after evening as such incidents were taking place in the broad-day-light also.
"Now almost one out of four families in the village does possess Television but there is no cable. People of this village and of this region watch Doordarshan. People watch films on CD through CD player (The Thraus are very fond of watching Hindi Films. They usually go in groups to nearby places such as Ramnagar, Bagaha to see films in cinema halls. But now they can be seen in these palaces buying CDs of different films. On my way to Tharuhat when I stopped at Ramnagar near a shop I saw young boys buying CD that too of new released films.). There is no computer in the village and no internet facility at all.

"No basic facilities related to health. If something serious happens in the midnight there is no way out Ramnagar Don patient can be rushed to hospital. In this kind of situation in most of the cases, there is hardly any chance of survival."

I met an energetic and dynamic ASHA worker named Rajkali who greeted me with initial two lines of a Hindi song which has a universal message:

"Bhala karne wale bhalai kiye ja,
Burai ke badle duwayen diye ja."
(Those who are doing service to humanity, they should keep doing that. If some one is doing bad to you, you only pray to God for their good.) She says, “Doctor is not available all the time, mostly he is absent. If a woman has labour pain in the night it becomes very difficult to manage. In the surprise inspection by BDO, one doctor along with four health workers were found absent in the Additional Primary Health Centre (Bakhari) run by Champaran Yuva Kalyan Society of one Badaruddin. This has come out in ‘Dainik Hindustan’ Newspaper also.” (First time I saw village Bakhari being reported in a widely circulated and well known Newspaper.) The job of ASHA is to create awareness among the rural people about heath and hygiene and bring the villagers to Health centre for proper care and attention.
One of the Young Tharus showing his appointment letter as Sub-Inspector
Shankar Mahto [who had become unconscious for eight days in 2006 with no hope of recovery, with the help of local MLA Chandra Mohan Rai treated in Patna] goes on to say, “Now the Tharus in large number have become labourer and most the Tharus depend upon labour for their livelihood. Only a few, those who have sufficient land, depend upon agriculture. But now the developmental and welfare schemes of government have started reaching in all the villages. There are now only six tractors in the village.”

“There has been substantial improvement in the education especially for the girls. We can find a private High School named Jagannath Uchch Vidyalaya along with a private Career Coaching Institute in the village. The most important and noticeable development in this regard is opening of a residential government girls school in 2007 named ‘Kasturba Balika Uchch Vidyalaya’. [This will definitely become nerve centre for the education of the girls in the region and transform the face of the area in years to come.]

Girls are coming to this village for study from far off places such as Bankatwa, Gobardhana, Manchangwa, Bagahi Sakhuani covering 6-7 Kms on cycle. Once a girl of Gobardhana who was coming to school on cycle, came under a truck and got killed.”

“The wood they (Tharus) used to receive under ‘Charsa Permit’ earlier has completely been stopped. They were used to get ‘Ghar Sangha’ (wood for use in house) as per their rights. Now after being granted the status of ST it has also completely been stopped. This is a gross violation of the fundamental rights of the Tharus and it has to be highlighted in media.”
Residential ‘Kasturba Balika Uchch Vidyalaya’ in Bakhari Bazar

Rajkali ASHA worker in Bakhari Bazar
The government should come forward in giving support to small scale industries in the area as it has great potential. There is a lot of work done with the help of wood. Tharus are very skilled in woodwork. A special type of grass called ‘Sawai’ found abundantly in the region can be utilized for making rope (rassi), dagara, dauri, mawni, dalia (all different kinds of baskets) on a large scale.”

These items are environment friendly and can replace the use of polythene which has become threat to environment and is health hazard. The government can support and encourage this quality of the Tharus and train them a little so that they can be able to produce beautiful, high quality of product which can be marketed not only in India but outside also. There is great demand of such items as souvenir/memento amongst the foreigners as we see them taking keen interest in such items in Delhi Haat. This step will not only help in the increase of foreign exchange but also facilitate not only
in improving the deteriorating condition of the Tharus but boosting the morale and confidence of this wonderful community.

For the first time I found out the village being connected from outside through mobile phone. When I came to know about one residential school coming up in the village my joy knew no bounds and immediately I rushed to see the premises of 'Kasturba Balika Uchcha Vidyalaya'. People out there, not the students, became perplexed when they saw me taking photographs of the building. One woman came to me and asked, 'Are you from Press?" Again one boy gave me his mobile, then from that side asked the School Incharge, "Why have you come here?" Let me make it clear I too was scared as I thought these people might create problem for me. But after knowing my introduction the man got relieved and asked his person to serve breakfast –tea to me. The most important thing to note down here is mobile
connectivity of the village. School Incharge, sitting in Bettiah, far away from the village, earlier unthinkable without landline connection, can be in direct touch with his person in Bakhari and keep a watch on the activities of the school.

Again I visited Tharuhat in second week of June in 2009. When I visited Tharuhat in 2006 I had to go to Bakhari in Tanga, the same way and almost with same difficulty as I visited in 1987-88. But when I visited Bakhari in 2008 I hired a Jeep in Bettiah and went to the village via Chanpatiya, Narkatiyaganj. The road was good and driving was smooth. In 2009 I reached Ramnagar via Lauria by bus and then from Ramnagar took jhajha for Bakhari. Thus we can see that now transport system on Ramnagar-Gobardhana has improved considerably. Jhajha is now available from morning to evening. My key informant says, “The process of land alienation has definitely decreased and bajis with small landholdings are slowly moving out of the area after selling their land. Now the process of migration has increased and we can find a large number of Tharus going to Delhi, Punjab, Shimla, Jammu for employment. Mobile is now abundantly in use. Mobile repair centers have come up in the village. (I, for the first time, visited this
village after giving prior information in the village on mobile.) With the arrival of many churches and other missionary related activities we can find cases of conversion also in this area. The power and influence of Mishra and Upadhyaya families in the village has gone down. Social structure of the village has almost remained unchanged with only marginal increase in population growth. But Bakhari Bazar chowk (Intersection) has become the hub of many activities and shops.” We can find the influence of Baba Ramdeo in this remote village. I saw
Shankar Mahto using medicines such as ‘Divya Gashar’, ‘Divya Kanchnar’. His daughter in Patna regularly does Pranayam as taught by Baba Ramdeo.

Now it appears that Bakhari Bazar, which was an island in itself and completely cut off from the main society due to bad and bumpy roads and lack of bridge on the Synahi river, has been connected with Harinagar (Ramnagar) with pucca, motorable road. Hoards of Tharus particularly women and children are without any hitch moving out of the village by early available jhajha, jeep or Tata vehicle. Even trucks can be seen plying on this road. Harinagar is now connected with all the important places of the country through Rail and thus leading to migration/movement of the Tharus to distant places either in search of job, or for better medical facilities or for better education. Not only are they bringing financial support to their families but also the culture of Metro cities. There is a change in their outlook, behaviour and attitudes. There is increase in opportunities and widening of the horizon. Son-in-law of Ramnath Qauzi is working in Ordinance Factory of Kanpur. One of the three sons of Shankar Mahto who has been selected as Sub Inspector, is posted in Bhagalpur. Grand son Phanindra Kumar has completed his MBA from Sri Guru Govind Singh College of Commerce, Pritampura (Delhi University). Phanindra’s sister came to Delhi on
Young Tharus talking on Mobile in Bakhari Bazar
10th July 2009 for counselling in NIFT, Hauz Khas. These are no simple incidents but are the powerful indicators of change in the attitude of the Tharus of West Champaran. Phanindra speaks good English and shows a lot of confidence while talking on a subject. His attire and that of Joginder of Bakhari Bazar have been very impressive with jeans and beautiful T-shirts. They have now started using plastic money, ATMs, for money transaction if going outside of Tharuhat for study or job or for any other reason.

The 2009 Human Development Reports on migration marks a paradigm shift in attitude with its call for easing barriers to human movement. In a significant contribution to our understanding of the phenomenon, it establishes that migrants enrich individual, family and community life – at the exit as well as the entry points. The report acknowledges its many benefits to parent communities; new ideas, jobs, social dividends in the form of higher school enrolment, and empowerment of women. The HDR’s single most important finding is the strong positive correlation between migration and poverty reduction. Internal migration leads to upward mobility and financial rewards, though life in the city often means crowding into slums. In a small number of cases, migration is forced by conflict, displacement and other negative factors. It is a warning to all those proponents of ‘sons of the soil’ chauvinism who have made a career out of slandering and mistreating migrants. (Editorial: “Migration Benefits”: The Hindu: October 13, 2009)

Mobile connectivity has brought about a revolution in this village and in the Tharuhat. A Tharu staying in Delhi, or Kanpur or Mumbai or Shimla can be in regular contact with his families though landline has not reached in this village. This has shortened the distance and opened the floodgates of opportunities. Now not only electricity poles but electricity has come to the village which is again a great event in the history of Bakhari Bazar. This will definitely help in the development of the village and the area and growth of small scale industries.
Many NGOs have been working in the area but mention of SATYAM SHIVAM seems to be necessary as this has been working in the village for years peacefully and silently. This has helped in making the Tharus aware of their rights and different welfare schemes of the government especially after their ST status. The organization has also been encouraging the children particularly the girls for education and distributing books/copies /pencils.