

SADALPUR VILLAGE: A Journey From Poverty To Prosperity

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Using the fallow uplands in the village for tasar plantations has been instrumental in not only taking the villagers out of abject poverty but in also freeing them from the clutches of moneylenders

IN JHARKHAND AND BIHAR, THERE ARE large tracts of uplands lying fallow. The non-availability of irrigation facilities makes the land unfit for any high-value crop. This is considered one of the major reasons of persistent poverty in the area. The arable land-holding of families is less than a hectare; they use this land for cultivating paddy in the *kharif* season. The output from these lands is also not up to the mark, mostly due to rudimentary agricultural practices. If a regular income could be generated from the unutilized uplands, it would give a great boost to families that struggle in the vicious cycle of poverty. The additional means of income will free them from their practice of subsistence

agriculture and help them pay back their long-pending debts. PRADAN's intervention of planting host trees for *tasar* silkworms on privately owned barren uplands where poor families could take up silkworm rearing after three years of gestation period played just that role.

A village that has witnessed change in the lives of its families through *tasar* plantation is Sadalpur. It is 11 km from the block headquarters of Saraiyahat in Dumka district and on the way from Saraiyahat to Deoghar district of Jharkhand. The village comprises 20 households, of which 19 belong to the backward Ghatwal community. Only one household belongs to the upper caste landlord community. The

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average land-holding of these Ghatwal families is around 2.5 acres, of which only 40 per cent is lowlands and medium uplands suitable for paddy cultivation, and the rest are uplands.

Prior to PRADAN's intervention in the village, abject poverty prevailed because many of the families had mortgaged their lands to the moneylenders in the nearby Dighi village to meet urgent cash requirements, or had lands under share-cropping because of the lack of the livestock and capital required for agriculture.

The food grains produced from their land barely lasted three to four months. The families were forced to work as agriculture labour in the moneylenders' fields. The other option was for male members to migrate to nearby cities to work as rickshaw pullers or labour in rice mills, brick kilns, construction works, welding shops, etc. Some youth migrated to Delhi and Surat for six to eight months a year and returned only during the paddy transplantation season, to work in the fields of the moneylenders and pay off debts. The women of the family were engaged in shepherding cattle and other ruminants of the moneylenders

and in doing other domestic work in the moneylender's house. During the day, no adults can be found in their houses. Only one house in the village had a mud wall and tile roofing; this belonged to the Choudhary family. The other houses had paddy straw thatched roofs and walls of leaves and twigs covered with mud. None of these houses had wooden doors because they could not afford them.

Often, families had to do without a meal and, in such cases, the women suffered the most. Tears rolled out from Sonia Devi's eyes as she shared how she had to subsist on only rice water and salt on many nights because there was hardly any rice left after her three children and husband had eaten. In the palm fruiting season, her children and she survived on palm nut and juice.

Children were deprived of primary education because they were busy guarding cattle from a very early age; they migrated for wage labour once they were 10 to 12 years old. Nakul Ray (35 years) told us that he left his studies when he was in the 5th standard and went to Deoghar to work as a labourer at the age of 12.

PRADAN began work in the village in 2004 under the Special

Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) *tasar* project. One of the team members, Binay Kumar Tiwary, noticed a barren stretch of land near the village while searching for a suitable place for taking up Arjuna plantation. The land had been lying idle for a long period because it was highly undulating in nature and the soil had a rocky texture, unsuitable for agriculture.

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To convince the people, PRADAN organized an exposure visit for the families to an already established plantation in the nearby Chandubathan village in the same block, where the villagers were already reaping the fruit of the plantation. The families of Sadalpur interacted with them and understood the nitty-gritties of the process for plantation and the arrangements of the project in detail. This

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exposure visit helped people clarify their doubts. The villagers feared that PRADAN would take away their land when the plantation was complete. Those fears were allayed when they saw the work already in progress in the other village. There was, however, another challenge. Of the 65 acres available, around 50 per cent belonged to families of nearby Dighi village. The people there were not so poor. The plots in Sadalpur were interspersed with those owned by families in Dighi. The idea of the plantation, therefore, did not take off.

On the suggestion of the villagers, Binay contacted Tribhuban Choudhary, in Dighi village. Binay took him to Chandubathan (exposure site) to explain the idea of the plantations, the work that PRADAN did, and how the suggested project would have long-term benefits for the poor families of Sadalpur as well as for the land-owners of Dighi village. Vinay persuaded him to share this information with the fellow land-owners of his village and motivate them to take up plantation on their lands.

Tribhuban, then, arranged a meeting with the other land-owners of Dighi village where he joined Binay in sharing the scheme and motivating them

to allow the plantation on their lands so that the poor families of Sadalpur could take up rearing on their plots and the villagers of Dighi could get rent from those families. Such an arrangement already existed in the Chandubathan plantation, wherein 30 per cent of the land belonged to the upper caste Brahmins, who had rented their plants to the Santhal community of the village to rear silkworms. The moneylender land-owners agreed to the proposal of the plantation, realizing that they would get something out of that barren land without investing anything.

The land-owners of Dighi came to Sadalpur for a joint meeting and discussed the modalities of the plantation. The villagers of Sadalpur worried about finding labour for all the earth-work activities such as pit-digging, cattle-proof trench-digging, inter-cultural operations in the plot, etc., that needed to be conducted under the project.

PRADAN formed a Tasar Vikash Samity (TVS), initially including all the land-owners, after finalizing the family-wise, land-holding details in the plot. Later, only the villagers of Sadalpur attended TVS meetings and took forward the activities of

the plantation. TVS selected five nursery farmers to prepare the nursery for raising the seedlings required for transplantation. They were trained on the techno-managerial aspect of nursery preparation. Quality seedlings were raised and transplanted in time. Protecting the plantation from grazing was a major challenge for TVS; the families, however, guarded their plants and at times even fought with those Yadav families of nearby villages whose cattle strayed into the plantations because there was no controlled grazing practised in the area. PRADAN also assisted them in conducting all the inter-cultural operations on time (as per the project provisions), resulting in the maturing of the plantation within the stipulated three years' time, by 2007.

Before taking up rearing, the land-owners of both the villages finalized the modalities of the activity in a meeting held in the Sadalpur. They decided that the land-owners of Dighi would not take up rearing in the plot, leaving it only to the families of Sadalpur to rear silkworms in the plantation. The plants were then distributed equally among the 12 interested families for taking up the rearing activity. Each family got around 6,000 plants (16 rows

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each). During the first year, the land-owners of Dighi refused to take any rent for the plants; from the second year onwards, the rent was fixed as Rs 0.50 per plant. After undergoing training in *tasar* silkworm rearing from PRADAN, these 12 willing families took up rearing for the first time in 2007 with the 750 quality disease-free layings (DFLs) PRADAN arranged for them, earning them an average income of Rs 6,000. In subsequent years, the rearing capacity of the plot increased. At present, 20 families are involved in rearing in the plantation plot with more than 4,500 DFLs; the average income of the families from rearing is around Rs 15,000 to Rs 25,000 per year. With the increase in income, the rent of the plant increased to Rs 1 and, subsequently, to Rs 1.50 by 2015 when it was decided to raise it to Rs 2.5 per tree, which is the currently prevailing rent. The

income realized in last four years is given in Table 1.

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four years from 2007 to 2011 and their earnings were in the range of Rs 20,000 to 25,000 per family. The average net earnings from rearing in 2007 were Rs 12,000 per family. Binay distributed the money earned from sale of the cocoons in a meeting. The villagers were reluctant to take the cash to their homes because they feared that the money might be stolen because they did not have doors in their homes. They requested PRADAN to arrange for depositing the money in the bank. PRADAN then helped the villagers to open bank accounts and deposit the amount in their accounts.

In 2011, there was a shortage of DFLs and some poor quality DFLs from Basic Seed Multiplication and Training Centres (BSM&TCs) were reared in the plantation, resulting in an infestation of diseases. There was crop loss

Table 1: Income raised over four years through *tasar* silkworm rearing

Year	No. of Families Rearing Silk-worms	No. of DFLs Reared	Total No. of Cocoons Produced	Total Income Realized (Rs)	Rent Paid for the Plants by the Families (Rs)	Average Net Income Per Family (Rs)
2012-13	16	3,050	2,72,182	4,91,111	56,308	25,174
2013-14	18	3,250	2,57,959	4,55,263	60,000	19,207
2014-15	0	0	0	0		0
2015-16	20	4,707	1,94,160	4,51,530	75,000	15,767
2016-17	20	4,869	2,92,140	6,47,090	75,000	24,824

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that year and the rearers got a very low return of Rs 6,000 each. To prevent any loss in the subsequent years due to the residual effect of disease, the families undertook all possible inter-cultural operations such as pollarding and controlled firing of the ground, under the supervision of PRADAN, and revived their income in 2012–13. In 2014–15, there was again a shortage of DFLs from PRADAN-promoted cooperatives and the rearers opted for not taking up rearing for one year rather than taking poor quality DFLs from elsewhere.

In the meantime, two SHGs with 22 women were formed in 2005. They began having regular savings and credit. By taking loans from their own savings, the women were able to escape getting into the clutches of the moneylenders for their immediate petty cash requirements by taking loans from their own savings. The present saving per member is around Rs 10,000, from which they take loans for different activities. Several trainings were imparted to the community on new developments in vegetable cultivation such as the *machan* system for bitter gourd cultivation, mushroom cultivation and improved

practices of paddy cultivation, thereby increasing the income of the families.

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Upendra Ray told us that he had not been aware of how much land his family had. They had never cultivated that land but when they got the money from *tasar*, his mother told him that they had half an acre of land mortgaged with the moneylender, which he could now pay off and have the land released. He used his earnings of Rs 10,000 to repay the debt and now he cultivates his own land as well and produces 8–10 quintals of paddy from it. In his childhood, he had been forced to give up his studies and work as a labourer crushing stone due to abject poverty. Nowadays, he has taken up round-the-year vegetable cultivation in his own field. He shares how moneylenders are now requesting the villagers to take their land for share-cropping because they do not have the

required manpower to cultivate their land and they do not want it to remain fallow. Families are now bargaining with the land-owners on the proportionate share of production. They are taking half of the produce and the landlords are also bearing half of the production costs. He himself is cultivating around two acres of land on a shared cropping basis, along with half an acre of his own land.

Nakul Ray, another youth, who takes up the *rabi* tomato cultivation on a large scale, remembers how shopkeepers used to refuse to supply them the required agricultural input on credit saying the villagers did not have any credibility. This year, when cultivating five acres of land for a tomato crop, he took seeds and fertilizer worth around Rs 20,000 on credit from the trader in Saraiyhat block for more than one month. This is only because of the sustained income from the *tasar* cultivation; this year, he will repay the money once the *tasar* cocoons are sold in one week because there is time for the tomato to come for sale.

Significantly, there is no longer any distress migration from the village; the youth are mostly engaged in agricultural activities,

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producing vegetables such as okra, spinach and chilli round the year. Seeing the interest that the youth show in agriculture, water bodies have been developed under MGNREGS and watershed schemes are being implemented to facilitate their cultivation.

Nakul shares how he learned large-scale tomato cultivation on the uplands in the *rabi* season. In 2010, two Yadav youths came from the nearby Matha village (6 km away from Sadalpur) and took a five-acre plot adjacent to the plantation on lease from the moneylenders of Dighi and started doing tomato cultivation in the *rabi* season. The youth and the women of Sadalpur worked there as hired labourers. During this period, the youth of Sadalpur learned the Package of Practices of tomato cultivation. In 2012, when there was a failure of the tomato crop, they left the village. Next year, four youth from Sadalpur village grouped together and gathered the courage to take up tomato cultivation on the large uplands, taking the land on lease from the moneylenders. In the first year, they invested

around Rs 25,000 per person from the savings from *tasar* and earned a profit of more than Rs 50,000 per person. After that they became confident to take up this cultivation individually. Every year, there is more than 20 acres of land under the *rabi* tomato crop in the village. The village is well-known in the *mandis* of nearby Deoghar town or Dumka town. At times, purchasers from Bhagalpur also come down to Sadalpur to procure tomatoes. The villagers not only learned about improved practices of tomato cultivation, they also became very aware of the cultivation practices for different crops; every family is now taking up the hybrid variety of paddy and most of the families are engaged in producing some vegetable through the year, to sell in the local market.

The people have now begun sending their children to schools and some are even spending Rs 1,000 per month per child toward private tuitions in the nearby village. Godo Ray, one of the rearers, shared that his daughter's children are staying

with him. Both the grandson and the granddaughter are in the 10th standard and he spends Rs 8,000 a year for their education. Upon completion of their matriculation, he is planning to send them back to their mother and concentrate on the education of his sons' four children. They are too small to get enrolled in school yet.

The village is now food sufficient and the women are happy that they have plenty of clothes and are even investing in gold ornaments. Currently, the income from commercial *tasar* rearing, in an average year, comprises over 60 per cent of the annual family cash income in the village. Apart from the productive assets and the realized cash income, the families also enhanced their intangible assets in terms of gaining skills, increasing their capacity and developing a confident attitude to life, which had hitherto been missing.

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