

CHAPTER XXV



RAMENDRA KUMAR

IN the second week of September the Inter-School cricket tournament started. HPS team did well but lost in the finals to the first time finalist Little Flower. Sagar's personal performance was consistent both with the bat as well as the ball.

In the First terminal Aamir managed to retain the top spot but in the second terminal Shantanu beat him by 35 marks bagging the highest in both English and Maths.

Aamir was shattered. "I think I got overconfident," he told Sagar.

"Till the final put your Literary Club activities on the back burner and get down to some really serious study."

"You are right. I'll talk to Sharma Sir. Jacob of Class IX has been shaping up quite well. He can take over as the President of the Literary Club."

Aamir put his plan into action and started working harder than he had ever worked.

Aamir was quite happy with his performance in the Class X Board examination.

"I think I have done well but let us see how well the others have done," Aamir told Sagar.

"What about Gopal?"

"He is quite happy with his performance in all the subjects except English and Social Studies. "What about you?"

"Thanks to your notes and last minute cramming I'll manage a first class. English was cool but I am just not cut out for Science," Sagar said.

"Sagar, you yourself don't realise how intelligent you are. You are cut out for every subject. But you seem to have taken a vow not to study," Aamir said and Sagar just smiled.

During the hols a selection camp was organised for finalising the Hyderabad team that was to take part in the Under-16 cricket Tournament for the Amarnath Trophy. This was the most prestigious tournament in the

FRIENDS FOREVER

The competition was a really tough one. Much tougher than Aamir could ever have imagined. HPS School bagged the runners-up position while Shantanu won the best debator award. In the next debate competition organised by YMCA, the HPS team bagged the top spot with Aamir being declared the best speaker.



country for school students and the best young talent could be seen in the fray. Many top cricketers of the country had got their first major break in this tourney.

Sagar made it to the sixteen-member Hyderabad Team that was nicknamed the Hyderabad Blues because of the sky blue colour of the dress of its team members.

Riding on a thick slice of luck and a spirited display of some gutsy cricket, the Hyderabad Blues team did rather well. It entered the finals beating more fancied teams from Delhi, Bangalore and Kolkata. In the final it had to take on the team from Mumbai - the Mumbai Reds who were the reigning champs. The match was to be

played on 25th at the Lal Bahadur Stadium.

On 22nd evening Sagar was practising at the nets. He had not yet made it to the final eleven. And it looked highly probable that in the finals too he would be cooling his heels in the pavilion.

Irfan Khan, the Captain of Hyderabad Blues, called him. Irfan, a well built sixteen-year-old of medium height, was a student of Saint Peter's High School. He was a dashing left-hand batsman and a brilliant close in fielder.

"Hey Sagar, I have terrific news for you." Sagar looked at him hoping against hope that his prayers would be answered.

"You have made it to the final eleven," he said slapping Sagar on his back. "The Mumbai Reds have four left-handers in their side. Your inswingers can prove very effective against them. You still have a couple of days to go. Practise your inswingers as much as possible."

"Who's being dropped?"

"P Satyan. He has not done all that well in the earlier matches. Moreover, Mumbai Reds have an impressive batting line up. We need to strengthen our batting. It was felt by our team's think tank that since you are also a better batsman than Satyan you should be preferred."

"Thanks," Sagar said shaking his cap-

tain's hands and went back to the nets with his feet barely touching the ground.

The next day after nets Sagar and Aamir were sitting in the stands munching groundnuts, which Aamir had got for Sagar. Aamir had taken permission from the Principal to be with Sagar.

"Sagar," Sagar and Aamir looked up. It was Irfan. His face looked tense.

"Sagar let me come straight to the point. Were you on drugs earlier?"

Sagar reacted as if he had been slapped.

Aamir got up.

"Why are you asking this, Irfan bhai?"

"You keep out of it," Irfan snapped and then turning to Sagar asked, "Now tell me Sagar? Were you taking drugs? Were you admitted to a de-addiction centre and stayed there for more than a month."

Sagar looked Irfan straight in the eye and said, "Yes."

Irfan met his gaze and then said very quietly. "You are out of the team." He then turned back and started walking away.

"Wait, wait Irfan, you can't do this to me," Sagar ran back and caught hold of Irfan's arm.

"The decision is not mine. The think-tank comprising Ramesh Naidu, the President of the Hyderabad Cricket Association, Veerendra Yadav, Chairman of the Selection Committee and Raghav, our Coach have decided. I was only asked to communicate the decision to you."

"Who told them all this?"

"I really don't know. Veerendra Yadav called an emergency meeting and I was asked to attend. There this decision was taken," Irfan said and walked away.

Sagar came and sat down beside Aamir.

"I was dreading this would happen one day - my past would catch up with me. Now my cricketering career is finished forever," Sagar said, staring vacantly into space.

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Title deeds elude the Paharia community



SARADA LAHANGIR

IT was evening when I reached Bhaisadani village of Nuapada district. Champabati Paharia, 40, a widow, was returning from the forest with a bundle of bamboo on her head. She looked tired. She had gone to the forest to collect bamboo (only six pieces in this bundle) five days back.

Champabati is a poor woman. Her husband died a couple of years ago. They had five children. Every fortnight she goes to the forest to collect bamboo. Since bamboo is not available in the nearby forest she has to go to Koruapain dangar about 15 kms away, after crossing two to three dangars - Thana Pani, Tike Para and Garjan hill. It takes two to three days to reach the Koruapain hill. Then she collects bamboo and returns home. It takes at least seven days - to go there, collect 8 to 9 piece of bamboos and to return home.

"I cannot carry more at a time. When my husband was alive, we both or sometimes he alone used to go to the forest with the villagers and get bamboos. I went to the nearby forest and collect the seasonal minor forest produce like Mahua, Kendu Patta, tuber and roots. Now it is very difficult for me to survive. I have no land where I can cultivate vegetables. This is all forest land and we live under constant threat that the Forest Department officials might evict us from here.

Bamboo is the only source of income for me. Since this is my traditional occupation I know to make different household articles such as bas-

In 1980, the demand for inclusion of the Paharias in the ST category was raised in the state Assembly. In 2000, 'Paharia Vikash Manch' was formed by this community to fight for their cause. On 27th July 2005, a proposal for the inclusion of the Paharias in the ST list was sent to the center by the state government but nothing has happened yet

kets, handmade fans, etc, which I sell in the weekly haats. The whole exercise takes about 15 days. And with these six to eight pieces of bamboos, I can make products worth Rs 500/- to Rs 600/-. The income is not sufficient to feed my five children; so two of my children have gone to Bhubaneswar to work in a brick kiln," she explains.

"We have heard that Government is providing land patta to those who are living in the forest; some of the fellow forest dwellers of other communities have got the patta. But the forest officials are telling us that we are not Adivasis, so we are deprived of this benefit. I don't know the government's policy. I just want that government should help my family get two square meals a day," she said.

Budhram Paharia, 65, of Bhaisadani village is also facing the same challenge. "No work is available here. Our sole income is from bamboo products. Bamboo is not available in

the nearby forest. We have to go too far, almost to Chhattisgarh border, crossing the hostile terrain. It is risky to cross the hills at night and old people like me can't collect more bamboo pieces," Budhram said.

"If we would have been given community right under the FRA we could have planted bamboo in the nearby forest and easily got the bamboo. Though we are forest dwellers and have been living here since generations Government has not yet recognized us as a tribe. Many of our relatives who are in Chhattisgarh are considered tribals and getting all benefits; we are not getting any. Several times we have demanded ST status but Government has not yet fulfilled our demand," he lamented.

Bhaisadani is a small village of Nuapada district, covered by forest, where 22 Paharia families have been living since generations.

Paharia community is one of the



Primitive Tribal Groups in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. There are around 10,000 Paharias in Nuapada and Kalahandi districts. Though the Paharias (also known as also Kamars) have been recognized as ST by Governments of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, they are yet to get ST status in Odisha.

Two British citizens, Richard Temple in 1863 and V. Ball in 1867 had described, "The Paharias sustain their lives by hunting animals in the jungles and eating mainly forest products." The two authors wrote that the Paharias belonged to the wild race and lived in caves. In the 1901 and 1911 census, the Paharias were included in the ST category. Historians like RV Russel and RB Hiralal in 1916 described the Paharias as STs.

British rulers had accorded Protected Status to the Paharias. But the ST status of the Paharias died an ignominious death in 1936 after Odisha became a separate province and the erstwhile Khariar zamindari merged with Odisha, which was earlier a part of the Central Provinces.

Their main source of livelihood is bamboo weaving, collecting minor forest produce and cultivation. They make baskets, handmade local fans, winnows, trays, mats and different types of decorative handicraft items. These are no longer remunerative because bamboo has become scarce. Secondly, there are not market link facilities to sell these products. Even if they get bamboos with difficulty, they cannot sell their products at good price. As far as cultivation is concerned, these are forest land which many of them cultivate. As it is upland

and has no irrigation facility, they can't cultivate much.

During summer, they use to maintain their families by collecting minor forest produce like Mahua. If there will be good flowering, each family can get 2 to 3 bags of flowers worth Rupees 2000 to 2500/-. But to collect this Mahua flowers, the struggle is as hard as collecting bamboos. Many of them have to temporarily shift to deep forest, about 20 kms away from their home to collect Mahua flowers. They construct temporary sheds of branches and stay there during the collection.

"We have been deprived since ages. I saw my parents struggling to get two square meals for us and we are now experiencing the same hardship to feed our children. Nothing has changed. During election time, politicians come here and promise everything to us but do nothing. Government is yet to ensure us ST status," Subhadra Paharia, 55, tells us, frustration writ large on her face.

In 1980, the demand for inclusion of the Paharias in the ST category was raised in the state Assembly. In 2000, 'Paharia Vikash Manch' was formed by this community to fight for their cause. On 27th July 2005, a proposal for the inclusion of the Paharias in the ST list was sent to the center by the state government but nothing has happened yet.

Phanindam Deo, research scholar, submitted a report on the Paharias to the government demanding inclusion of the Paharias in the ST category. A study was conducted by the Tribal and Harijan Research and Training Institute on the ethnic status of the Paharias

Nuapada based activist Ajit Panda says, "It is unfortunate that the Paharia community has been landless due to Government's apathy and lack of will power. This community has been fighting to get ST status since years and now they are struggling to get right over the land where they have been living since their forefathers' time."

"When Government has given thousands of hectares forest land for mining and for setting up industries, even in the reserve forest area, I don't find any reason why government is not keen to implement the FRA and issue the title of the land to Paharias," he added.

A.B.Ota, Director, Tribal Research Institute informed us that inclusion of any community in the ST list is a long government process. "As far as Paharia community is concerned, the file has already been processed and now it is lying with the centre and is in the last phase of clearance; hopefully very soon they will be included in the ST list."

According to the Campaign For Survival and Dignity (CSD), State Government has not yet implemented FRA properly for the non tribal forest dwellers. We have found that only in one and two places like in Sundargarh and Angul, non tribal forest dwellers have been issued title over their land.

In the present scenario, it seems that ST status can only give some relief to the Paharias. They also hope to get the title over the land which they possess.

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