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Project Akansha: Motivating, helping out PVTG children to take up education

Under Project Akansha, over 220 students are enrolled in seven residential schools across Jharkhand.



Project Aakansha, therefore, aims at bringing a paradigm shift in the lives of Birhors and Sabars one child at a time. (Express Illustrations)

RANCHI: Children of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) in Jharkhand, which are considered extremely backward but are on the verge of extinction, have started going to schools and doing well in exams

All thanks to Project Akasha, an initiative by Tata Steel Foundation which has been motivating and helping out PVTG children to take up education so that they can motivate others in the tribe and develop interest towards education.

Scattered throughout Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal, the Birhors are traditionally nomadic by nature, which spend their entire lives in the jungles sustaining on natural resources collected from forests. With less than 10,000 members left in the tribe, their vulnerability as an age-old ethnic group of India comes across in dwindling numbers.

The project has not only enabled quality education by enrolling Birhor and Sabar children into residential schools and supporting them with tuition fees, but has gone ahead and produced many first-generation learners in their families. It has

not only given the children a chance at sound education, but also enabled them to imagine living in the reverie of becoming a doctor, or an engineer someday.

Therefore, with over 220 students enrolled in seven residential schools across Jharkhand, Project Aakash is a strong foray into the dark shroud of illiteracy that surrounds the Birhors and Sabars, yet another nomadic tribe that is dependent on the forests for sustenance.

This year, as many as nine students enrolled in the project completed their matriculation with flying colours.

Stifan Birhor is one among them, who, for the first time felt the taste of success. Belonging to the Birhor tribe, Stifan is one of those many children from Jharkhand who have found their roots in a sound educational environment.

“It was my first exam in a new school and after scoring decent marks in almost all the subjects, the teacher called me to the front of the class and cheered me on!”, says Stifan Birhor, a student of M S Mahato High School, who recently passed matriculation with a whopping 84.6 per cent. Possibly, this was the first time he was cheered for doing well in exams which will motivate him to study harder for the next exam, he added.

Notably, with a smile beaming across the entire length of his face, there was a prominent presence of pride and excitement in Stifan’s words.

Another child, Charan Birhor, who also studies in the same school under Project Akasha and scored 72 per cent in class 10 Board Examination, admitted that he would never like to go back to his old lifestyle.

“Initially, I used to spend the entire day roaming around the village with my friends, wasting all my time, but after getting enrolled in the school, I found myself being busy with studies and once I scored well in my exams, there was no looking back at the old lifestyle”, says Charan Birhor.

Project Aakash, therefore, aims at bringing a paradigm shift in the lives of Birhors and Sabars one child at a time.

“Education being the driving force towards creating a world that needs holistic development of children, Project Akasha aims at motivating students from

communities to take up complete basic and gradually enable them chose their career paths,” said Tata Steel Corporate Social Responsibility Chief, Sourav Roy.

Many of the students who are a part of the project Aakansha, the first generation learners, have become inspiration for many around them, he added.

Roy further added that it enables them to study sincerely and break out from the shackles of abject poverty and rural hardships that today envelops the members of the Birhor tribe.

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