

## Held with love

In India one of the realities we face is the situation of caste, by which we experience hierarchy in social relations that prevents people from respecting and accepting them for who they are. India is also the land of the Indigenous people and they live in places of great natural beauty and mineral resources. The model of development followed here is capitalistic and highly dependent on fossil fuels. Given these realities Indigenous cultures who for centuries lived in close relation to nature and dependent on the ecology for their life, livelihood and meaning systems are deeply under threat.

This impoverishes women and marginalizes them. Women become redundant, useless, dominated, oppressed and exploited and lose all sense of worth. In this way thousands and millions of women in the Indigenous lands in the eastern and central part of India lost their Identity and the world lost the rich culture of song, dance, knowledge, wisdom, values that these women held for centuries that could have formed the traditions and heritage of future generations..

Bhadurlatwa is a small hamlet nestled in the dry- deciduous Sal forests of Hazaribagh. Here live five Santhal families.” Anita had been working very hard since the Mahua Season. She was pregnant for the fifth time and their fourth child was only one and a half years old. Both Jitin and her husband were building a little mud house close to their father-in-laws house. The house was nearly complete, their child was born. When the child was 2 months old Anita died. Frequent pregnancies, inadequate food, hard labor, the oppressive socio-economic situations of her husband and lack of space to share her suffering left Anita weak and vulnerable to disease and death. The doctor who treated her said,”She had no blood”. Jitin works like many others in his village on trucks unloading bricks at construction sites. He leaves in the early hours of the morning and returns late at night often drunk and tired. This left all the household chores to Anita including building the mud house.

But the story of Anita tells us that the best health care service couldn't have helped her. It is limited in what it can do to factors like malnutrition of adults and children, inadequate child care due to working conditions of women and the inaccessibility of basic health services when required-limited by poverty, the source of which is the social order itself. In the most fundamental sense, power in Indian Society is represented by the access to food. The way in which food is distributed reflects the social power structures. Therefore lack of food is the primary determinant of ill-health in this area. The lack of food to Indigenous communities is man- made poverty situations being created by the forces of Globalization. Here it is brought about by the activities of extractive industries that give rise to displacement and permanent destruction of the Indigenous governance structures, age old values and cultures. Things are made worse by the internalization of the destructive ideologies of the upper castes.

Bina Stanis a Medical Mission Sister lives in Kasiadih a small Santhal village in the district of Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, India. She works with Indigenous communities. Dr. Eva was a frequent visitor to their place. One day Dr. Eva Wallensteiner suggested to Bina Stanis to write a Project to the Organization Katholische Frauenbewegung Osterreichs(KFB) Aktion Familienfasttag. The project was approved and since then till date there was no turning back. This grant supported us with new possibilities, flexible and catered to the needs of local Indigenous women and made a huge difference in their lives and in the evolution of the organization priorities. It gave CASS power(Shakti) to create new structures of governance for women like creating 39 Women's Self Help groups, seven cluster groups, built confidence in women through celebration of women's day, made healing possible for individual women and families, and like a invisible pillar of strength became the backbone of their initiatives and never allowed them to fall and **held women in Love.**

“Whether it was the pressure from vested interests, women in Horomocha told us don't leave us. So we remained there in spite of the insults some of the powerful men threw on us telling us we shall chase you out and make your house into pig house, men would pass by and ask whether they could get some alcohol”. Regina Tirkey a nurse and a local Indigenous woman persisted and persevered in this center and continued to Midwife the changes with Women in the area. Today Regina stays strong, fearless and alone and manages one center of the organization that is like a beckon of light in that region. Many women were prevented from getting an abortion done by Regina and lo and behold they gave birth to a healthy boy who they needed after giving birth to many girls and they are grateful to Regina. Yes she is a pioneer of Change in Horomocha area and **held in love** by everyone there.

**Aktion Familienfasttag helped us to repair the Horomocha mud structures and increased spaces for women and girls. One of the best parts of the grant is that it is flexible and we could tailor it to meet the changing needs of women. The center gave women identity.**

One of the activities KFB does every year in Austria is the educational work with women in all the dioceses of Austria. During the Lenten time KFB traditionally invites one of their project partners to visit Austria and to meet women of KFB. In 2020 Bina was invited to represent CASS ( Chotanagpur Adivasi Seva Samiti)During the visit she was accompanied by Luisa. This idea of accompaniment is so great and as a guest you are **held in love** wherever you go. It gives the guest security and a feeling of safety in a foreign country. For Bina it was an opportunity to get exposure to the great women and mothers of Austria who believe that a new world order is possible and to the historical sites and learn about Austria that gave Mother Anna Dengel who Gifted the world with the Charism of Healing through the Society of the Catholic Medical Missionaries. The world holds **Anna in love. Many women commit themselves today to live this Charism and experience healing.**

**Woman fell from the motorcycle:** It was Monday and in our area it is market day and many women go to buy their weekly requirements from soap to oil for cooking to slippers and

vegetables. Shanti Kisku too went. After her shopping she was returning with one of the youth from the village. At the corner of the village the youth took the wrong turn. Shanti got scared and jumped off the motorbike. People gathered and the patrolling police arrived and took her to the government hospital. She was badly hurt on the face, lips and forehead and stitches were put. After a day “we visited her and found her family had not even given her bath. We brought her to our center got hot water and soap made her sit on the chair and helped her daughter to gently wash her head, remove the bloody bandage and clean herself nicely. Binita the nurse at the Kasiadih health center dressed her wound, gave her warm lemon beverage and a banana which she was afraid to eat. We encouraged her and told nothing will happen eat it **and held her in love.**

**Being a neighbor:** Malko had been working hard all alone harvesting paddy. Tired and worn out she became ill. Her daughter Rita is away doing her nursing studies. Her two sons don't help her on time. We encouraged her husband to take the ambulance and take her to the doctor. Malko is our neighbor. After she returned we shared some breakfast with her. Malko got well soon.

**Supporting education for girls:** Anjali Hansda one of the girls supported for nursing education with the help of this project comes from Kasiadih. Anjali was in the 4<sup>th</sup> standard when her father committed suicide. Being the eldest in the family she wondered if she could study further. However she continued and went to the 5<sup>th</sup> standard where she stood 5<sup>th</sup> in the class. Anjali felt encouraged with this and continued her Schooling. Life was hard for her widowed mother. Anjali missed the love of her father very much. But she courageously continued and supported her three sisters. She grew to understand that in life one must ignore certain things like not having a father and not having a brother. She became a friendly person and related with everyone in a pleasant manner. Bina Stanis who is supported with this project mentored Anjali and three other girls to complete their Schooling and get them to go for nursing education. All these girls come from poor Santhal families who live on subsistence farming. The produce from their field sustains them just for three months. The rest of the year they must live from daily wages. So for these girls who are first generation learners without the support from Aktion Familienfastagg it would be impossible to make it. It is a similar story for eight other girls whom Bina accompanied to help them to get admission in Schools and find hostels. Accompanying such girl's means talking to their principals of their Schools and talking to different in-charges of residential hostels, for the girls who had to get into nursing studies it meant preparing them for entrance tests, planning their physicals, talking to the parents, having several meetings about fees and structures and finding suitable youth to help them do all this in a timely way. Anita Murmu was actually on the waiting list for the School of nursing where she had applied for Auxiliary nurse midwife training. Anita was sick and sad that she wasn't selected. One day Bina called the Principal of the nursing School and told her if there is place please let her know as Anita is a deserving Candidate. It so happened one of the selected candidates didn't turn up. Anita got a chance. She was so happy.

**Thanks to Aktion Familienfasttag stopping child marriages:** In the target villages where Indigenous communities live like in the Ganjhu and Santhal communities when a girl reaches 14 or 15 years parents are afraid of being humiliated by any activity she might engage which is counter to Society's value system. So parents start planning to marry their daughters at the age of 14 or 15 years. This step of such parents takes the Indigenous community backwards and effects the next generation born to such a young couple. The children are malnourished and lack adequate care as parents themselves are underdeveloped and not actually marriageable age. Parents are busy meeting survival needs and have no time to be with their children. Seminar for girls to reflect on body, mind and society was held from the 6<sup>th</sup> September 2021 to 10<sup>th</sup> September 2021 at Ankur RanO'ka Horomocha to make young girls aware about the effects of child marriage and how it violates their Rights as persons and makes them directionless.

Girls age between 11 years to 18 years numbering 151 from 12 villages participated.

Sukhdeo Soren and Regina visited some of the villages where these girls came from. They asked the girls who had attended the program how they found it. The girls shared that they benefitted from it and wanted to have more of it to really understand and get personal help as it was not possible this time.

**Rekindling the desire to fly again:** Sonamuni Hansda and Lalita Hansda are two young girls from upper tola, Kasiadih. They completed the three month training at Hazaribagh under the DEEN DAYAL UPADHAYA scheme also popularly called DDU skill India. Sonamuni could not complete her Schooling unlike her youngest sister Phulkumari who completed her Schooling successfully. Lalita on the other hand struggled but completed her Schooling. Both were restless and didn't find meaning in being in the village like their other sisters who worked on the farm and did daily wages. They desired to go out. On completing the three month sewing training they were told they would get their certificates only if they went out of the State and worked for three months. So with consent of the parents they went with other girls from Jharkhand to Bangalore. In Bangalore they worked in a factory that manufactured towels these needed to be folded. So this was the girl's job. Lalita found the food indigestible. They were not allowed to go anywhere but stay put in the hostel. Somehow they managed but during lockdown they returned home. It so happened one day Dr. Eva suggested what about working with migrants. This ignited ideas for working with girls like Sonamuni and Lalita.

**'Behind these mud walls burns a flame, which has been lit far away in a small Tyrolean village in Austria more than a century ago.'**From the Globalization of Hope by Dr. Eva Wallensteiner.

This flickering flame has been ignited once again by a Tyrolean and burns even brighter now in Kasiadih and shares much Hope to many families. Anjali, Phulkumari, Manju and Reeta instill hope as they as nurses trainees join the girls/women like Kalista, Regina Tirkey, Rawena, Neelmuni, Paulina, Sunita, Swarnarekha, Jyoti, Regina Murmu, Malti, Anita, Akansha, Priyanshu who now work in Medical institutions and are supporting their families. On 17<sup>th</sup> September

Phulkumari's mother came and shared her pain she missed her daughter. She handed over a 200 Re note and said give this to Phulkumari!

Phulkumari's mother works at a local petrol pump as a cleaning woman for two hours. These are just a few girls who got a chance to study among the hundreds of girls in the target villages. How to bring equality, balance and justice for the many that haven't had a chance to School or skill?

A small flame has been lit in the way of Phulo Jhano skill center. Hopefully this center will help the girls regain their lost confidence and self-esteem and rekindle their desire to fly again and migrate to safe spaces.

**Dreaming adequate food:** Farming is growing among the hunters and food gatherers who dream to become food growers at least to feed their families. Women save money but how to help them save time for their children so to get to know what is happening to them. For this our activities must become creative and sustainable. 22 girls were surveyed in Horomocha area that had migrated. Each of them has a story to share. Life among the Indigenous people is changing effected by globalization but the Hope is positive conscious change is possible for the many through continuous reflection and action. The hope is that what is being experimented here in Kasiadih may fire Hope in other parts of Jharkhand and make their winter days warmer.

**Facilitating Organic Farming:** From February 2020 a new initiative has begun in Kasiadih. Indigenous Farmers are meeting every Monday to talk about how to improve farming. Until the Lockdown these meetings took place and the result was several families started or improved their Kitchen gardens. But what were observed was farmers were using pesticides on their vegetable crops. This was disturbing. Right before your eyes you see poisons being sprayed on the plants and vegetables "from these gardens come vegetables to our plates". This issue was discussed at the staff meeting in Kasiadih. It was decided that Mr. Chunu who is a staff supported by KFB and has learnt how to prepare Organic pesticide at the Farmers training will start to prepare organic pesticides and make it available for the farmers. Thus on the 20th May 2020 Chunu bought the drums. Mr. Anup brought the Kanod root from the forest. On the 26<sup>th</sup> May, Anup and Chunu talked about Organic Pesticide making. They said they need Tobacco sticks. This was got. The Organic Pesticide is prepared. Bricks also you must get now and start making the Tanks for composting. Vijay Hansda from Neemkocho; Anup Tigga from Bhadurlatwa; Anand Hembrom from Birgodda; Lawrence from Bhadurlatwa; Katilal Soren and Emil Tirkey from Bhadurlatwa got bricks and tanks for composting are constructed and compost are getting ready.

**Tarwa:** Malko a widow at Tarwa shared with Taharam that she got scared one day when there was a storm. The storm broke the Jackfruit tree close to her house so she sleeps outside her home in the open Verandah with the children of her daughter. Here she and her two granddaughters live. From here she moved out of the house to live in a small corner of the mud house whose wall was still there. She was actually living in the dilapidated old PM house which would have actually fallen. The two children bring her water and Malko sits and cooks. Malko has a bad hip

she was operated but it was too late to be repaired. She manages with a Walker. Malko is in great pain. She does her own cooking “it is a real pity to see her this way”. She shared that Sitaram has got the money for the house. Pressure was put on Sitaram who with the help of Jibon completed the house.

**Birakhap:** Binod called one of the staff at 11.30pm him at night and started to cry on the phone saying he is threatened by his uncle. The staff assured him “don’t worry nothing can happen to you we shall see about this tomorrow”. On the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020 Binod Soren came to meet CASS members. He was invited to share to the whole group. Binod cried a lot saying “my uncle wants to destroy us; they want to take away our land. On deeper enquiring he shared that in 2012 Dilip wanted to cut their Mahua tree a Darbar was called while I was away in Chennai doing my Poly-technique. During the Darbar they beat my mother. Since then I don’t have faith on the village Headmen”. Chunu one of the staff of this project analyzed the problem of Binod’s family” that as incidents occurred he and his family got cut and kept cutting themselves and now feel alone”. One of the CASS members said,” Binod is only a branch we need to take care of the roots of the tree”. Binod and his parents were brought by the Ambulance from Birakhap as Binod’s mother couldn’t walk due to pain to meet the CASS team in Kasiadih. Talo Binod’s father shared the incident. The question the team asked was how shall we love and become lovable. Binod said ,”when we were small we were okay then came water problems; my mother was not allowed to take water from their well saying she puts on her slippers and climbs the well when she draws water”; Binod asked for the land papers to make his income and residential documents Dilip made Binod go from pillar to post. On this occasion Binod’s mother called Dilip mad. Dilip called a meeting made everyone sit and then in front of everyone he gave the Land papers saying your mother may burn the land papers. Gemma asked Binod why you think they did not want to give their land papers immediately Binod immediately replied”the boy must not go ahead”. Binod was asked can if he can take the initiative to say hello to Dilip and Krishna. Binod shared “Krishna’s mother comes to Bijay’s house and they talk then she looks towards me and laughs”. My mother is sick there is so much tension and pain. The staff shared with Binod’s parents that “Binod is afraid about Krishna’s father when he shouts. All this is new for Binod you all are used to these ways. This must be cleared so that the air around your family is clean. Let everything come out from everyone’s heart. Like a fistula let it break. The staffs learnt from this experience through a diagram on the blackboard that when there are puddles of water here and there River will not flow. When these puddles are opened up they start to flow it becomes a river. Life must flow like a River. And thus a meeting was held in Binod’s village with all the members concerned. Everyone shared and the staffs facilitated the meeting.

The visit to the family of Binod the next day after the meeting it was seen Binod’s mother and Bijay’s wife were sitting together and talking. Binod came out of the house smiling. After a few days Binod came along to help out with another youth who was already working to paint the wood black of the center in Kasiadih. He shared” my mother is better; she does not use the stick to walk anymore ; I also thought staying simply at home is not good for me so I came to help.”

**Aktion Familienfasttag makes possibilities for Classroom learning:** Many women in these regions are illiterate health trainings with aids is one way of helping women learn. 51 young women were made aware about the importance of nutrition; problems that may arise during pregnancy; information about the Government facilities available during this period and how mothers can care for themselves during pregnancy and have a normal delivery. The Women from Kura, Lathia, Lurunga, Khapia, Jaratandi, Phular, Jharnaghutu, Chirwa, Horomocha, Baskudra who attended the trainings became aware of their Reproductive Health and enjoy now a better quality of life in their families.

**Aktion Familienfasttag makes possibilities for Exposure: It is common for women here not to find time to visit new places. Most are locked in their work and home chores.** 48 Women from Lathia; Lurunga and Kura went for an exposure to Ranchi to see the Hundru falls and the zoo. First they got their tickets and then started to go about with their Women friends down the stairs and after reaching they took their favorite places and sat down. Seeing the waterfall women were happy and took pictures as remembrance and enjoyed the sight and learnt what a waterfall looks like. From here they went to see the zoo here also women found everything exciting and for the first time for many the animals and birds they saw were new. As evening came the weather got cooler and women returned happy taking with them the new experiences of places they visited. For many of these women it was for the first time in their lives they received such an opportunity to go out of their village so they really enjoyed this experience and had a lot of fun together. For a few hours women forgot the daily struggles of survival and realized the value of their lives. They returned home renewed and refreshed ready to face the daily struggles of life again. Mr. Giridhari Ganjhu who is supported by this project accompanied the women and took care of all the travel plans.

**Extractive industry and mental illness:** Talomuni is a young widow from Durukasmar. She lost her husband as a result of diarrhea. The coalmines are close to her village. Her husband's bother got a job in the coal company. Strip mining destroys everything that gives meaning to women here. Water tables go down, forests are destroyed, and families fragmented and increased violence on women Talomuni became mentally disturbed. There are many women in this region who suffer this way. They must walk long distances to find drinking water and spaces to keep themselves and their children clean. As the forests are gone and land polluted they can't farm and get no supplementary foods from the forests. Talomuni went into depression and attempted suicide. She was taken care by the staff of CASS and taken to the psychiatric center. Today Talomuni is able to take care of herself and gets her medication regularly from the health center of CASS in Kasiadih.

The **community center** built by the government several years back was given a facelift from the extra grant received as a result of foreign exchange. This proved to be a boon to the villagers as it now serves them well for all the women's meetings children's classes and training during lockdown.

**Ever Ready Regina Tirkey:** Ms. Regina Tirkey is a staff with KFB Project. She belongs to the Oroan tribe and heads the health center at Horomocha village. Always ready and smiling she gave her services at Kasiadih from November 2020 to March 2021 and in the March 2021 she returned to Horomocha to be available for the people there. Women in the villages find a good listener in her. They spend hours sharing with her their difficulties and troubles. Many women in need of a boy child would come to her for advice to abort and she would encourage them not to and this always turned out to be beneficial for these women who would give birth to a boy child. These women would be grateful for her suggestions.

At Kasiadih she updated herself on the new medicines available for different illnesses.

One day a man looking quite old came to Kasiadih health center from Horomocha area on a bicycle from a distance of 18 kilometers. He shared his young daughter around 8 years had got burnt. It was early morning the mother of the child had put water to boil on a coal stove. The child happened to go close and this accident took place. Regina made herbal medicine for him. The child's father came regularly to collect the medicines and the child survived. The formulation of this medicine (made from beehive, camphor and coconut oil) was learning for Regina. In Kasiadih Regina enjoyed doing home visiting. In one of her visits she met a young girl (child marriage) who was married off and now had a baby. She and the baby both looked weak and anemic. Her husband a mentally challenged person went to work. Regina talked to her often and encouraged her to come to Kasiadih health center and finally she came. She was given herbal tonic to improve her hemoglobin and slowly she recovered and was able to reasonably nurse her baby.

**Lopongtandi Center an Oasis in the desert of destruction:** Ms. Kalista Soren is a staff with KFB project. She belongs to the Santhal tribe and is a trained health worker. She lives in Lopongtandi center which consists of four tiled roof structures. One of the four mud and tiled structure is a health center where Kalista treats patients. During the months of November 2020 to May 2021 around 170 patients visited this center. In the second wave of the Pandemic in the months of April and May 2021 she treated 79 patients. They all had a mild attack of COVID. All got well. Kalista in her heart she sometimes felt disturbed and fearful but then she realized the condition of the people and their suffering. Villagers dreaded the thought of going to the government hospital which is 36 kilometers away and to be diagnosed with corona; the nursing homes were closed and no quasi medical practitioners as they too became sick. Villagers had no place to go to get relief from their ill-health. Kalista felt pity for them and responded compassionately as possible.

The consequence was Kalista herself contacted COVID. She was suggested isolation, rest and treatment. She was asked now to protect herself and start inhalation and herbal remedies. Kalista got scared but everyday she was assured of support by all of us. She grew in courage and strength and during this period she spent time in prayer and grew closer to God. It took her one month to get well but now she is happy and fully healthy.

Lopongtandi village has resisted successfully the coming of the coalmine. It has been possible due to the resistance put by women.

Even though life here is very hard for women to walk the same paths, cross the same river, wash the same clothes; speak the same language the journey with KFB made it easy and lighter to bear. It couldn't have been better. Like an artist who can't help drawing new painting each New Year the Organization **Katholische Frauenbewegung Osterreichs(KFB) Aktion familienfasttag** stands firmly grounded in the traditions of their foremothers, truly centered in the feminine power creating new paths, vibrant with new ideas, open to change, willing to integrate the new and the unknown, firm and harbingers of Hope and Joy and faithful to the promise of God and holding the world with love.

We are grateful for the **Aktion Familienfasttag** their support and assistance in our journey with women has made us realize their "suffering and resilience" in the following way:

"Women are like trees that grow in the rains into new leaves and branches, fresh roots going deeper in the earth to find water and nourishment.

Women are like trees that stand dormant in the winter taking in life from within staying calm and cool waiting for the cold to go away. Bearing patiently and awaiting the sun.

Women are like trees that stands naked in the autumn leaves gone with the wind the old must go dry leaves fall painlessly to become manure to enrich growth and to give nourishment to new growth.

Women are trees that have suddenly broken into blossoms of fresh flowers announcing the coming of spring

Women are trees who have borne the heat, wind and rain of hot summer months to break forth into ripe fruits delicious and juicy. Some premature flowers and fruits don't reach their ultimate purpose in life. But yet have been part of the life journey of women. As they fall along she looks at them with compassion that they have found other ways to live.

Women though looks strong and straight longs for the birds to come and play on their branches, build nests on them, eat the ready fruits sing songs of joy and pain and **Holds us in Love.**

*In Sathali language woman is referred as Tua Dari( milk tree)*