



Indigenous practices and MFP of south-west tribes of Odisha: A Pathway of economic growth (Dist-kalahandi, Koraput, Rayagada, Malkangiri)

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Abstract : Tribal has their identity and life style. They have been living in the forest and forest valleys away from civilized society since time immemorial. From birth to death, they move with many ideas and beliefs. They claim that land, water, and forest are the pastures of their daily life. They are the primitive people of that place. Therefore, the area they live in was called Janpada. For that reason, they are known as tribes. Their indigenous way of life is identity of Indian culture and knowledge. Now-a-days we are saying it as indian knowledge system. Minor forest product both timber and non-timber is a life line of south-west tribes. Govt. introduced various scheme and policy, but not implement properly as it is. Educationally and economically they are underdeveloped due to the lack of infrastructure growth and also facing more health problem. This all lacunas should fulfil by Govt. In this study I am trying to show life style and economic development of south-west tribes of odisha.

Key words: indigenous, timber, non-timber, MFP, pvtgs, merchant, infrastructure, preservation, implement, socioeconomic, demography, livelihood, forest, etc.

1. INTRODUCTION: The tribal population of south-west Odisha (Makangiri, Rayagda, Koraput, Kalahandi) constitutes a significant portion of the state's demography, representing a rich mosaic of diverse ethnic groups, cultures, and traditions. Makangiri, Rayagda, Koraput, Kalahandi district is more than 48 tribal communities, including nine Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) or Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), such as the Dongria Kondh, Bonda, and the Gadba, Soura, lanjia soura, Gond, Kondh. Binjal, Bhumija etc. these communities have lived for centuries in close harmony with nature, developing unique systems of indigenous knowledge, governance and resource management. Their invaluable the socioeconomic condition of most tribal group remains considerably backward compared to other parts of tribes in odisha.

The pursuit of collection and sale of MFP (minor forest product) comes under unorganised rural sector and engages, either fully or partly, almost all the forest dwellers belonging to both the sex and to all the age-groups above ten years. The landowning tribes, like the Kolha, the kondh, the Didayi, the Dongria, the Paraja, the Bonda, the soura, the Bhumija, the Sabara, the Binjhal, the lanjia soura, the Gond etc. as well as the shifting cultivators, like the all tribes of south-western part of Odisha the study areas have adopted the collection of MFP as a subsidiary economic pursuit and the semi-nomadic Hill tribes -generally landless by nature, have reported the 'collection activity' as the principal source of sustenance.

The former two types of tribal communities usually collect the dry matters from the trees that are found near their habitats or agricultural fields. The latter, on the other hand, collect MFP from dense forest away from their habitats. The agrarian tribes go for collection of MFP within an area with a radius of 3 Kms.. The sphere of operation of shifting cultivators usually has a radius of up to 6 Kms. In case of food gathering tribes, like the Hill tribe, the area of the collecting activity has the radius of more than 10 Kms.

The division of labour on the basis of sex is noticed in the act of collection of certain MFP, like honey, resin and gum. Women do not collect the above items of MFP. Age-group wise division of labour for collection of MFP

is noticed in tribal belts. Both the male and female members of age group 10-15 years collect MFP from tree bottoms in nearby forest but males belonging to the age group of 16-60 years of age do the harder work such as climbing the trees, felling the trees, collection of honey and transportation of bulk quantity of collected items to the village. The females of this age group collect windblown MFP, dig the roots and tubers and process the MFP, Women of above 60 years of age, usually process both edible and non-edible items of MFP.

While collecting the MFP the forest dwelling tribes/communities try to maintain the eco-balance in their own way. The adherence to the ethic of conservation of forest differs from tribe to tribe. Majority of the cultivating tribal households of Malkangiri, Rayagad and Koraput area-45 out of 59, favoured controlled destruction of forests to keep both the tribal economy and the eco-balance on an even keel. From among the shifting cultivating households the majority (61 out of 121 Kutia Kandha households) favoured the collection of MFP for sale to safeguard the economic interest and the forest. The south-west tribal Odisha area overwhelmingly supported the idea of exploiting the forest wealth up to its sustainable level. From among 50 Hill south-west tribal households, 48 are in favour of foraging the forest within its tolerable limit.

Forest dwelling tribes/communities usually go for multiple occupations to eke out a living in the study areas. Hill tribes pursue the collection of MFP as the chief source of income while the landowning tribes as well as the shifting cultivators (The Kutia Kandha) have the grass culture as the principal occupation.

The traditional occupation is the main income source for the non-tribal forest dwellers. From among the 233 study households five belonging to the semi-nomadic Hill tribe have single occupation to pursue with. The occupation being the collection of MFP. From among the 233 study households as many as 218 (93.6%) have declared the collection of MFP as their economic pursuit-either primary or secondary.

The collection of MFP is highly seasonal in nature. Soon after preliminary processing the collected items are disposed of for (a) clearing the old debts, (b) Bartering for other goods and services and (c) obtaining cash. The first two are in vogue among the collecting tribes living in remote villages of the study areas. Items in bulk quantities are always exchanged for cash. Small quantities of MFP of high unit cost are bartered to mobile vendors or small provision stores for cloth, umbrella and rice. The procurers of MFP are the non-tribal shop owners or the mobile vendors who act as the agents of the leases authorised to handle MFP.

The tribal people seldom get the remunerative price for their collected goods. It is the usual practice of the tribal people to carry the MFP in bulk quantities to the market but dispose of the same at doorsteps in small quantities to the mobile vendors. Lack of storage space. Communication facilities, knowledge of use of preservatives, additives etc. and immediate cash need compel the forest people to part with the MFP for whatever little they get in return.

Majority of the tribal people are aware of the procurement rates fixed by the Government for different types of MFP. As many as 211 out of the total 233 study households (90.5%) opined that they are underpaid by procuring bodies-both Private and Government. Volumetric transaction of MFP is in vogue in tribal belts.

Gravimetric transaction of MFP by use of balance and weights is a new concept for them. The units of measurement are never checked by the personnel of the Weights and Measures Department. Due to the absence of quality control facilities and standards, most of the goods brought by the forest people are branded as sub-standard and the tribes are paid accordingly. Another reason for non-realisation of reasonable price for MFP is the absence of 'value addition' activity at the gatherers' level. At present no easily adoptable and cheap technology is available to the tribal people to utilise the byproducts of different kinds of MFP. Only a few byproducts, like mango kernel and jackfruit seed are consumed locally during the lean season in tribal belts of Belghar area. The Kutia Kandha barter tamarind seed for salt. In the study areas there is no processing unit to do justice to the bulk arrival of MFP.

The importance of MFP in tribal economic life can be assessed from the fact that in the study area nearly 90 per cent of the total annual income of the semi-nomadic Hill tribes is derived from forest collection. Nearly 6 to 11 per cent of the total income of the landowning tribes, like the Kolha, the Gadba, the Gond, the Banjara, Bhumij, the Dongrias and the Kutia Kandha are obtained from the sale proceeds of MFP. It is also found that tribal people earning less from MFP collection spend less on food items.

The communities with more income from forest spend less on purchase of assets and inputs. They also spend less in rituals and festivals. It is also observed that collecting tribes are less vulnerable to private loans. Only 4

per cent of the Hill tribes households have incurred loan from moneylenders whereas this percentage is 6.6 for shifting cultivators, 30.4 for the Kanda and 66.66 for the Gond. The forest people are not interested to take the benefit of Co-operative movement members of the Co-operative Societies

The socio-economic standard of the forest people is to be developed not only by efforts of the Government but also by the active involvement of the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) Two most important steps taken up by the Government to develop the above are (a) Conservation and regeneration of forest to maintain the eco-balance and for greater forest revenue and (b) Management of MFP with an aim to elevate the economic status of tribal people. For that purpose many forests have been declared as Reserve Forest, Protected Forest and Wildlife Sanctuaries. The Social Forestry Project started in 1983-84 with assistance from Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), at present has 96474.40 hectares of forest to its credit.

Attempts have been made to involve the tribal people in this programme to create belongingness among them. The only fault with the project is its choice of plant species. It prefers 'quickies' over the traditional slow growing plant species.

In the front of making the pursuit remunerative, the Government has set up the Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation Ltd. (TDCC). It procures MFP at Government approved rates A few private parties have also been given rights to handle certain kinds of MFP. However, pluralism of procuring agents is absent in tribal hinterland. As a result, the tribal people are underpaid for their wares.

The TDCC and other Government agencies have failed to play the fair role due to resource crunch-both human and financial. At places these bodies/agencies act more as the agents of economic exploitation. The NGOs are more in number in South-western odisha (kalahandi, Rayagada, Koraput, Malkangiri) than in the another part of the State. NGO and Govt. usually take up programmes on this tribal area. In my study areas there have no taken up any forest based programmes. So it is better to look into this area. Makangiri, Rayagda, Koraput, Kalahandi district of Odisha's tribal people depend on agriculture, shifting cultivation, forest produce collection, and wage labour. Livelihoods are largely subsistence-oriented and vulnerable to natural and market fluctuations south-western part of odisha's tribes.

Limited access to irrigation, modern tools, and markets has restricted agricultural productivity. And industrialization, mining, and development projects have often resulted in displacement and land alienation, weakening the economic base of many tribal families and forcing them into marginal occupations. Government rehabilitation schemes exist, but the benefits often fail to reach for them.

The tribal communities face challenges in education, health, and social mobility. Literacy rates among the Scheduled Tribes of south-west Odisha are below the state average. It is happening due to poverty, language barriers, and the remoteness of tribal settlements. Health indicators also remain poor, with high rates of malnutrition, anaemia, child mortality, traditional health practices persist and it due to lack of modern healthcare facility. Therefore, complicates their situation. Progression can be seen like Ashram schools, Eklavya Model Residential Schools, and mobile health units that aim to bring essential services to tribes of south-west tribes of odisha.

The government of Odisha, supported by central schemes, has implemented various programs like:- Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP), Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs), and Micro Project Agencies (MPAs) for PVTGs. These all programs focus on improving infrastructure, livelihood opportunities, and education is not enough.

NGO and Govt. should take another scheme and plane for development of kalahandi, undivided koraput district. The Forest Rights Act (2006) and Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) have also empowered these area's tribes and recognizing their traditional rights over forest land and promoting self-governance. But measures part is that, the success of development depends on effective implementation, transparency and participation.

2.Conclusion:

The tribes of south-west odisha have rich traditions of music, dance, festivals, and craftsmanship. Their indigenous knowledge have influenced by rapid modernization and external. Promoting economic and education is a major developmental challenge for them. Therefore, Tribal development should be holistic, integrating economic growth with cultural preservation and environmental sustainability.



Finally, the socio-economic betterment of south-west tribes in Odisha requires inclusive, participatory, and sustainable development schemes and policies. Further, NGO, Govt. and social worker efforts must focus on land and forest rights, education and health, providing to modern livelihood and encouraging entrepreneurship among tribes. True development will occur, when tribes are in progress, empowered to their own destiny, maintaining their identity and indigenous knowledge. The tribe of south-western part of odisha future is deeply connected with the well-being and empowerment.

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