

# **Livelihood issues of Tribals**

## **A Case study of Tribals in Odisha**

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### **Abstract**

The research study highlights on the **relevance of livelihood issues of Tribals in Odisha**, emphasizing the pressing obligation for supportable, context-specific involvements in a state where unevenly 22.75% of the populace are tribes, including 62 distinct groups. Despite rich natural resources, Odisha's tribal communities look long-lasting poverty, land alienation, and displacement due to unavoidable situations. A case study method, predominantly in districts like Kandhamal, Sundargarh, and Koraput, reveals that traditional livelihoods are under danger from climate change, land degradation and adverse impact of Covid 19.

**Key Words:** PHRS,VDVY,MSP,TTCCOL

### **Introduction:**

Tribal group of people has been the most susceptible groups in India. The essential rights of tribals are violated in each stride of their existence. Tribals are recognized as poor and residing in naturally inaccessible regional inhabitant. They are recognized as sizeable minority population of India and making up 8.6% of the total population in India or 104 million people. About 40.6 percent Scheduled Tribes lived below poverty line in India out of their total population. It is against 20.5 per cent of the non-tribal population in the country. **(Census 2011).**

### **Tribal existence in India**

“In tribal life the principal links for the complete society are based on kinship.”**(Madelbaum:10)**Kinship is not basically a standard of social organisation.It is also a code of inheritance, division of labour and allocation of power and opportunity. Tribal societies are small in volume. They acquire a decency, faith and worldview of their own, matching to their social dealings. Most of the tribes such as Santhals,Gods and Bhils are fairly outsized.

Tribals have a tough sense of their individuality and divide themselves from non-tribals, jatis, Christians, and Muslims. Language is one of the well-built character by which they categorize themselves. Mundas, Santhals and Hos are acknowledged as distinct tribes in relation to their spoken languages. A huge number of tribals in India survive in hilly and forested areas where population is thin and communication is not easy. They are dispersing over the whole sub-continent, but are originated generally in the states of Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

The tribes are lacking education and very poor in economic position. They were oppressed in the past, by the overriding sections of Indian society, namely, Hindu landlords, money lenders and industrialists who procured their lands to set up industries in tribal areas. The tribals bring forest products to the markets for sale.

Tribes have been estranged from other groupings on the origin of remarkable structures. In India, the British carried out a comprehensive record of the tribals in the 1930s. Tribes were illustrious from castes on the basis of their religious and ecological circumstances.

Tribals reside in remote areas of villages and have been occupied in agriculture and allied occupations. They have been recognized as peasants as well. There are about 67 million tribals divided into 427 tribes. They constitute about 8 percent of the total population. **(Census 1991)** There is immense multiplicity among the tribes in terms of geography, natural balance, financial hunt, language, religion, and links with the exterior world.

The huge tribes of India are characterized as the Bhils of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh and the Santhals of Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal, Gonds of Chhatisgarh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The Gonds and the Bhils are more than four millions each. The Santhals are more than three million. **(Sharma:100)**

### **Problems:**

To shield against discrimination prepared to them, the Constitution of India has decided to protect them particular dispensation for their empowerment. Article 366(25) of the Indian Constitution says that Scheduled Tribes are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. **(Chandramouli:1)** A tough brain of uniqueness is widespread with the tribes of India. Language, religion, magical attitude, food lifestyle, manner of dress, outline of surroundings and reliance upon forest produce are significant part of their existence which make them discrete from non-tribal cluster. Tribal societies are normally undersized. These are not a great deal of social dealings between people of diverse tribes. Intra-tribal harmony has been well-built. At the moment, the most important difficulty of tribals is not of integration or adaptation with castes and communities in India. Joblessness, indebtedness, backwardness, unawareness etc. are the major part of their problem for sustenance. To

incorporate the tribes with the middle-of-the-road, unique economic openings are accessible to them.

Tribes are becoming mindful both socially and politically, of upholding and safeguarding their racial and cultural uniqueness and also of shielding themselves against mistreatment by outsiders. They have worried their political cohesion. This may yield consequence in a new form of ecological-cultural segregation. Tribes have normally taken such ladder due to their poor economic position and sentiments of disturbance. To include the tribes with the mainstream, particular economic opening were accessible to them. The assimilationist model of the tribes absorption with non-tribal India demanded structural connection of the tribes with the non-tribes. The isolationist model would not be much pertinent today in the face of quick alteration in Indian society. Despite enormous transformation taking place in India, tribal awareness has been reinforced largely to venture tribes as diverse mechanisms of Indian Society. Industrialisation in most of the part has also supported both tribal awareness and assimilation with the non-tribal sections in the region. The demand for Independence by tribals has initiated from their terror of defeat of cultural independence and of mistreatment.

### **Impact of Covid-19**

In keeping the past lockdown in the region, the livelihood of tribals had been negatively affected by COVID-19 pandemic. The predominantly marginalized tribal groups were more at risk. The height of social dispossession and segregation had led to an occurrence of diseases and circumstances like undernourishment, malaria, leprosy, tuberculosis (TB) and additional diseases. Deficiency of healthcare facilities has also limit their competence to accommodate with COVID-19 pandemic. It posed a grave risk to the tribal population. The novel Corona virus COVID-19 adversely impacted people with compromised health situation and low resistance. About 100 million forest dwellers rely on minor forest produces for food, shelter, medicines and income activities. It took place between April and June. (**Ministry of Tribal Affairs: Government of India**) However, since the phase corresponded with the lockdown past years, the study shown how the progress had been disturbing the livelihoods of the tribal communities. It noticed that tribals were also facing problems due to their forest land diversions and limitations imposed on their movement. The problems arose among the tribals which was relating to non-recognition of forest rights and tenurial insecurity. The Table 1.1 shows the comparative analysis of 1961-2011 Census of proportion and distribution of Rural and Urban tribal population in India.

**Table 1.1: Proportion of Scheduled Tribes Population India: 1961-2011**

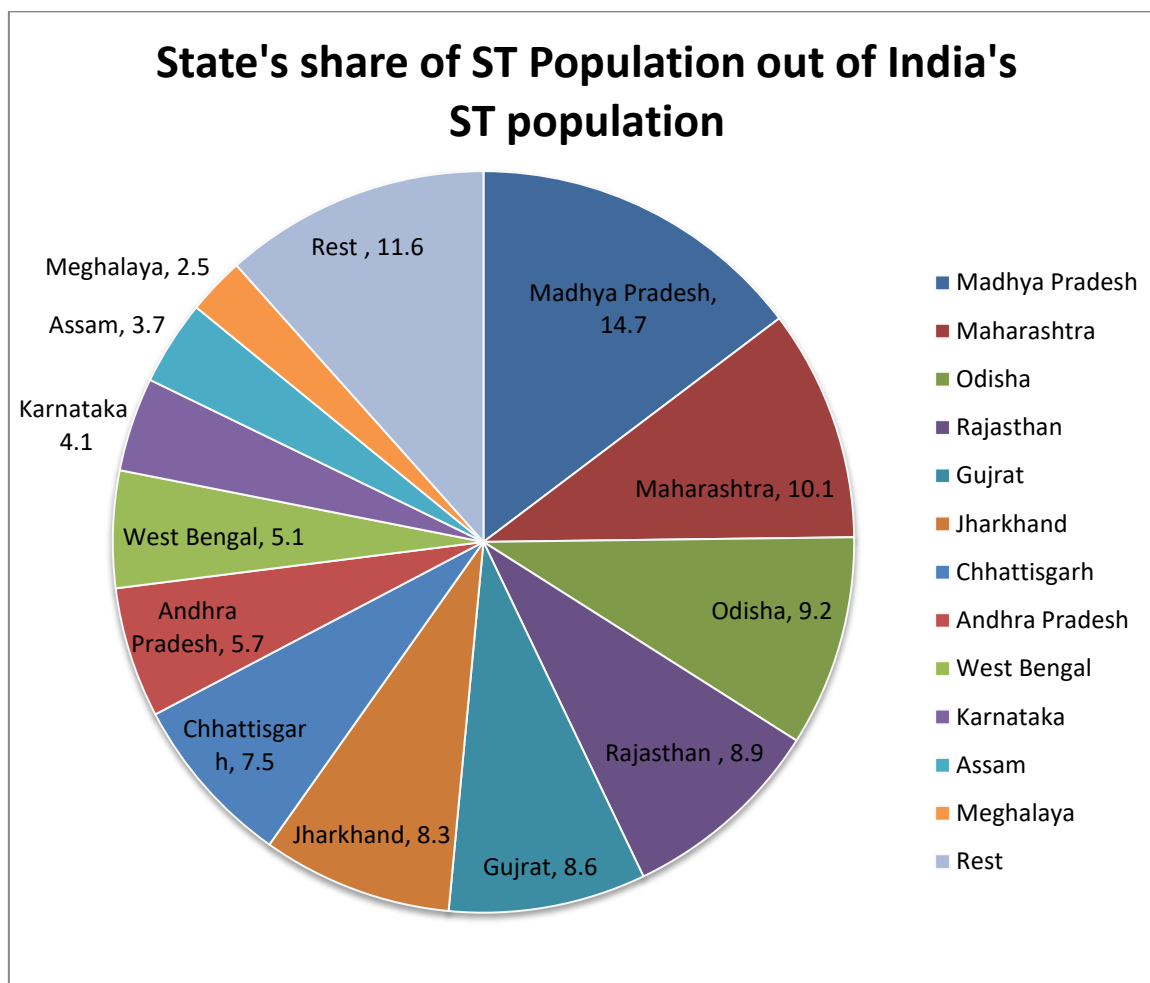
Census Year	Proportion of Scheduled Tribes to Total (in %)		
	Total	Rural	Urban
1961	6.9	8.1	1.0
1971	6.9	8.4	1.2
1981	7.6	9.2	2.0
1991	8.1	10.1	2.3
2001	8.2	10.4	2.4
2011	8.6	11.3	2.8

**Source:** *Census of India 2011: Registrar General & Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs: 03 May 2013*

The Rural local tribes have been opposing diversion of forests as it would adversely affects the cause of damage of their ancestral forests, displacement and failure of livelihoods. It is a concern of anxiety that the union environmental ministry has given clearance of forest diversion proposals at the time of crisis Covid 19.

The flow chart 1.2 shows the state's share of ST population out of India's ST population.

**Flow Chart 1.2**



**Source:** Census of India 2011: Ministry of Home Affairs: 03 May 2013

The pie chart has also showed the complete concentration of Tribal Population in respective states like Madhay Pradesh,(14.7)Maharastra (10.1%),Odisha (9.2),Rajastahan (8.9),Gujarat(8.6),Jharakhand (8.3),Chhatisgarh (7.5), Andhra Pradesh (5.7), West Bengal (5.1),Karnataka(4.1) Assam(3.7),Meghalaya (2.5) and rest is acknowledged as 11.6 respectively,( **Census of India 2011**)

**Case study of Tribals in Odisha: Livelihood Issues**

**Paraja, Kondh, Godba etc tribals and Collection of Mahua Flowers**

The Paraja, the Kondh, the Gadaba, the Mali, the Domb are living in district of Koraput. Tribal Women and children are mostly occupied in gathering of mahua. They pay back their credit money by selling mahua flowers and seeds. Trade in mahua flowers in summers is one

of the chief resources of their livelihood. The novel coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic disease adversely affected their income generation activities. The tribal people were under constant economic pressure to manage their capacities of livelihood. The virus spreaded at the pick time of the production. The pressure of lockdown has hit them in a very ineffective way. The blow of the lockdown came with poor sales of mahua flowers in the proximity of the region. In keeping the current pandemic situations, it became a very tough job for buyers in transporting flowers from one place to another. This became a challenge for every traders in the district of the tribals. Koraput, Kalahandi, Balangir, Kandhamal, Sambalpur, Raygada, Sundargarh, Betanoti are the major grounds of the collection of the mahua flowers for the traders. The buyers were unable to come to the collection centre to buy flowers. Mahua Flower collectors receive always the advance money from traders. At present, it has now become a problem for them. The traders are now getting a part of instructions and the debts are piling up. The tribal market fundamentally runs on mahua flower deal. Flower traders found fault of lack of supplies even when they remunerated flower collectors in advance money.

Due to the pandemic Covid 19, many village leaders blocked the entry points of their villages for flower collector. The trade particularly started during the summer season but on the other hand pandemic corona virus has stopped everything. In every year it adds to their humble income generation. Now these vulnerable tribal groups have been caught on the basis of their rights and economic freedom. Out of the production, most of the tribal families store up a high quality of produce for personal consumption throughout the year. The concerned tribals gathered around 20-25,000 quintals of mahua flowers. They decided to fix Rs 17 per kilogram as the minimum support price for mahua flowers and monitor traders to buy flowers from tribals. **(Senapati:03)** The source of revenue were disrupted and it also affected their livelihood completely. The government decided to fix the price of mahua per kg Rs30/-. But the market demand had been compressed. This had negative impact of Covid-19 in the tribal economy. Since then the current month witnessed the decline of trade from 30 to 40 percent. **(Senapati:7)**

In the states of Orissa, mahua collection was prepared in a sprinkled method. In Orissa on average, each family gathered about five to six quintals of mahua flowers per season. It also provides about 30% of their annual cash revenue. **(NTFP: 5)** The livelihood had been poorly affected by the lockdown and market has been temporarily closed.

### **Gond Tribals and Tendu Leafs**

The tendu leaf is one of the most well-known minor forest produce (MFP) in the state of Odisha.

The Gond Tribals are engaged in procuring kendu leafs for their survival in the district of Kalahandi. They have been adversely affected in term of their daily wage of their income. There are about 300 tribal households in the village of Dharanapur in the district of

Kalahandi.(Sahu:05) The families also depend on the complete procurement of their tendu leafs for their sustenance.

The pandemic novel Corona virus 19 hits an obstruction in getting hold of tendu leaf for production. The government of Odisha decided to give relaxation for collection of minor forest produce in the village. About 10 villages of the district of Kalahandi determined to procure more tendu leaf under the provision of The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. (Sahu: 06) The villagers had been demanding the same for long as the Forest Rights Act allowed the gram sabha to give declaration of transit permits to expand their trade and transportation of tendu leaf. The Pandemic COVID-19 lockdown overlapped with the peak time for gathering and cropping of minor forest produce. It has become very important to start protective actions so as to look after them as well as their livelihood. Each tribal family generated income of Rs 4,000-Rs 9,000 through the collection of tendu leafs.(Sahu: 08) The tendu leaf in every year exported to Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. But this year it has been suffered completely due to lockdown. The estimated annual value of tendu leaf is about Rs.10.4 billion. It is completely on decline this year. (Ministry of Tribal Affairs: Government of India).The business of tendu has been suffered. These tendu leaf grant income to the marginalized tribal people in the concerned region. The major problem which has been addressed during this lockdown is the high rate of GST tax (Goods and Services tax) on the production of tendu. It is about 18% on tendu leaf. It is subject to high burden on their livelihood. (ibid)

The gram sabha procured 0.1 million bundles of tendu leaf worth Rs 1.30 lakh from pluckers. But most of the tribals have not received their deserve payment for a year. (ibid) The decision making body requested the villagers to go for the stopping of procuring the leafs on behalf of gram sabha.

### **Sal of Kondh Tribals**

The tribals of Odisha, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar are engaged in doing Sal business. Kondh tribes is one of them. They belong to the tribe from Odisha's Mayurbhanj district. Sal is extremely vital for their employment.(Pani:10) Since the lockdown came into force, the tribals could not sell what they had already collected and could not obtain anything. They faced many challenges and problems and they are open to massive losses. Now due to novel Corona virus Pandemic 19, more production has been on decline. Even they don't have any alternative for their own sustenance. About 40.6 per cent ST population lived below poverty line in the country as against 20.5 per cent of the non-tribal population in the country as per the data revealed in 2011 census. (Mitra:3) About 56 million of tribals in different mentioned comprehensive states are very much dependent on the production of Sal seeds as their livelihood resource.(ibid) These resources provide ample opportunities for employment of vulnerable tribals. A large number of tribals in the Odisha's Mayurbhanj district who grow Sal seeds production faced uncertainty. Their daily livelihoods have been at the most threat. During the lockdown, many tribals lost employment while

income generation activities completely cut for many others. The tribal people received 20-40 percent of their annual revenue from minor forest products. (**Ministry of Tribal Affairs**) There have been heavy income drop among the tribals in the respective states. At the same time, Amphan, the Cyclone in Odisha, was also collectively responsible and stood the test of the time in their threat of survival. Not single buyers are ready to recommend the acknowledged minimum support price (MSP) to sal seed gatherers.

The Kondh tribals are unable to sell sal seeds in keeping the current novel corona virus in the country. Buyers are unable to come to the sal centre. The Pandemic Covid 19 and Amphan, Cyclone have damaged the economy of the tribals in the concerned districts. It was their significant resource of earning. Basically the sal seeds are sold during the time of May and June. The gathering of sal declined. It has impacted their livelihood considerably. On the other hand, Amphan, the Cyclone, has also damaged crop loss recently.

### **Mask making and Dongria Kondh**

Dongria Kondh belongs to the Odisha's Rayagada district. They have taken a new initiative to start producing hand woven and embroidered cotton masks. The embroidered cotton mask is very much demanding in both national and global markets. But on the other hand the Covid 19 pandemic has started to restrict the sales of the mask. It has been blocked due to heavy restrictions of the tribal people to expand their business. It is a huge loss and big threat for their livelihood. The Dongria Kondh are facing tremendously tough time due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. The increase of Covid 19 is posing a grave danger before them and has made the Dongria Kondh more susceptible in expanding the business. The hand woven embroidered cotton masks are very eye catching for everybody. It has attracted not only in the national level but also across the globe. It is made of red, green, brown and yellow threads which have been well structured to embroider of the traditional designs. At present the Tribal Development Corporation of Odisha Ltd. is closely associated with the Dongria Kondh Development Agency at Chatikona in Rayagada district for 500 handcrafted masks. (**The Hindu: 3**) These traditional designing of masks are to be sold in other Urban centres of the state. In order to expand the business, the Women Self Help Groups (WSHG) has been formed by group of Dongria Kondh Women to manufacture handcrafted masks.

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the demand for production of more masks. But movement of tribals has been restricted and transportation of trading network has been shut down. It has upset the mindset of the tribals those are very engaged in day today work of their livelihood in mask production. The variety of masks may attracted the international and national buyers in the common market. The Dongria Kondh Development Agency has taken steps to involve Women of Khajuri and Hundibali villages to increase the volume of production process in order to compensate their production process. They are making general masks for common use which is structured of hand woven base cloth. (Kapda Ganda). (**The Hindu: 2**) In order to strengthen more of their livelihoods, the Dongria Kondh Development Agency (DKDA) also intervened to include males in the production process.

### **Lanjia Saora tribal and Traditional Paintings and arts**

The tribes Lanjia Saora are living on the hills in the Paralakhemundi and Gunupur areas of Southern Orissa. Tribal arts and crafts have a vast advertise within these tribes (**Ota: SCSTRTI**). They have been closely associated with their traditional paintings and crafts. In keeping livelihood issues, they have been restricted limitation imposed by Covid-19 pandemic lock down. The form of traditional Saora painting which was structured on the mud walls of aboriginal Langia Saora homes. It attracted very much art lovers across the globe. The market demand for Idital and other tribal art and craft has been on decline due to novel corona virus and the complete lockdown of the process. The tourists are unable to visit the place to buy the beautiful products. The selling of the product in the market has been declined. Due to the drop in tour, the economic activity of Lanjia Saora tribals in the production of traditional paintings has been negatively affected. The volume of production of these traditional paintings by these tribes has been affected with low export margins. The complete economic loss of the livelihood of the concerned tribal's has put a downward pressure on the prices of the product. The economic impact of the traditional paintings has been mostly disturbing due to corona virus pandemic. Even they don't have an alternative platform for online sales. It damaged the complete sale of the product in the market. The supply chain have been put under constant worry. The Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation of Odisha Limited (TTCCOL) is a State-run agency, taking charge of the product to send markets for profit. But due to lack of connectivity online selling, the Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation of Odisha Limited is also on decline. This current scenario has adversely impacted their livelihood extensively. (**The Hindu:3**) The travel restrictions were imposed in the last week of March, 2020. Those tribals were being associated with paintings and artistic works have not been feeling comfortable to get raw materials for their manufacturing and activities of production. They always started to visit from one place to another to sell their product in the open market. During this season, tribals organized different exhibitions and fairs to attract the tourists in order to buy the paintings and artistic works. Their livelihood has been completely disrupted in the past 3-4 months due to lockdown measures imposed by the government. Their income was measured a minimum of 1.2 lakh a year. This was a very good sum for their sustenance. A painter of Gond paintings usually collected innovative works of tribal art from villages and sell them in the market with high profit. Their monthly income also targeted 40,000 respectively. It had a good market demand. It is said that about 60 tribal youths developed skilled programs in Saora and Gond paintings. The result was to come across livelihoods effectively. It also attracted many other communities. Bamboo Crafts by Lodhas, Jewellery by the Bathudi and Bhumija, the looms of Kulis in Western Odisha (SCSTRTI) are very much prominent. Most of the tribal painters are struggling hard to start hand crafting face masks but it is not adequate to provide dependable livelihood. The Minor forest produce (MFP) collection time starts every year from April to June. It offers economic boost and support to tribals. Almost 60% of annual collection takes place during this time. It coincides accurately with the process

of lockdown. It had a far-reaching and long term blow on their source of revenue and sustenance. (ibid)

### **Bonda Tribals and Weekly Haat**

The Bonda tribes are living in Malkangiri district, Odisha. They have been divided into 13 particularly vulnerable tribal Groups. They have been recognized as a first wave of migration to India from Africa about 60,000 years ago. The tribes have their partial connection with the collection of minor forest produce and for sale at the weekly haat. This type of activities generates cash income for their survival. The women from the Bonda group sell their harvests in the local haats. The buyers occasionally visit their villages to procure harvested minor forest produce. Siyali seeds, siyali bark used to make rope, siyali leaf, hill brooms, sindhikoli, chotodimbri etc are the major products for their livelihood. Few of the products are perishable. The unparalleled condition of Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the income generation of 12,000 Bondas right to livelihood. As per 2011 Census, Bondas live in 32 villages which is 130 square km in Khaiput block in Odisha. (Census 2011). The Bonda Women prepares traditional liquor from millets, rice and jackfruit. It was sold at their local haats. This production generates flow of cash in every year. Minor Forest Product and production of liquor are major sources of income for the specified tribes. This production has been adversely affected due to the extended lock down in the current month of July, 2020. This is the negative impact of lockdown on their subsistence. The lockdown has affected the livelihood of the bonda community. The Bonda Women completely narrated their grief story in front of the researcher in saying that they don't have money with them and haats are closed down. It is a very tough job for them to sell their products in the local market. The local weekly market is the only alternative for their flow of capital. Most of the tribals have been living in the village Bondaghati for generations. They harvested mushrooms, hill brooms, medicinal herbs from the forest which has been completely stopped. Whatever they earned after selling the product, the earned money entitled them to buy salt, vegetables, livestock, oil, cereals etc. for their sustenance. The weekly market (local haat) is subject to their village economy. (Mridha:2) It is very important to provide an adequate space for the Upper Bonda and lower class Bonda people to share their ideas, news and information as well. (ibid) Several community based organizations at the time of lockdown started sensitization campaign at the local weekly market to guarantee broader outreach of essential information on Covid-19 for the Bonda communities. It is found that the upper Bonda are comparatively more in danger due to their isolated locality. There is lack of healthcare facilities to provide health services to them during pandemic.

The community based organisations had come ahead to deal with the problems of safety during the pandemic. The organizations also focused on their food and nutritional insecurity among the bonda people. (Pattanayak :6) The Public Health Research Society (PHRS) has also carried out constructive sensitization programmes to give educational awareness of the Bondas in suggesting measures to be worked out during the pandemic. It is not only civil society organizations but also the state administration should collectively focus on nutritional

food supplies to accommodate Bonda households under public distribution centre at the time of lock down.(Mohanty &Choubey:1)

### **Findings:**

During the lockdown period, the State government on behalf of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs took steps to initiate pro-active measures for the common welfare of the tribals. There was urgent need is to set up COVID -19 Response Cell in the tribal region. The group of designated nodal officers monitored state governments to tackle the crisis. The State government involved the civil society organizations to address issues and problems of tribal people for their economic betterment. The Union Environment Ministry amended the advisory on protected areas to ensure the livelihoods activities of communities. The Central government gave attention to reduce GST rates to zero on available forest products in keeping the novel coronavirus Pandemic-19. Due to lack of health facilities, Covid-19 impacts augmented threat of illness to the tribal and forest communities living in deficiency. In this context, the Central government and local administration took adequate protective measures for their health and source of revenue. The Van Dhan Vikas Yojana (VDVY) and Minimum Support Price of the Centre has been properly implemented to address the basic problems of tribals. The massive compensatory afforestation support have been constituted under Forest Rights Act to administer community forest management for income activities and wage employment for tribals and forest dwellers to deal with economic challenges.

### **Summing up:**

The need of the hour is to provide relief and rehabilitation actions for the affected tribals. It will overcome the failure continued and reconstruct their lives. Preventive actions like continuing social distancing and hand washing maintained as when COVID-19 went on. Practical dealings by the state with humanitarian standpoint were called for. The Ministry of Tribal affairs took various constructive programmes for rapid implementation as part of the process to protect tribal persons from pandemic Covid-19. The Ministry tried to restore progress in the rural economy after the Covid-19 pandemic and also focused on movement restrictions. The Union Minister of Tribal affairs requested the 15 states Chief Ministers to start sensitization programme of state nodal agencies to go for undertaking procurement of Minor Forest Produce at Minimum Support Price (MSP). The States were covered under this programme like Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Manipur, Nagaland and Assam respectively.

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### Key Words

- MFP : Minor Forest Produce
- MSP: Minimum Support Price
- WSHG: Women Self Help Groups
- DKDA: Dongria Kondh Development Agency
- TTCCOL: Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation of Odisha Limited
- PHRS: Public Health Research Society
- VDVY: Van Dhan Vikas Yojana