



FOREST PRODUCTS & TRIBAL LIFE IN CHHATTISGARH (AN ANALYSIS)

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ABSTRACT

With its physical feature & complex nature of flora & fauna, India presents a great array of diverse natural resources through its boundaries. The foot heels of mountains; peninsular physiographic & existing micro life in various natural products makes India a peculiarly rich country. It has been geographically divided in many ways and the state of Chhattisgarh is a part of its geographical division.

KEYWORDS: *physical feature , various natural products , geographically divided .*

INTRODUCTION:

Chhattisgarh state Situated in the heart land of Indian subcontinent that is central India the state of Chhattisgarh represents itself with unique richness of natural resources. Along with these components the life of the people of living in Chhattisgarh state depends more or less on natural activities & natural products. The reason of Chhattisgarh is generally known as a '**Bowl of Rice**', is indicates by the flourishing condition of paddy cultivation. Chhattisgarh is not only limited to the paddy cultivation but it is also rich in other agricultural products, minerals, mineral sources and industries & trade & commerce as well. Apart from this the state is also enriched with its local indigenous inhabitants & their specific cultures, which is commonly known is tribal culture.

Chhattisgarh Government has declared the state as "**Herbal state**" with an objective to conserve plant Resource in natural form. Therefore it is obviously depicted that state of Chhattisgarh is highly endowed with the forests wild life & natural recourses. With respect to forests products, the state of Chhattisgarh regularly produces Timber and fuel wood. Babul & bamboo are the other major forest products. Bamboo is important an industrial raw material for paper and pulp. Timber was use for railway sleeper and for collieries in the British time period. Several minor forest products as Tendu leaves, Sal seed, Harra, Gum, Mahua seed, Tamarind, Chironjee , Indian Aroow Root(Tikhur), Baichandi, Honey, wax, Indian Gooseberry (Anwla), Dhawdalac, kosa, Mahul leaves, Baibirang, are also in plenty.

The several other minor forest products in Chhattisgarh are like flowers, fruits and leaves, medical plants, fibre, grasses, and fodder also. These forest produce are used by rural communities as medicine, food supplements and moreover, the rural communities earn substantial income especially during non-agriculture season through the collection and sale of these produce. In this manner there are about ten thousands units based on forest products.



It is common conception that forest & tribe are complimentary to each other. Tribal and forest have become the two inseparable words. Vanbasi, Vanjati, girijan etc. are the synonyms for the tribes. Existence of tribal divorced from forest cannot possibly be conceived.

It is a fact that 93.8 per cent of the total tribal population of India lives in and around the forests. "Forefather of these tribals settled themselves within the forest and had been surviving on forests and other available natural resources in the forest. As a result, their economic, social, and cultural practices closely revolve round the forest life-cycle and they become the foster children of the forest."¹

There has been a close relation between the tribals and forest. It is a matter of fact for the state of Chhattisgarh that the districts which are rich in forests cover are also dealing in the tribal demography. That is why it is also a perception of governance that on the one hand the tribal communities are to be associated with the forests and on the other hand the several benefits of forests products are to be made available to them. It is a well known fact that since the dawn of civilisation the tribal economy & livelihood was mainly based upon the forest products. In the use of forests products and the field of forestry, most of the tribal people involved are labourers. Natural equation & social forestry generally gives the first right of its usage to the tribals. That is why in the era of forest management the rights of tribals over forest produce were commonly accepted. They can either use the forest products personally or they can make commercial use of it. According to a report of the Government of India 1990, the tribals living in the forest reason are having first right to use the forest & forest products, but in practice due to colonial domination, increasing population & changing interests of government from the British period to the present age the forests rights of the tribals living in the forest went curtailed. For this purpose different policies, laws, rules & regulations were made & implemented as well.

The wasted interest of government & changing scenario with the time led to the physical, economic & social exploitation of the indigenous inhabitants who were mainly tribals. The history of the exploitation of tribals under the forestry & forest produce is having its root from centuries. The tribals living in remote areas of the state of Chhattisgarh were initially enjoying the natural products naturally, but they were exploited by the Britishers first, followed by the traders & the intermediaries. There was a ray of hope to get rid of such exploitation after independence. It was assumed & supposed that their forest & natural rights will be resumed & they will be benefited at the large scale. The attainment of independence and nationalisation of forest products gave a little blow to the process of emancipation, but in long term these all measures were nullified & proved failed, while their exploitation continued even today. The nationalisation of forest products was done with the motive to bring out some positive changes in the life of tribals. It was dominated by having & the utility of nationalisation first to be proved, but the surplus value of small forest products once again accumulated in the hands of intermediaries, while the tribals were least benefited.

In this manner the government failed to transport the benefits the surplus value of forest products to its original inhabitants and hence their exploitation continued. The social demography of tribal community depicts quite a different scenario.

Different tribal societies & communities have not been living in different stages of human development. It is quite a surprising fact that even today some of the tribal societies are in a phase of hunters & gatherers. The measures of development have not been known to them. They are totally dependent upon the forest and forest products for their livelihood. Their settlement, profession, livelihood, entertainment & day to day life are encircled with forest & forest products. Therefore, it is demanded that with the increasing utility on forest products & increasing trade on the small forest products benefits should accrue primarily to its original inhabitants.

MINOR FOREST PRODUCTS OF CHHATTISGARH:-

Minor Forest Products (MFP) means the products from various forest species in the form of fruits, seeds, leaves, barks, roots, flowers and grasses etc., including entire plants of medicinal herbs/shrubs. The forests of Chhattisgarh are very rich in these MFP. There are many MFP species of commercial importance in the state.

Tendu leaves, Sal seed, Mahua, Gum, Harra, Bahera, khair, Dhawda, lac, Tamarind, Chironjee etc are the minor forest products in the state of Chhattisgarh. The tendu leaf which is used for wrapping tobacco for manufacture of Bidi (a cheap smoking product) after processing, these are the primary sources of

income of the tribal's living in the Chhattisgarh state. Apart from this the collection of Lac, from deep forest is one of the major commercial activities in the Chhattisgarh. Many of the tribal societies are the manufactures of different products made from bamboos.

The economic conditions of the tribal living in the forest region as well as other tribal inhabitants living in the outskirts of these forests is directly associated with the forests & forest produce. On an average one third income, of such communities is collected & accumulated through these forests which depends upon the small forests produce. For example a date represents that about 13 lakh people are employed and directly benefited by the profession of tendu leaves. Tendu leaves industry not only benefits these people but also some other industries like tobacco, railways, are directly benefitted by this.

Chhattisgarh is a pioneer State of India, producing the best quality Tendu (*Diosporas melonoxylon*) leaves. The Tendu leaves are used as Beedi (cheap cigarette) wrappers. The production of Tendu leaves in Chhattisgarh is approximately 16.44 lacs standard bags annually, which is nearly 20% of the total Tendu leaves production of the country. One standard bag of Tendu leaves in Chhattisgarh comprises of 1000 bundles of 50 leaves each. Bidi rolling is the primary job in the state. It is a source of subsidiary occupation and supplementary income to lakhs of poor rural folk Bidi industry provides employment to the rural population during off season for collection of bidi (Tendu) leaves. Obviously, bidi industry has a vital role in rural welfare and in promoting rural economy in the state.

Central & state government receives handsome amount in crores in the form of royalty from tendu leaves industry. Thus several data represent that at an average tendu leave trade covers about Rs. 1000 crores rupees per annum. The tendu leaves popularly termed is the 'green gold of forest', which provides seasonal employment to about 13 lakh families in Chhattisgarh. About 550 billion pieces of bidi (rolled by 10 million people) are sold every year in India, in the tendu leaves industry. Therefore it is quite obvious that the income & employability of tribal community is totally depends upon forests & forest produce. On the one hand, sources of income increase the government revenue & on the other these are sources of livelihood for the tribal's.

"Apart from their revenue potential the minor forest products, are a source of raw material for a large number of industries and are directly utilised by man and animals alike. Eg edible fruits, roots and flowers, medical plants, fibre and floos, leaves and roots, gums and resins. The adiwasi people depend on these products for their living. Unfortunately, this resource has not been developed in our country in a systematic way. Management of these forest products is one of the important problems of today"²

POLICIES ABOUT FOREST & FOREST PRODUCTS:-

Tribal's & forests are definitely made for each other. Tribals were attached with the forests & their products, so it is obvious that any policy which covers forest almost affects tribal's community. "In the year 1864, the inspector general of forests was appointed in India and under his control organised forests department began to function. In 1865, the first Indian Forest Act was passed and on that basis officers were empowered to issue local rules for conserving Indian forests. Later on more acts were passed by British parliament to make forest department of India effective in conserving Indian forests."³

The forest policy in the country starts by the British government. The first forest policy implemented in the British period on 19 oct. 1894, was based on Dr. Voelcker report, with this policy, British government regulated few restrictions in forest products. "In the year 1894, the government of India issued a circular, which formed the basis of future forest policy of British India. The circular has been termed as old Forest policy which consisted of the following main elements.

The forests of India were the property of the state and they were to be administered to fulfil the objectives of providing benefits to the tax payers of India as a whole and regulated benefits to the people living within and in the vicinity of forests."⁴

During the British rule the tribals were marginalised. "During the British administration, wilful participation of tribals and other sections of society could not be availed for the protection of forests and afforestation for motivation were rarely used by the administration to obtain voluntary participation.

Moreover, poverty eradication programmes for tribals and other weaker sections were not executed during British rule and poor people, to meet their both ends continued to cut and sell young shoots and branches of trees.”⁵

After the independence the government of India initiated several Forest policies, as First forest policy initiated on 12 may 1952. Post independence, government has focussed on tribal development but there is apparently no positive result in the life tribal people. Government also restricted the forest rights of tribal's as in 1954 government of Madhya Pradesh ended the 'Haqdari Systems' which implied that the government cut down the forests rights to use the forest for their livelihood. In 1959 government restricted to use the forests for their cattle's in the scheduled tribes area. In 1988 the national forest policy first time government gives special attention to the tribals. "Special rights and concessions of tribals and other weaker sections were analysed in the paragraph 4.3.4 of the forest policy. In the paragraph 4.6, the relation of tribals with the conservation of forests was analysed. Intense relationship of tribals with forests was accepted in the policy. It was stated in the policy that, all agencies discharging the responsibility of forest management, including forest Development Corporation of must try their utmost to obtain maximum participation of tribals in the conservation of forests. The Tribals living within forests or in the vicinity of forests were to be provided jobs on priority basis in the execution of programmes of afforestation, maintenance and preservation. Customary rights and concessions of tribals were to be properly safeguarded. The Attention were to be paid for the tribals in the policy first time in the country. According to the Forest Policy 1988 the proper attention had not been paid for protection, regeneration and maximum collection of forest produces in our country. Hence it was recommended that to pay special attention for regeneration, protection and optimum collection of forest produces. Hence it was considered essential to setup institutional arrangements for the marketing of minor forest produces.”⁶

EXPLOITATION OF TRIBAL'S AND CHANGING TRENDS IN THE POLICIES:-

History of the exploitation of tribal's is long standing and deep rooted. The tribals who living in the interior parts of the state Chhattisgarh exploited by traders, contractor, intermediators, phad muni (collection centre clerk) and several other. Their no set wages of tribal's in the forest product industry.

“Historically, the tribals were collecting the MFP for their own consumption and use. A change in this system took place after the in-flux of non-tribal traders into the tribal areas. The non-tribal introduced barter system in the tribal areas. These traders initially supplied essential commodities like salt, tobacco, kerosene oil, spices etc. to the tribals in exchange for the forest produce and agricultural produce. This system introduced a spirit of competitions among tribals to collect more and more forest produce and get more and more essential commodities in exchange. Realising the commercial value of the various MFP, the traders introduced cash in their transaction with the tribal people. The introduction of cash brought more competition among the tribals for collection of MFP. The private traders used to pay very low price for the produce. Sometimes traders used to pay loan in cash against the MFP. If it is not possible to repay all loan from the sale of MFP, the traders kept the land of the tribals bounded labourers to the fields of the traders or mahajans. These mahajans had full control over the Haats of tribals. These mahajans were very clever. They used to exploit the sentiments of the tribals by distribution Biri, Cigarette, Tobacco, etc. So that they were able to buy the MFP at the reduced rates.”⁷

In tendu leaves industry, the exploitation of the tendu leaves collectors tribal's in the three stages. In first stage the contractor cheats the tendu leaves collectors. He cheats in counting of tendu leaves; he doesn't give the wages to tendu leave collectors.

There is a system called PACHOR SYSYEM, which was running in the tribal areas in Chhattisgarh. In this system the tendu leaves collector have to give four to five bundles of the leaves free to the tendu leaves contractor. This system was a very natural in the tribal areas. The tendu leave contractor also cheat the labourers in the payment. The illiterate tribal labours were cheated at every stage in tendu leave industry. The contractor took the maximum profit of the tendu leaves and the tribal people got the very small part of

that. The impact of the exploitation is that the labourer of tendu leave takes loan from the contractors and that's why exploitation has continued to worsen in this industry.

During the pre-independence period and up to the mid-1960s, the Forest Department would auction tendu leaf collection rights at a division level and the contractors would then arrange for collecting the tendu leaf using local villagers as wage labourers. A significant amount of tendu leaf also grew on private lands and was disposed of as the landowner pleased. Prior to 1964, the control of the forest department and the government in the trade of tendu leave was absent. The contract systems were prevalent in the tendu leave industry and they paid a meagre wages to the tendu leave labourers.

NATIONALISATION OF MINOR FOREST PRODUCE:-

"Nationalisation is the process to handover the market rights by the government. Nationalized Minor Forest Produce are the one for which the trade monopoly lies with the state government or its authorized agent CG MFP Federation. The collection and sale of nationalized forest produce is done by CG MFP Federation only. The Federation sells the collected produce through tenders and auctions on behalf of the state govt. The state monopoly has been created to ensure payment of appropriate price to the rural collectors of forest produce. Tendu leaves, Sal seed, Hsarra and Gum are the nationalised minor forest product in the Chhattisgarh state."⁸

In 1964, citing 'pilferage from government lands adjoining private lands', and 'exploitation of tendu leave collectors by private tendu leaf producers', the state government passed the Madhya Pradesh Tendu Patta (Vyapar Viniyaman) Adhiniyam, 1964, which brought the sale and transport of all tendu leaf, including that grown on private lands, under the control of the government. Due to exploitation of tendu leave industry, government took the rights of tendu leaves trade and the nationalisation act passed on "28 November 1964 by Chhattisgarh Tendu Leaves (Vyapar Viniyaman) Adhiniyam. After that the rules made there under regulate the trade of tendu leaves and Chhattisgarh Vanopaj (Vyapar Viniyaman)."⁹ With this act government fixed the tendu leave collection wages, however the tendu leaves collection still continues by the contractor and consequently exploitation too continues in this system.

"On 21 June 1969, government nationalised the Gum & harra, by Chhattisgarh Vyapar Viniyaman Adhiniyam 1969 and the rules made there under regulate trade of Sal seed, Harra & Gums."¹⁰ Further, on 01 September 1970, government also nationalised the Sal seed.

During 1969-1979 the contractor systems continues in the forest products in the state, especially in the tendu leaves trade and the exploitation continues in the systems. In the period, 1979-1988 government initiated several policies to control the traders and the exploitation on tribals. "As the Madhya Pradesh State Minor Forest Produce (Trading & Development) Co-operative Federation Limited was formed in 1984 to control the contractor in the industry.

On 20 June 1988, the government of Madhya Pradesh finally ended the contractor systems in the tendu leaves industry. Subsequently, the wages of tendu leave labourers were given by the government co-operative societies. The three tier Co-operative structure were designed in this systems. M.P. State Minor Forest Produce Federation was placed at the apex level of this structure. At the primary level, Primary Forest Produce Co-operative Societies were constituted. At the secondary level, District Forest Produce Co-operative Unions were formed."¹¹ After this the wages of tendu leave labours given by the government co-operative societies. In the contract system for tendu leaves, the wages of the tendu leave collector labourer was 1.5 rupees which increased up to 15 rupees per day after the end of contract system in the industry.

The Tendu leave industry is the largest industry in the Chhattisgarh state. Former to nationalisation, only the contractor were enjoying the benefits of profit but now the bonus system in the tendu leaves industry largely helps the tendu leave labourers. In 2004 the Chhattisgarh government started a new policy with respect to the tendu leave labourers and now they sell their products in advance and the product was insured. The payments of tendu leave labourers were now managed by the Primary forest produce co-operative society in Chhattisgarh state.

There are a large population of Tribal's and rural areas in the country, so government formed several committees to improve the conditions of the Tribal's. The Dhebar commission In 1961, Hari Singh committee 1965, the national agriculture commission 1976, and several others. "The Dhebar Commission recommended that subject to safeguards, tribals, should be allowed forest lands for cultivation, their needs should be met from outlying in the reserve forests and their requirements for grazing and shifting cultivation should be conceded. The Commission wanted the forest department to participate in the betterment of the tribals side by side with the development and conservation of the forest. Their intention was to provide tribals with work all the year around by the Forest Department in consultation with Agriculture, Industries and the Development Department in each region."¹²

"The National Commission on Agriculture established in 1976 accepted the inter-relationship of forest economy with rural and tribal economy, but it also accepted that Forestry needed strengthening by rationally in operations, larger investment and use of newer techniques, so that forest can yield a higher surplus to be shared locally, regionally and nationally as against rapid disappearance of trees and vegetation."¹³

The impact of nationalisation & current scenario:-

The Chhattisgarh state is extremely rich in his natural recourses and mineral resource. But the situation of exploitation of tribals and the labourers initiated in the state has yet not changed even after the nationalisation of forest products. There is no positive change in the living standard of the tribals in the state.

The nationalisation accord in the forest products because of demands and profits come in the forest products industry. Prior to nationalisation, the profit of the industry went to the contractors, but even post the nationalisation the situation doesn't change and now the profit accrues to government and the government has failed to give substantial part of the profits to the tribals, as the tendu leave tribals are currently still in the bottom status of the society. The requirement is to read the system of the exploitation and try practically to ends the exploitation and to give maximum profit to the labours to the tendu leaves collector labourers to uplift their status in the society.

"With a view to end exploitation of the tribals in the context of marketing of forest produce several steps have been taken by the Forest Department. Some of the salient features are The abolition of contract system in forestry operations and Collection and marketing of Minor Forest Produce. Rights of tribes were inquired into and recorded. Over and above, tribals were permitted free grazing, collection of flowers, fruits, roots and tubers and removal of firewood for their domestic consumption before the introduction of amendment regarding Non-Forest Life in Forest Conservation (Amendment) Act 1990. This is in short the official version of tribal and forest situation; but the reality is somewhere else. Therefore a resume of forest management since British days will not be out of place here to appreciate environment-forest-tribal nexus."¹⁴

The tribals are attached with the forests not only physically but sentimentally also. Before commercialisation, they thought that they were the owner of the forests & the forest products, but after the commercialisation they are dependent upon the contractors and the forest department. The commercialisation of forest cut down the rights of the tribals on forests.

There is no long term policy initiated by the government for the tendu leaves collector labours, their collection, wages, and the profits. So government should bring a long term policy for the forest products. The policy should come in the several stages as forest development, forest economy, and tribal economy also.

The policies about tribals are most of the affected by the politics. The government policy doesn't help the tribals. The demands are to bring the government policies in the motive of tribal development. In the current scenario, the tribal labours took loans from several contractors, rural banks, and several nationalised banks also, hence the exploitation continues of the tribals in the state. It is suggested that

government should plan to give loan to the labours. The tribal labourer takes loans from the merchants in the village and he is exploited several time.

The need of the hour is to bring the tribal development programme in a large scale which covers the most of the areas. We need to ensure the highest amount of profit is rightly distributed the tribals. It is necessity that the government should give full rights of small forest products to the tribals, in the current era the tribal labourers is a collector of forest products, it is essential to develop him as the owner of the forest products. It is also must to implement scientific system in the collection of the small forest products. The pre-requisite is to bring advantages of the several government policies to the tribals. It is also vital to nationalise the other forest products.

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