# The Significance of Minor Forest Produce in the Indian Tribal Economy

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By

Kalsani Mohan Reddy

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This Book is Dedicated to My Beloved Teacher
Prof. C. Siva Rama Krishna Rao

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**K. Mohan Reddy**

# FOREWORD

Some of the most marginalised communities across the world are variously described as indigenous people, aboriginals and tribal people. In India, the Constitution refers to them as "Scheduled Tribes". Of the total global population of these marginalised people, India is home to the largest proportion. The "Scheduled Tribes" (STs) of India, with a population of 104.5 million (2011), account for 8.6 per cent of the total population of the country. Owing to their ancient roots in territories across the country, these people have come to be referred to as "Adivasis". There are about 705 tribes living mostly in Northeast, West, Central and East India, and of them, 75 tribes are identified as the most primitive tribal groups and are referred to as *particularly vulnerable tribal groups* (PVTGs). Though 80 per cent of them live in western, central and eastern states, they constitute a minority as regards the population of the respective states, with shares ranging from 5 to 30 per cent.

From time immemorial, through external invasions and occupations, they have lived as self-governed and self-sufficient societies. However, all that changed, and they lost control over and access to their customary land, forest and other resources, especially during the time that the British colonised the country. The British land policy took away their land rights and the British forest policy enforced a state monopoly of forest resources and restricted opportunities for the Adivasi livelihood. The marginalisation process of these Adivasi communities, instead of ending with the colonial rule, intensified in the post-independence period because of the development model followed by the country.

The habitations in most of the country may often be remote from the urban centres but it is here where there are the best examples of biodiversity and timber rich forests. The banks of some of the major rivers possess some of the richest sources of minerals in the country. The abundance of rich resources in the Adivasi areas has become their curse. *As the pace of economic and industrial development picked up after independence, the Adivasis have increasingly had to make way for commercial forestry, dams and mines. Often, the Adivasis are displaced because of the pressures and imperatives of what passes as* ***development****; sometimes, they are displaced because of the pressures and imperatives of another*

*equally modern aspect of development, namely,* ***conservation****. Thus, apart from large dams and industrial townships, tribals have also been rendered homeless by national parks and* ***sanctuaries****.* The devastating uprooting, dispossession and displacement are often not properly recorded and all that is available are estimates carried out by different concerned scholars. Due to the post-independence conscious development policy, an estimated 20 to 40 million Adivasis have lost their homes and lands. Adivasis are estimated to account for 40 per cent of the total displaced people in the country while they account for about only 8 per cent of the population, i.e., *the Adivasis have gained least and lost most from 60 years of political independence.*

What remains of the tribal economy in India is still predominantly rural in nature, with 90 per cent of tribals living in mostly remote countryside and dependent on agriculture and allied activities, mainly the collection of "non-timber forest produce" (NTFP) referred to as "minor forest produce" (MFP). The Adivasi agriculture is in a precarious state. Most of them still do not have clear land rights and their lands are often encroached on by non-tribals either through force or by mortgage largely because of their exposure to moneylenders and mortgages. As a result of the remoteness and also because of their invisibility in the power structure, Adivasi regions attract the least public investment in irrigation or other infrastructure and extension facilities. As a result, tribal areas suffer from very low productivity in agriculture. It is in this context that the collection and selling of MFP as a source of supplementary income assumes a significance in the livelihood activities of the Adivasis.

The present book, based on the work of a project by the author, focuses on the role of MFP as the source of livelihood of the Adivasis. It is based on a sample household survey of three major tribal communities – the Koyas in the Warangal district, the Gonds in Adilabad and the Hill Reddies in the Khammam district; all these three districts are in Telangana State. The MFP from this region includes gum, mohwa flower, mohwa seed, honey, cleaning nuts, tendu (beedi) leaf, amla, nuxvomica etc. The availability of these products varies from district to district. For instance, in Khammam, only three products viz. mohwa flower, mohwa seed and tendu leaf are available, while in Adilabad, honey, cleaning nuts and nuxvomica are not available.

The study shows that over the years, the share of MFP in the earnings of the tribals has been declining from an estimated range of 10 to 55 per cent

of the household income to about 7 to 14 per cent during the study period of 2010-11. The decline, notwithstanding the importance of MFP to tribal households, lies in the fact that it is a critical source of livelihood in the lean summer months, without which the tribal households face the threat of hunger. The main reasons for the decline in the share of MFP are linked to the destruction of their sources, viz. the dense and diverse forest. There has been a massive and large-scale deforestation in the study area. The decline of forest cover has also triggered the decline of the natural habitat of the wildlife resulting in a greater exposure of the MFP collectors to the threat from wild animals. The other reason is that unscientific methods of competitive collection have resulted in over exploitation and destruction of the plants and trees which are the sources of MFP.

Though there are a number of institutional interventions through the Girijan Cooperative Corporation and the Integrated Tribal Development Agency, there are still a number of problems faced by the Adivasis in securing better returns for their produce. The suggestions made by the households are indicative of the need for further institutional support. Their suggestions include ensuring better prices, providing training in better methods of collection, creating new market centres and better storage facilities, setting up collection centres in each village, improving the reach of existing institutional loan facilities, providing insurance and finally, ensuring better transport facilities. The author, in wishing to add rigour to his analysis, has used several statistical methods of analysis and in order to show that he is familiar with the rise and limitations of these techniques, he has earnestly devoted several pages to the description of these methods of analysis. This represents an important contribution to helping other scholars in planning their research work on the highly marginalised communities such as the Adivasis.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AP | Andhra Pradesh |
| APFD | Andhra Pradesh Forest Department |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organisation |
| FCA | Forest Conservation Act |
| FDC | Forest Development Corporation |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| FSC | Forest Stewardship Council |
| GCC | Girijan Co-operative Corporation Ltd. |
| GOB | Government of Bangladesh |
| GOI | Government of India |
| GPCMS | Girijan Primary Co-operative Marketing Society |
| ICFRE | Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education |
| IFA | Indian Forest Act |
| IFOAM | International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements |
| IPR | Intellectual Property Rights |
| ITDA | Integrated Tribal Development Agency |
| ITDPs | Integrated Tribal Development Projects |
| JFM | Joint Forest Management |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| MFP | Minor Forest Produce |
| MPP | Minimum Procurement Price |
| MSP | Minimum Support Price |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NTFP | Non-Timber Forest Product |
| NWFP | Non-Wood Forest Product |
| PESA | Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act |
| PRA | Participatory Rural Appraisal |
| SFRI | State Forest Research Institute |
| SHG | Self-Help Group |
| TDCC | Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation |
| TERI | The Energy and Resources Institute |
| TRIFED | Tribal Co-operative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited |

| | |
|---|---|
| TRTI | Tribals Research and Training Institute |
| TRIPS | Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights |
| VSS | Vana Samrakshana Samiti |
| WB | World Bank |
| WRI | World Resources Institute |
| WLPA | Wildlife Protection Act |

# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

Among several unresolved questions in India is the problem of how to frame an appropriate policy as regards the tribal people who constitute a sizeable section of the country. As a matter of fact, the word "**tribe"** is not defined in our constitution and indeed there is no satisfactory definition[1]. The term **tribe** commonly signifies a group of people speaking a common language, observing uniform rules of social organisation, and working together for common purposes (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1783, p.115). The other typical characteristics of a tribe include a common name, a contiguous territory, a relatively uniform culture or way of life and a tradition of common descent (Ibid). Another contentious meaning of tribe is generally used to denote a group of primitive or barbarous people under recognised chiefs (Everyman's Encyclopedia, 1913, p.44). Obviously, the adjectives signify the predominant traits of a social group called **"tribe".** The word **"tribe",** as generally understood in the literature on anthropology, **is a social group speaking a distinctive language and possessing a distinctive culture that makes it different to other tribes.** In common parlance, it suggests that they live in the heart of nature, in wild thickets and hills, and it can signify colourful folk famous for dance and song; to an administrator, it means a group of citizens who are the special responsibility of the President of India (Debher, 1960-61, p.1). So, a bewildering variety of definitions and understanding of the simple term itself represents a miniature tribal world of food gathers, pastorals and agriculturalists.

The history of the tribal groups of Andhra Pradesh dates back to the great epic Mahabharata. Besides, earlier references to them can be found in various religious texts and puranas. So, there have been many variations (Ramaiah, 1988, p.1). In addition to the greatest epics, archaeological evidence also shows the ancestry of the tribes. Through the ages, Andhra Pradesh has been highly associated with varied and different cultures, and religious and ethnic groups. Andhra Pradesh has the largest tribal concentration pockets among the Southern States of India. The sprawling

scheduled areas, covering 11,595 sq. miles and their nearby areas running through the districts of Srikakulam, Visakhapatnam, East and West Godavari, Khammam, Warangal, Adilabad and Mahabubnagar, are embedded with the main habitat of the scheduled tribes. These are inhabited by 30 scheduled tribes and among them are Bagata, Chenchu, Gadabas, Gond, Jatapus, Konda Doras, Koyas, Pradhans, Savaras, Lambadas, Valmikis, Yenadies and Yerukalas (Singh, 1977, p.37).

## Economic Life

The tribal groups of Andhra Pradesh can be broadly categorised into three types in accordance with their level of development, i.e., agriculturists, pastorals and food gatherers. Settled as well as shifting agriculture is the mainstay for most of the tribal groups. Gonds, Kolams, Naikpods, Bagatas, Savaras, Valmikis, Kotias, Gadabas, Samanthas, Hill Reddies and Koya are tillers of the soil of one type or another. Gonds of the scheduled area and Sugalis of the plains are pastorals as well as being settled cultivators. The Chenchus are mostly forest workers and they get money through selling murals. Hunting and the collection of honey, fruits, nuts, roots and tubers are their main economic activities. The subsidiary occupation of the Nooka Doras and the Kondadoras is basket selling, as well as cattle grazing and the collection of minor forest produce. The Koyas also collect minor forest produce including beedi leaves and even work in the iron ore mines.

The food habits of the Koyas are simple and they depend heavily on forest produce. They feed on gruel prepared out of tamarind seed powder and the roots and barks of some trees. They consume rice, but occasionally jowar and broken rice; they make flour out of **jowar** and prepare **ganji** out of rice. They gather edible roots and tubers from the forest, particularly chenna gaddalu, govindagadda, allagadda, yellaru gadda, etc. They eat wild lizards, the flesh of rabbits, deer, wild bear and buffalo meat. Toddy is consumed widely and honeycomb is used as a side dish along with drinks.

The staple food of the Bagathas, Valmikes and Gadabas constitutes rice chodi which is also the staple food of the Nooka Doras, Konda Doras and Lambadis. They have fruits, tubers, nuts and edible roots as their subsidiary food. Castor oil and mohwa oil are used by the Gadabas and the Savaras for cooking purposes. These people are in the habit of smoking

beedi made of tobacco. Chenchus chew areca nuts, betal leaves and tobacco. Many of them take liquor as their drink.

All these tribals buy their necessities of life from shandies, showakars, etc. Gingelly and Kerosene oil is used by them for lighting hurricane lamps. The tribals of Andhra Pradesh construct two types of houses, viz., the **middillu** and **purillu**. Yanadis build huts and these are made of leaves of thatels and walls with either mud or wattle.

## Social Life

Tribals are bound by traditions. They adhere to them quite uncompromisingly (Murali Manohar, et al., 1985, p.20). The underlying spirit of their tradition is to live in peace but with dignity and to lead the simplest life independent of any external control–economic or political. The enjoyment of functional liberty is their most cherished desire for which they are prepared to pay any price on demand (Ibid). Freedom is dearer to them than any other consideration on the face of this earth (Ibid). This is the significant feature which dominates the tribal culture. In relation to this, the religion and belief of these tribals are usually centred around the worship of village deities. They too celebrate Hindu festivals due to the extent of the non-tribal influence of the area (Ramaiah, 1988, p.7). Community dancing plays an important role in their life. They are often associated with certain seasonal festivals and various types of folk dances.

As per their customs and practices, birth is simple and unique. The pregnant woman continues her household work until the labour pain occurs. As far as marriage customs are concerned, tribal families are generally of four types (Ibid, p.8) viz., by negotiation, by capture, by elopement and by service. A bride price is allowed among the Tatapus, Savaras and Nookadoras and there is no dowry system for the Koyas (Singh, 1977, p.38). Divorces are allowed by mutual consent and marriages of widows are also allowed.

## Significant Features of the Tribal Economy

The tribal economy itself is considered a subsistence economy which is inextricably linked to an internal money economy. As it is a subsistence economy, some part of the village production is marketed. In such an

economy, disposal of produce by sale is incidental, depending on the availability of marketable surplus goods (Ghosh, 1964, p.1).

An economy becomes progressively monetised when the proportion of the total resources of land and labour devoted to money-earning activities increases, with a corresponding decline in the proportion of resources devoted to subsistence activities. The monetisation of an indigenous agricultural economy may take one or both of two main forms (Ibid, p.2). In the first instance, such an economy may itself directly produce for the market, and secondly, some members of the economy may temporarily take on work as wage earners in non-agricultural activities including government services. In the former case, some part of the resources of both land and labour in the indigenous rural economy becomes monetised and development may be said to take place within the economy by its partial transformation from a subsistence to a monetised economy. In the second case, some part of the labour resources of the indigenous agricultural economy are monetised, but only in so far as they are separated from it. As such monetisation involves the depletion of labour, the process of economic development is not necessarily confined to the indigenous economy (Ibid, p.3). There is a third avenue which people may take in terms of money-earning activities (Ibid, p.3) i.e., self-employment as entrepreneurs in the money economy. In this case, a few people may establish themselves as independent tradesmen. As such, from an economic point of view, an essential manifestation of the growth of money-earning activities is the shift of the resources of land and labour of the indigenous agricultural economy out of subsistence production and into production for the market. The flow of productive resources from the subsistence to the money sector depends both on the **push of forces** driving factors out of the self-supporting sphere and on the **pull of forces** attracting subsistence sector resources into the monetary sphere (Ibid, p.11).

In this sense, the tribal economy in India continues to be a unisectoral economy. Steps to diversify the economy have had little impact on the overall economic development of the tribal areas. Agriculture, being the primary sector, could not accommodate the entire working population and due to natural calamities and expeditions of the non-tribal population, more and more tribal people have been alienated both from their lands and places. Thus, it is an established fact that tribal agriculture is mostly subsistence in nature (Ibid, p.3) and is characterised by the production of food grains just sufficient to meet their requirements. Consequently, the tribal economy can be dubbed a subsistence economy. So, it can be

inferred that the tribal economy, even in modern times, has not been drawn completely into the vortex of the market economy and still retains its subsistence nature.

Another significant feature of the tribal economy in a more backward region is a largely standardised and simple structure. As the demand for modern commodities themselves is very limited, occasions for exchanges and transactions are very few. There is a spirit of mutual help and the value of money is not very high (B.D. Sharma, 1976, p.4) and the tribal economy is significantly affected by communication barriers.

Another characteristic feature is that most of the transactions in different commodities are mutual and work by using barter. In many tribal areas, urban types of markets (regulated markets) have not as yet developed and the weekly market/weekly shandy is the only and also the most important economic institution. A further distinguishing feature of the tribal economy is that the trader does not belong to the tribal community. Hence, moneylending and trading practices and skills are lacking among the tribals.

As the tribal economy is a subsistence economy, the main occupation for the majority of tribes is agriculture and it fails to provide them with full sustenance. The tribals largely depend upon the forest produce that they collect and partly consume and they then market the remains which augment their income of a hand-to-mouth nature. In this context, the collection of MFP (minor forest produce) could assure the tribals a source of subsistence during the summer months. It is a well-documented fact that tribal households with less than five acres of land mainly depend on the collection of MFP. The contribution of MFP to the income of the tribal households is 5.4 to 13 per cent in Orissa, 7.4 to 14 per cent in Bihar, 13.6 to 39 per cent in Madhya Pradesh and 10 to 55 per cent in Andhra Pradesh. Thus, it can be said that the income achieved through the collection of MFP in these States ranges between 5.4 to 55 per cent. One of the studies shows that 35 per cent of the earnings of the tribals in the Panchamahal district of Gujarat were from the collection of MFP (Report of the Committee on Forests and Tribes in India, 1982, p.20). Another study conducted in the Bastar district (1981) indicates that an average household (having two adult members, at least one child and an old person) on average earns Rs. 1,500/- a year (against a total annual income of Rs. 1,750/-) from the sale of MFP (Ibid, p.20).

In view of the above, an attempt has been made to examine the significance of minor forest produce in a tribal economy with special reference to the Telangana districts – Khammam, Warangal and Adilabad in the State of Andhra Pradesh.

## Objectives

The research is based on the following objectives. They are:

i. to analyse the role of minor forest produce in a tribal economy;
ii. to examine the socio-economic background of the tribal households;
iii. to examine the contribution of MFP collection to the economic activities of the tribals in the scheduled areas; and
iv. to examine the quantity of MFP collection and its marketing pattern.

## Methodology

The methodology adopted for the study is given below.

## Research Design

The research design adopted for the study is to examine the collection of the forest produce of the tribals and its contribution to their economic activities. For this, the research design adopted in the study is an analytical one where data from both primary as well as secondary sources has been collected. The evidence for the analysis is derived from various sources. Further, the collection of data regarding the details of the tribal formation has also been categorised according to the phenomenon of the forest and its economic relation with the tribals. For the purposes of this study, the Girijan Co-operative Corporation, the Warangal Division of the Warangal district, the Palwancha Division of the Khammam District and the Utnoor Division of the Adilabad District have been chosen.