



## **IMPACT OF COVID- 19 ON THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AMONG THE TRIBAL PEOPLES OF JHARKHAND**

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### **Abstract:**

Jharkhand is a tribal state having approximately 26 percent share of tribal people residing in the state. More than 90 percent of tribal population lives in rural areas. The original inhabitant of this land e.g., tribal peoples and non-tribe indigenous peoples earn their livelihoods in their own traditional ways of agriculture, domestication of cattle, collect minor forest product from their surrounding jungle and wages out themselves as laborers. The sudden spread of Covid-19 snatched away the rice bowl of these peoples as well as the mediums of earning livelihoods; and they had been forced to live a miserable live e.g., hunger and poverty. This paper analyses the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 on tribals and non-tribe indigenous people’s livelihood during the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Tribal Economy, Tribal market, livelihood

### **1. Introduction**

The abode of tribal peoples- Jharkhand is laid between 23° and 24° North latitude and 83° and 87° East longitude in the eastern part of India. As per the Census 2011, total population of tribal peoples (ST) is 86,45,042 which is 26.20 percent and non-tribe indigenous peoples (SC) is 39,85,644 which is 12.08 percent of the whole population (3,29,88,134) of Jharkhand. Most of the original inhabitant of this land e.g., tribal peoples and non-tribe indigenous peoples earn their livelihoods in their own traditional ways of agriculture, domestication of cattle, collect minor forest product from their surrounding jungle and wages out themselves as laborers. The sudden spread of Covid-19 forced both states and union governments to impose, at the very onset of March, 2020, at first time as a 21 days nationwide lockdown, limiting movement of the entire 138 crore population

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of India as a preventive measure against the Covid- 19 pandemic in India. But day-to-day the spreading area of Covid-19 cases and casualties was increasing as a great pace and the situations of controlling pandemic became the first priority for the governments but as we know the health care facilities for common peoples of our country has been very poor; so the government had a only one preventive idea was to confine the peoples of this country where they inhabited in their localities or migrated and emigrated one place to another in the search of earning livelihoods.

Evaluating the critical situations of the country in the context of great spreading Covid- 19 cases and causalities, a series of processes of lockdown was announced as pandemic under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 which snatched away the rice bowl from these peoples as well as the medium of earning livelihoods; and they had been forced to live a miserable live e.g., hunger and poverty. As most of the tribal peoples are characterized by geographical isolation, social and economic backwardness, lack of infrastructure and poor quality of health facilities which had impacted them badly due to lockdown. During this period many factories and workplaces shut down, a large number of wages labors and migrant workers had to deal with the loss of income. These all people had to be suffered from lack of food and uncertainty about their future and most of them were still live-in abject hunger and poverty. Covid-19 and the process of undergone lockdown had forced the tribal peoples to return their settlements and villages where they had involved in the traditional economy for earning of livelihoods.

The Covid-19 pandemic had proved itself very hazardous in killing the people all over the world. That's why a series of lockdown has still been undergone along with some unlock processes as a preventive measure. The processes of lockdown throughout India had two major aspects which affected the lives of common peoples of India; on the one side the lockdown had helped to stop sudden spread the Covid-19 from one region to another which was understood as a good sign for the common peoples but on the other side it had affected hazardously the life and lives of common people one who earned on daily basis; waged out as a labor and worked as a grocery, a shopkeeper etc. Most of them had suffered the great depressions in the burden of sustaining their families who lived without any income; lived without any savings and the lack of medium to earn a trivial requirement. These types of helplessness and loneliness were less among the tribal peoples of Jharkhand.

## **2. Tribal Peoples of Jharkhand**

Jharkhand which came into existence on 15 November 2000 as the 28<sup>th</sup> State of the Union of India is generally known as the homeland of the tribal peoples where there are 32 different tribal peoples live. As per 2011 census, the tribal population is about 26.2% of the total population of Jharkhand of which 91.01% lives in rural areas and 08.99% in urban areas (Annual Report 2020-2021, pp. 146-147). It has laid in north-eastern part of the country; and is bordered by the states of Bihar to the north, West Bengal to the east, Orissa to the south, and Chhattisgarh to the west, and Uttar Pradesh to the northwest. It has occupied 79714 square km (79 lakh hectares) of which 29.26% (23.32 lakh hectare) covers with forest. 52.91% (41.80 lakh hectares) is a cultivable area of which around 43.25% (18.08 lakh hectares) is the net sown area. The topographical sketch of

Jharkhand has undulating, rugged and rocky nature, are the subject to sheet and gully erosion, causing loss of soil and plant nutrients and about 19.11% (23 lakh hectares) of total geographical area are subjected to severe erosion every year (Jharkhand- State Agriculture Development Plan 2008-09 to 2011-12, 2013, pp. 55-57).

During the Mohammed period, the regions of Chota Nagpur were chiefly known as Pundag and Kokhra. Pundag which would really represent Palamau where the Cheros were the ruling tribes and Kokhra was a core-principality of Chotanagpur whose Raja reigned over Ranchi originality from a village of Palkot which is now located in the south of Gumla district (Habib, 1982, pp. 39-40). The Chota Nagpur regions were also known as “Kukara” region which came under British Rule after received dewani rights in 1765 and known as “Jharkhand” (Mohanty, 2006, p. 105).

Most of the tribal communities are generally concentrations in southern and central portion of Jharkhand. There are found Negrito, Proto-Australoid, Mongoloid, Mediterranean and Nordic races in the population of tribal peoples of Jharkhand. The Proto-Australoid features are found in the Kharwar, Munda, Bhumij and Mal Paharias. During the colonial period, all the tribal peoples were generally classified between the Kolarian tribes and the Dravidian tribes. The Dravidian tribes such as the Ho, Munda, Oraon, Kharia, Bhumij, Kisan, Santhal, Gond and Mal Paharia etc. are the major tribes of Jharkhand which are involved in the settled agriculture (Mohanty, 2006, p. 53). There are eight primitive tribes such as Asur, Birhor, Birajia, Korwa, Parahiya (Baiga), Sabar, Mal Pahariya and Souriya Pahariya who mostly confine themselves in the hill-side and dense jungle. And other minor tribes such as Bedia, Gond, Chero, Karmali, Chick Baraik, Kora, Kisan, Gorait, Birjia, Bathudi, Khond, Banjara, Kol and Kanwar who are scattered all over Jharkhand and are able to adapt almost all types of traditional tribal economic activities; and they all occasionally involve in other economic activities in the form of migration and emigration in search of livelihood.

### **3. Traditional Tribal Economy of Tribal Peoples in Old Days**

Traditional tribal economy is recognized as subsistence oriented in which tribal peoples sustain themselves with the beliefs and customs along with the life and lives of tribal peoples in the way of their own philosophy. Generally the tribal economy is depended on both agriculture and forest. P. K. Mohanty defined it as “Subsistence economy is imposed by circumstances which are beyond the control of human beings, poverty of the physical environment, ignorance of efficient technique of exploiting natural resources and lack of capital for investment. It also implies existence of barter and lack of trade.” (Mohanty, 2006, p. 143).

L.P. Vidyarthi and Binay Kumar Rai identify the tribal economy as “subsistence economy” by citing Dolton (1971: 45) who says that “Subsistence or Primitive Economy: it gives the assurance of subsistence livelihood to person through the social determination of labour and land allocation and the social right to receive emergency material in times of need and has the pervasive social control of productive and distribution.” Further they accepted it as “marginal economy” on of basis of different types of occupations to sustain themselves by citing Majumdar (1961: 139) who says that “In the marginal economy one group of people practices different types of occupations at one time for its livelihood. The fact that a tribe uses all kinds of occupations to eke out its

subsistence and combines hunting with honey gathering, lumbering with chase, shifting cultivation with domestication of animals, shows the complexity of economic subsistence in the lower culture.” (Vidyarthi & Rai, 1976, p. 96)

The Asur, Korwa, Parhaiya, Birjhia, Kharia and Gond etc. were traditionally the hunter and food gatherer tribes but nowadays they involved in different modes of earning for their livelihoods. There are some inhabited artisan tribes in the population of tribal Jharkhand who make all the agricultural tools and equipment, materials for accommodations and others necessarily household requirement for the material culture of the tribes. Traditionally these are the Chick Baraik who did weaving cloth; the Asur, the Lohara and the Karmali were versed in blacksmith, bamboo worker and rope maker; the Mahali intricately did work as bamboo worker and blacksmith; the Kharia did work as bamboo worker and agriculturists etc. and the Banjara earned livelihood by singing and dancing on the occasion of marriage, birth, etc. in nearly village. If we go back in pre-colonial or colonial period almost all tribes were involved in more than two or three modes of earning livelihoods as their traditional tribal economy. One who involved in hunting and food gathering also did occasionally shifting cultivation. One who involved in shifting cultivation also did occasionally hunting and food-gathering and tried to adopt to be settled agriculturist. And one who involved in artisan making materials for others also did hunting and food gathering (Prasad, 1961). They have been inhabited in the traditional ways and engaged in the different form of economic systems with their primitive technology, limited skill and unflinching traditional and ritual practices, their entire styles of life revolve round the forests. V. S. Upadhyay cited Majumdar and Madan who have found nine important traits of primitive economy as noticed in tribal India they are: 1. Absences of technological aids, 2. Use of barter and exchange, 3. Absence of profit motive, 4. Co-operative and collective endeavor, 5. Slow rate of innovation, 6. Regular market, 7. Manufacture of consumer goods, 8. Absence of specialization, and 9. Display rather than accumulation for wealth, to show property (Upadhyay, p. 91)

Since they lived in the undulating, rugged and hilly areas, propitiating and appeasing the bongas and deities which were overlapped in their daily life and lives, were found these all as common rituals and magical practices among all tribal peoples of Jharkhand (O'Malley, 1907); they believed that these all lives surrounding them and inhabit on the leaves of the trees. Tribal economy, therefore, as a process of earnings livelihoods has been extricable woven into the social and religious life of tribal peoples. It could be well understood in the paradigm of nature, man and spirit complex (Vidyarthi & Rai, 1976, p. 72) that is, on the basis of relationship with nature fellow men and the supernatural. It had consolidated the social unity of the tribal peoples, inspired them a sense of social responsibility for appeasing and propitiating the bongas, diuris, deities and ancestral spirits. These all bongas, diuris, deities and ancestral spirits had been invoked on the all occasion for receiving the good luck in any economic operations. They all were considered as the guardians of the village and their helps were invoked before starting any economic operations such as agricultural and non-agricultural involvements.

Since their agriculture was based on nature, they collectively with the whole village community used to involve for worship and propitiating for making rain or stopping it. They usually

propitiated their bongas, deities of diuri and many other related bongas before starting any involvement of economic activities for their livelihoods e.g. before entering in the forest for hunting, before and after searching for the regions for shifting cultivation, before entering in the field for planting paddy or harvesting and other related activities with cultivation etc.

#### **4. Baffling Problems among Tribal Peoples in Present Days**

As we have observed above, Jharkhand has possessed the forest-clad highlands, owing to the rocky nature of the surface preventing the spread of cultivation. The cultivable and arable lands of these regions have been broadly recognized as consisting of two interlacing zones as upland (*Tanr*) and lowland (*Don*). Most of the areas which located in the parts of tribal peoples, either *tanr* or *don*, are generally surrounded with jungles or located on the slope of the hills; even these arable lands have been very precarious owing to irregularity of the rainfall along with beasts of the surrounding jungles and forest.

The *tanr* is poorer in water retention and soil fertility than the arable land of *don*. The arable lands of *tanr* and *don* have been constructed in the forms of terrain which are leveled and confined with embankments for making them good water retention as well as for making soil fertility but as a matter of fact the regions are incapable in water retention due to undulating land structure, absence of perennial river and steep rocks and rocky formation preventing accumulation of underground water. Above all these complications of the soils in all categories of arable lands have been lacking in nitrogen, but fairly rich in potash. Since the soils have been potashic and terrains have been undulating construction, the rainwater has been quickly lost from the field that the problem of soil erosion has been baffling in the whole areas of Jharkhand (Sinha, 1979, p. 60). As Mohapatra had observed in different studies which had been conducted by Damodar Valley Corporation as well as by Ranchi Agricultural University where they found that the physical and chemical proportion of soil e.g. nitrogen, organic carbon, exchangeable calcium and available phosphate had been considerably improved under the terrain where the depth of layers and clay content (Mohapatra, 1988, p. 52) but the profiles of soil have been generally poor in quality and suffering from a deficiency in organic matter as well as the tools and techniques of cultivation are almost primitive, and manuring has been not practiced except arable lands of *Bari* or kitchen gardens which are generally located near their settlements. From the early days of the British advent, it was recognized that the districts of the contemporary Chota Nagpur were infertile and, therefore, of very inconsiderable value (Reid, 1912, p. 4).

Tribal peoples of Jharkhand are mostly depended on forest and land, but as we have observed above agriculture do not support its inhabitants throughout the year due to non-availability of irrigational facilities as well as poor and deficient soil. The other hand, they have to face many difficulties and calamity for their livelihood in collecting minor forest products due forest law policy and deforestation which have given the extreme obsessions and poverty. Most of tribal peoples have to suffer high degree of unemployment because some seasons bring plenty of cereal according to monsoon and some seasons bring abject of hunger and poverty. All these problems and difficulties make forces on them migrating one state to another in search of earnings. Most of the

migrant tribal workers who have leaved their villages in search of livelihood have to work as industrial workers, construction worker, brick kilns, masons agricultural labours, watchman, rickshaw pullers, mid-wife and many more in metropolitan city of different parts of India e.g. Gurgaon, Delhi, Patiala Hoshiarpur, Nasik, Mumbai, Surat, Ahmedabad, Bhubaneswar etc. A Study reveals that 9 out of 10 tribals migrate for livelihood; out of it 80% tribals prefer interstate migration while rest prefers inter-district (intra-state) migration in search of jobs from the study area. As per 2011 census, about 31.44 % (103.73 lakh) of the total population of Jharkhand migrated to other states in search of earning his livelihoods in which 39.12 % (40.58 lakh) were tribal peoples of the state. That means about 46.94 % of the whole tribal population (86.45 lakh) were migrated in search of earning of their livelihoods (Tribal Livelihood Migration in India: Situational Analysis, Gap Assessment & Future Directions in 12 States in India, 2020, p. 7; 97).

### **5. Impact of Covid-19 on Tribal peoples**

As per 2011 census, 53.06 % tribal population were always inhabited in their tradition settlement where there depended on forest and land along with other earning sources for their livelihoods. Most of the tribal peoples in their respective areas in Jharkhand have not been majorly affected by Covid-19 but one who had been leaved their villages in search of livelihood and went on other places had to face a lot of difficulties in returning their homes and villages. Under the Covid-19 guidelines, the inter-state and intra-state travelling transports were banned; they were not able to move for the economic activities as most of the tribal people had not the access of private motor vehicles. Most of the textile women workers who were working in textile industries in Tamil Nadu lost their job and was trapped in other state without having financial support.

Due to sudden lockdown and unavailability of transport facilities, they were forced to walk approximately 100 to 1000 of Kilometers by foot to reach their home which was very miserable and hazardously for them. Due to economic uncertainties and unavailability, they were more concerned for their economic difficulties, so they continually travelled for many days giving sacrifices for their physical and psychological wellbeing. Many people died in the way of their destinations due to hunger during the walk from the bigger cities to their home villages. During travelling back to their home, women and children were the ones who confronted more difficulties. Even from the proper interventions of occasionally facilities had been provided to get them reach to their home safely by the Government of Jharkhand, but they had to face many problems related to food, water and money as it has been divested during the travel. As per (Amit, 2020), out of 576 migrant workers surveyed at Nawadih, Bokaro Jharkhand it was found that about 244 people used the Bus facilities provided either by their native state or by state in between their way, 185 used goods transporting Trucks, 67 used train, 37 used private bolero, 19 used personal Car, 11 used bicycle, 6 used motorcycle and 4 came to their native place by foot. Most of them were the younger people aged between 20-30 years old (Amit Kumar, 2020).

Even after reaching the home there were resistance found in many tribal villages where they were force to quarantine in the village schools and community centers for 14 days. They were not allowed to meet their family members who had mental impact over them. Once they moved to their

home after successfully completion of quarantine period of 14 days, the major challenge starts as their most of the livelihood activities which had been shut down due to Covid-19. The tribals and other indigenous peoples usually used in busy in collecting minor forest products and tried to sell them in their nearest **Hatt** (Local Market) which is generally known as village market or periodic market, but due to lockdown, the all sources of earning livelihood had been shut down which made them live a miserable life.

Most of the tribal areas where they have located the village markets or periodic market in the form of their own traditional systems were completely shut down during Covid-19. The village markets or periodic markets are the place where they usually run small enterprise and entrepreneurship in the form of public welfare. In these markets, there are large number varieties of agricultural tools, seeds and pesticide, electronic gazettes, ornaments and garments are generally sold by outsider along village products and minor forest products are sold by villagers. These all things except village products and minor forest products are provided by neighboring traders, small business men and entrepreneurships who often come there from near located villages and towns. But near of these markets, there were few small enterprises, entrepreneurships and small business e.g. shopkeepers, medical shops, and cybercafé etc. casually used to open their shutters for fulfilling the daily basis requirements by breaking the law and management of Covid- 19. In the holistic way, all the small enterprises, entrepreneurships and small business which were located in the tribal areas were shut down their business during Covid-19 which had affected badly on their business activities and some ways it was also affected the tribal peoples who were depended on them.

## **6. Major Positive Interventions**

Government of Jharkhand had taken many initiating steps to solve and minimize the difficulties of common peoples during Covid-19. To tackle with the fake news spread regarding the Covid-19 spread, the local tribal languages were used to communicate the correct information by Information Public Relation Department (IPRD) of Jharkhand (Jha, 2021) Jharkhand government had launched the control room for helping the migrant laborers trapped in to another state. The government announcement of giving the ration and other food commodities in advance for three months to each household without any condition in both rural and urban areas, helped most of the tribal people for the better survival during the pandemic. (Staff, 2020)

Farmer producer models (FPC) had been successfully functioning during the lockdown. This was the post-harvest season, where quintals of paddy were ready to be sold out to vendor, but due to sudden lock down stock could not be supplied to the vendors. Later on, with the help of FPC aggregation unit and WOTR (Watershed Organisation Trust) in villages, 5-6 village laborers it was being supplied to the vendors with the help of organisations like. WOTR's team has done hard work during the lockdown to reach out to the beneficiaries in villages on the Humanitarian ground. They helped in awareness generation and ensured the preparedness at the gross root level working properly with the Community. They even helped in distribution of rationing kits, masks etc. to the needy people. This team also worked hard in creating sensitization for right information related to the covid-19 spread (Dudeja, 2020).

Jharkhand government with the help of 42000 Asha Workers famously known as Sahiya launched the week long Intensive Public Health Survey (IPHS) so that they can identify population having high risk for Covid-19 from 18<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020. Sahiya had been actively engaged in various activities like contact tracing, line listing etc. during and after the Covid-19 spread since March 2020. They were creating awareness about precautionary measures of Covid-19 like regular hand washing with sanitizer and soaps, use of masks, maintaining the 6 feet social distance when stepping out in public spaces, following proper etiquette while coughing and sneezing, etc. (PIB, 2020)

## **7. Conclusion**

COVID-19 has impacted the tribal and indigenous people negatively socio-economically in formal markets due to the sudden lockdown by the government. Informal markets and various quick government interventions have helped them to survive anyhow. The tribal and non-tribal indigenous people had to face many families' crisis due to the pandemic. The pandemic has also impacted the children and students from these communities as schools and colleges were shut. The mental disturbances in them were also visible. Many people died due to hunger and poverty. As per recent Global Hunger Index 2021, India has fall down to 101 ranks globally which show that how the people of India had to face the crisis.

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