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Livelihood Concerns of Tribals During the Pandemic: Societal and Philosophical Perspective

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Abstract: The second wave of COVID-19 is severely affecting the entire world. The scenario is very grim in India. Indigenous people are becoming even more vulnerable during this global pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has created a dystopian scenario. It has generated 'uncertainties' because of immediate prevalence of the notions of risk, fear, panic, crisis and social distancing. Tribal livelihood system has been deeply affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown. Government has also suggested several constructive suggestions in order to restructure tribal livelihood. This Covid-19 pandemic has created a grave situation with regards to tribal livelihood system. Series of debates and discussions are necessary in order to provide certain constructive suggestion in mitigating tribal livelihood system.

Key Words: Covid-19, Pandemic, Lockdown, Tribal, Livelihood

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Introduction:

Tribal areas already suffer from a severe shortage of basic healthcare facilities, shortage of healthcare professionals, lack of information and awareness etc leading to prevalence of diseases such as malnutrition, malaria, leprosy, tuberculosis (TB) and others. Absence of healthcare facilities can severely limit the capacities to deal with any major COVID 19 outbreak in tribal areas posing a serious threat to the tribal population. COVID 19 impacts people with compromised health conditions and low immunity. This increases risks of infection to the tribal and forest communities living in deprivation. Testing and monitoring of the disease is inadequate and is mostly limited to urban areas. Providing testing facilities in tribal areas is a major challenge.

The second wave of COVID-19 is affecting most of the world. The scenario is very grim in India where the daily count on April 27, 2021 itself is triple of the first peak. The epidemic evolution there is quite complex due to regional in homogeneities. The death rate in India for Covid-19 despite a very strong surge in the second wave of the

pandemic is a little over one per cent. This means almost 99 per cent of Covid-19 patients are recovering and surviving the menacing illness caused by several variants of the novel coronavirus behind this pandemic.

In this critical situation all the people from education to industries are affected. But the life of tribals is different from Urbans. Tribal people and other kinds of forest dwellers are facing an extremely difficult time due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Changed people's lives:

The COVID-19 epidemic has changed people's lives globally from 2020 and, like in other fora, it has been the subject of intense discussion in academia. It is assumed to affect all sections of people equally but, in reality, it has affected people differently depending on social, economic, and geographical locations.

Tribal's already experience poor access to basic needs such as healthcare, safe and pure water, sanitation, education, etc. Now they are facing difficulties in obtaining immediate support from the government for healthcare facilities and emergency services for livelihood

and survival. This pandemic has created food insecurity and these people have lost their homes and means of livelihood. Hence, today's lecture highlights the consequences of COVID-19 and the struggle of tribal's in this difficult situation.

Indigenous people are becoming even more vulnerable during this global pandemic. As these people experience a high degree of socio-economic marginalisation and are at disproportionate risk in public health emergencies, owing to factors such as their lack of access to effective monitoring and early-warning systems, and adequate health and social services. Now, the lockdown has created havoc in their lives. All of you know that this area is famous for Tribals, there are many tribals living and we are directly acquainted with their livelihood. Now, the lockdown has created havoc in their lives. lockdown has caused more suffering to Adivasis than the virus. Most Adivasi habitats have so far been free of the virus. But what happens to Adivasi migrants when they get home is a major concern as the health infrastructure in these areas is extremely poor.

How are Indian tribal people coping with the lockdown, how have their livelihoods been impacted in these particularly challenging times and what kind of precautions are they taking to save themselves from the infection?

Tribal Community and COVID-19 Pandemic:

Every tribal group has their own unique identity on the basis of their geographical location, ethnicity, language and socio-economic subsistence. But the growth of capitalism, globalisation, and development process affected the social, cultural and economic life and identities of tribal people in India. It pushed them towards urban and industrial areas for working in the informal sector on low wages. After independence, three crucial approaches were introduced regarding the policies and programmes for tribal welfare and development, that is, assimilation, isolation and integration.

Indian sociologist G S Ghurye advocated an "assimilationist approach" and suggested that the assimilation process would help the tribal community get absorbed into the

mainstream society, but tribal people are left with discrimination and exploitation.

Anthropologist Verrier Elwin advocated the "isolationist approach" but the mainstream society interrupted and interfered in the community affairs and did not allow them to live their lives peacefully with full freedom.

Jawaharlal Nehru attributed "integration theory" and introduced the five fundamental principles "panchsheel" as a protective and promotional measure to integrate the tribes into the national mainstream.

(1) People should develop along the lines of their own genius, and the imposition of alien values should be avoided.

(2) Tribal rights in land and forest should be respected

(3) Teams of tribals should be trained in the work of administration and development.

(4) Tribal areas should not be over administered or overwhelmed with a multiplicity of schemes.

(5) Results should be judged not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the human character that is evolved.

But this pandemic situation has proven that the tribal population was considered only for the labour requirement of capital and the global market. They were thrown out of the mainstream society during the lockdown period. Tribes are experiencing the adverse effects of the failure of all these measures taken up by mainstream society. COVID-19 isolation has made tribal people more vulnerable and left them without government facilities and support.

The economy of these Adivasi communities is based on subsistence activities, where there is no surplus. Every member of the family is involved in the production process. They produce and consume for themselves. All the members of the family including women and children work hard for their survival. So, there is no clear-cut gendered division of labour in these families. The difficulty level increased during the lockdown period for the Adivasi women because they had no work for earning a livelihood. The different categories of the tribal economy got affected and livelihood was endangered. Women are involved in all kinds of economic activities whether it depends on forest produce,

agricultural sector and unorganised sector, or working as service providers.

The Adivasis have lost their self-sufficiency and become dependent on capital and the global market for their earnings. "How to survive?" remains a valid question. They are advised to be "atmanirbhar" (self-reliant). Moreover, when the Adivasi women were self-sufficient and self-reliant they were forced to move out of their traditional life and move towards globalisation where they were made to be dependent on the industrialised and unorganised sector. Now, at this stage, they are again asked to be atmanirbhar. This implies that they have to reduce their dependence on the state and be self-reliant to strengthen their standard of living.

The notion of "stay home, stay safe" is not the same for everyone, more specifically for the Tribals who have been wage earners and migrant workers from the tribal communities.

Before one week a NCC Cadet talked with me over by phone and I asked him about the Covid situation, what he said is not believable for me. This point can be well elaborated with the case of a couple from Bonda community, who returned to their

village Gadapadar from Pune city due to the lockdown. Since they were not allowed inside, they had to set up a hut outside the boundaries of the village on a hilly terrain where the notion of "stay home, stay safe" is not applicable. Though they could protect themselves against the virus, they were in danger from wild animals, snakes, scorpions and many other poisonous insects in the darkness. Yet they were not afraid of the difficulties and dangers of living in a hilly terrain but were more worried about a new beginning without any resources.

The Alternative Solutions:

Livelihood issues are more rampant which has made the women vendors more vulnerable, as they are everyday visiting the market due to somehow the covid stigma things are not taking a good turn, despite the social distancing and hygienic environment allotted by the vending committees prejudices among the masses are quite significant. Financially shattered, and a lack of mental well-being has led the lives of these street traders in drudgery. Stripped of their livelihood and caught between work, pandemic and poverty, they are

struggling to make their ends meet. Being women due to their lack of access to credit and other challenges they are surfaced with other additional challenges.

Meanwhile there has been a rise in online marketing of fresh vegetables from these traders which has been a very crucial step to curb the gap and the gendered implications as it can enable empowering culture among these street vendors. As Covid-19 has an economic toll on women vendors it has significantly marginalised them, but the growth of online shopping of these street products has been a welcome step for the betterment of their conditions. A tribal woman aged 26 who vends fish opined on anonymity at Koraput that the online marketing of products has been somewhat life saving for them, as the virus has affected severely their productivity.

The Negotiated Lives needs Remedial Ways:

Another tribal woman aged 36 who trades flowers said their basic needs are also affected and people do bargain at times of covid. The bargained lives of these street vendors which is a culture where the buyers

always negotiate for the products, requires adequate inscription there is a need to recognise them as they have struggled hard and these tribal women in Koraput , toil hard to earn their livelihood. Need to empathise with their struggles and challenges, strict measures like the use of masks and sanitizers for safeguarding them after post covid is an emergency and needed tool, Awareness and Sensitisation among these tribal women vendors on the streets by the media, NGO'S and civil society organisations should be an adequate step. Visible but unheard the tribal street vendors and their right to live is at stake, the need for social protection and their visibility in every form be it economic, psychological and social contexts is a vital and weighty consideration for their empowerment and should be the norm of the era and after.

Natural immunity:

Many tribal people themselves and their healers do believe that they have good natural immunity that keeps them safe from many diseases. Their extreme exposure to the natural environment is attributed to be the reasons of their disease prevention and

tolerance. Tribals are naturally immune to several diseases, as they still thrive upon forest products like fruits, root vegetables and various herbal products. One of the tribal ways of responding to sneezing, cold and cold fever is by way of administering decoctions of roots, barks, leaves and spices. These medicinal decoctions are known in different names in different communities. However, the most commonly used term is Kaadha. The Kaadha is prepared out of several herbs, leaves, roots like Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*), Arjun (*Terminalia arjuna*), Patalgaruda (*Rouwolfia serpentina*), Guava (*Psidium guajava*), Guluchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), Kalmegh (*Andrographis paniculata*), Gangasiuli (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*), Satavari (*Asparagus recemosus*), Cinnamon, black pepper, ginger, turmeric, et with jaggery and such other materials that provides superior immunity. The tribes in the remote areas and also in the mainstream drink Kadhaa as medicines and also as regularly as tea when feel sick out of cold, fever, flu and that kind of ailments. The Kaadha works in the body as preventive and curative medicine. The Kaadha is considered an efficacious preparation and

formulation in Ayurvedic literatures. However, the tribal Kaadha preparation is different from the Ayurvedic texts as they mix up fresh naturally available multiple ingredients in estimated quantities based on their past experiences. Kaadha in tribal society is time tested efficacious medicine which is preventive, curative and ameliorative.

Conclusion

Since 1991, globalisation has attracted/pushed many people, including the tribal population, towards the urban and industrial sector, but this pandemic made them realise that there is no socio-economic security for their life. This pandemic left them stranded without their traditional way of life with nature and without life security in this new global economic structure. The tribal women from migrant families thought earlier that working in modern society with a modern economy would make their life easier and improve their standard of living. Now, they have lost their faith in this uncertain city life. Those who have an alternative will now not return to urban and industrial sectors. Those who have nothing except their labour

to survive will return to serve the modern global capitalists.

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