Abstract

Since most of the tribal population had been living in their own environment and remained aloof from the outer world until the two or three centuries before. They were completely dependent on forests for their livelihood. Majumdar (1952) pointed out that they were living in secure asylums in the hills and forests, lived on fruits and tubers, and wore leaves or rags round their loins. But in recent time most of these tribes are coming into the contact with mainstream communities. Thus due to their assimilation with non tribal communities their entire socio-cultural setting have been changing.

Migration of peasant caste into tribal dominated area, during the late eighteenth century, are considered as most significant development as far as changes in tribal society is concerned. Because the peasant caste went there with comparatively advance agricultural tools, and the concept of agricultural seasons. Acceptance of these tools and techniques of agriculture by some section of tribal population, particularly those living in the valleys, resulted in emergence of sections of peasants tribal communities. Since then peasantization of tribal communities is a continuing process.

However, a number of tribal communities, particularly forest dwellers, heavily depend on forests for their existence while others supplement their economy with the collection of various minor forest produces. Their continued dependence on the forests can be attributed to the following three factors i.e., Long association with forests, Meager returns from their agricultural practices as it is still at subsistence level due
to environmental, infrastructural and financial constraints and Lack of alternative employment opportunity.

By the very nature of their habitat and ecology, the forest dwellers tribal communities depend heavily on forests for their occupation, livelihood and survival. They subsist on edible leaves and roots, honey, wild game and fish. They build their homes with timbers and bamboos and practice cottage crafts with the help of available raw materials.

Forests are safety net for the tribals. In the time of spiraling prices, reduced wages in real terms, unemployment, sickness, reduced productivity from land, and recurring shortages, forest resources act as a kind of safety net for local communities, protecting them from the harshness of market forces. Forests work as rescue by providing a safety net against food and livelihood insecurity, drought and pest attacks, illness, etc.

Tribals have been living symbiotically with forests for centuries. According to Prof. Roy Barman (1997)1 “tribal communities are not only forest-dwellers but also for centuries they have evolved a way of life, which, on one hand is woven round the forest ecology and forest resources and on the other ensures that the forest is protected against depredation by men and nature”. But due to the emergence of new forces in the forest region, their entire life support system perished and shattered. According to Tiwari (1980)2, senior forest officer in the Ministry of Homes Affairs, “the tribal communities could subsist for thousands of years with reasonable standard of health and comfortable abode, because forests

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1 Quoted by Debashis Debnath (1997), “Linking Forestry with Tribal Development”, Kurukshetra. New Delhi, pp 105-111
provided them food, shelter and gainful employment. A variety of new forces have arisen in the forest area which disturbed this balance”.

The present study of “impact of forest economy on the socio-economic development of tribes” is all about the past, present and future (prospect) of tribal development with respect to forest economy.

Chhattisgarh – a newly created state in central India has been chosen as the study area. The physiographic set-up of the state; roughly and hilly forested tracts, suits the tribals and thus about 32 per cent of total population of the state are tribals. Moreover, 42 different tribal groups are inhibiting in this state. More than 45 per cent geographical area of the state is occupied by the forested land.

The following objectives have been framed for studying the role of forest economy in the socio-economic development of tribal communities.

i). To understand the nature of economy of the tribes and changes therein.
ii). To know the degree of dependency of the tribal population on forests.
iii). To assess and examine the role of other sources of livelihood. iv). To know and evaluate the affect of restrictions imposed upon tribals on their free access to the forest on their socio-economic development. v). To know and analyse the Government Plans and Policies regarding tribal development with respect to forests.

Recently, Government of India has passed an Act (Scheduled Tribes and other traditional Forest Dwellers – Recognition of Forest rights Bill 2005), that has recognizes the rights of tribals on forests. Thus, it was imperative to examine the prospects of ‘Scheduled Tribes (Forest Rights) Act’ on the socio-economic development of tribal community.

The study assumes the following four research hypotheses i.e., (i) Forest economy has important role to play in the tribal’s socio-economic
development, more on who are highly dependent on forest. (ii) The degree of dependence on forest varies among the different tribal groups as well as over the space. Higher the level of socio-economic development of a tribe, lower will be dependence on forest and vice-versa. (iii) Given the fact that tribal access to forest resources has increasingly become restricted until now, adverse implication they carry vis-à-vis their sources of livelihood. (iv) 'Scheduled Tribes (Forest Rights) Act' supposed to be a landmark to enhance their over all socio-economic condition. It is also supposed that it enhance the safety and security of the forests.

To examine the impact of forest economy on the socio-economic development of tribes, it becomes necessary to take the help of empirical data. Thus, the study is mainly based on primary sources of data and supplemented by secondary sources of data. Primary data was collected through field survey of the study area i.e. Chhattisgarh state. Accessibility was determining factor in choosing the villages for field survey. Moreover, three types of tribal groups were selected for the study. Firstly, among the five Most Primitive Tribal Groups of the state (identified by government of India), living in or around the forests, three have been selected and termed as MPG, secondly, those living in and around the forests but are not primitive and termed as Forested Cluster tribal groups and finally, tribal groups not living in and around the forests and termed as non Forested cluster groups. Random sampling method has been chosen to select the households.

Three statistical techniques have been applied vis-à-vis factor analysis, Correlation matrix and Composite Mean Z scores, to analyse the data. Besides, simple percentage method has widely been used to show ratio of the different aspects of the selected tribal groups. The
concentration index of tribal population has been obtained through location quotient technique.

Keeping in mind the problem, the present study has been divided into seven productive chapters.

In Chapter first the researcher tried to introduce the problem which also incorporates the objective of the study, hypothesis, data base and methodology. Chapter second deals with geographical profile of the study area. Chapter third presents the conceptual frame work, literature review and highlights the theoretical aspects of the tribal development. Chapter four describes the demographic and social characteristics of the tribal population with the help of primary as well as secondary data. Chapter five is devoted to study about utilization of forest resources by the tribal population while chapter six focuses on the variation in the socio-economic development of Chhattisgarh which also included a case study of the sampled tribal population. The last chapter is dealing with impact of forest economy on the socio-economic development of the tribal population. Besides these, the conclusion and suggestions have been incorporated in the study.

While analyzing the demographic characteristics of the selected tribes, it has been discovered that sex ratio among tribal community is decreasing. The sex ratio of Kamar tribe is only 832 females per thousand males. The study reveals that the declining dependency on their traditional occupation; basketry, in which females were contributing substantially may be one the reason of neglecting female child. The study also reveals that the custom of child marriage has been disappearing even from the backward tribal societies.
The study found that the economic dependency of a tribal society on forests is determined by its present economic stage and availability of other sources of survival. Since, the primitive tribal groups are at the lowest level of economic stage and in the absence of alternative sources of survival; their dependency level on forests is very high. It is also revealed that there were little difference between primitive tribal groups and forested cluster tribal population as far as dependency on forests is concerned.

All the minor forest produces collected by the tribals are channeled to the market by middlemen whom they collect at much cheaper prices from the tribals. The study also reveals that most of the forest-dwellers tribal communities are heavily indebted to these Sahukars and in fact the poor tribals pay their debt in terms of kinds rather than cash.

The study revealed that well off tribal communities like Kawars and Gonds, who are residing in the middle of jungle, are emerging as new middlemen. Earlier the Sahukars were only non tribals and most of them were outsiders.

The study also pointed out that only few beneficiaries (forest dwellers tribals) of “Forest right Act 2005” know about the new Act. The new “Forest Right Act 2005” would really prove a landmark in the tribal development provided that all the forest dwellers know even the minute thing of the Act. Unless education penetrates in the primitive tribal society, all the measures by the government will become null and void.

The study on the levels of development in Chhattisgarh and particularly that of tribal population reveals that tribal dominated pockets of the state is lagging far behind as far as socio-economic development is concerned.
The micro level study through the field survey shows that disparities in the levels of socio-economic development exist among the different sections of tribal communities.

The study of impact of forest economy on the socio-economic development of tribes through the correlation matrix indicates that the correlation of variables of 'forest economy' with variables of socio-economic development is mostly negative.

The factor analysis of twenty variables indicates that 95.14 per cent of the total variance explained by three factors. Factor 1 explains 60.69 per cent of the total variance. It was obvious that most of the variables of forest economy were shown by negative signs while most of the variables of socio-economic development represented by positive signs in the first factor.

We can conclude that the higher dependency on forests for the sustenance results in low level of socio-economic development. Though higher dependency on forest reflects the primitiveness of tribal communities but it is not only the primitive tribal communities but all those tribal and non-tribal population living around the forests are bound to supplement their income from the collection of forest produces because of absence of any alternative employment opportunity around the forest regions. On the same line we may infer that lower socio-economic development of forest dwellers can not only be attributed to the higher dependency on forest but also to the lack of infrastructural facilities.

Tribals living in remote areas suffer from twin problems of deprivation and exploitation. The policies for the development of tribal communities should be formulated keeping in view problems faced by these tribal communities.
The most crucial hindrance in the tribal development is the existence of middlemen on one hand and absence of marketing facilities for their produce on the other hand. Remunerative prices to the tribal’s collections of minor forest produces can make significant contribution to their subsistence economy. Alternative employment in traditional forestry operations for the tribals, living in and around the forest areas may prove a landmark in the tribal development programme. Better accessibility to the infrastructural facilities for the tribals is the need of hour for augmenting their social conditions.