The Indian tribals have unique socio-economic cultural characteristics with varied living background. The tribals are considerable in number and live in specified tribal belts, which are totally aloof from the mainstream of the society. In our country there are around 400 tribal groups with different socio-economic, cultural backgrounds. Mostly they live in deep forest belts and depend on forest resources for their livelihood. Most of them live below the poverty line, and they have scanty financial resources, as they depend mostly on forest resources, petty wage labour, and small agricultural activity, all of them bring small income. The majority of the tribal people in our country are not able to have two square meals everyday. In certain seasons they have sufficient food and in other seasons when they have little or no employment as they are very close to malnutrition and starvation. Their earnings being irregular and scanty, they cannot afford to buy adequate food throughout the year.

The tribals have other daunting and awesome problems, which are detrimental to their health and wealth. They have the challenging task of adjusting themselves and their lives to the far changing socio-economic conditions of the country. Chronic and rampant problems of poverty, low income, lack of medical care, poor shelter, lack of transport, lack of other required infrastructure of every day life, keep them lagging behind the rest of the country in all respects. Among the problems of the tribals, finding adequate and nutritious food is one of the most
serious. Their survival largely depends on that. Lack of sufficient and nutritious food makes inevitably leads to malnutrition and starvation. There is evidence that in Andhra Pradesh there have been in some tribal villages starvation deaths. Lack of sufficient and nutritious food makes the tribals prone to ill-health and vulnerable to infection diseases. During the monsoon seasons when employment is not easy to find, they cannot find food enough for themselves and their families. To buy food they have to depend on either moneylenders or middlemen who exploit them miserably. As their financial resources are meagre, the tribals cannot repay the loan taken from the moneylenders. They get trapped in ever-increasing indebtedness. Moreover, they live in unhygienic and insanitary conditions, which makes them disease-prone. It is the responsibility of the powers that be to solve these persistent problems of the tribals.

Providing food to the tribals is the primary responsibility of the Government, of which it is aware. It is trying to provide essential food items to the tribals through the Public Distribution System, but its efforts in this regard have not succeeded as much as they ought to have. The agencies involved in the distribution of food to them also have not been as much helpful as they should be. There are not the necessary infrastructural facilities to make living less strenuous and hazardous for the tribals. The efforts of the government to alleviate the miseries of the tribals should not be underestimated, even when they are found to be inadequate.
The existing situation pertaining to all tribal issues requires a thorough investigation and an in-depth study. More particularly the food problems of the tribals and the role of the PDS in providing essential food items to them and help them to solve the problems of food requires immediate and detailed investigation. Supply of food items by the Government at subsidised rates through the PDS is linked with other problems of malnutrition and starvation. They are all closely linked with the problem of poverty of the tribals. The present research work entitled "Role of the Public Distribution System in the Economic Development of Tribals in the Prakasam and Nellore Districts of Andhra Pradesh" focuses on the measures it has been taking to meet the tribals' food requirements. It examines how efficient the PDS has been in providing the food requirements. It also takes into account the various issues of the tribals relating to their food requirements. The objective of the study is to get a clear insight into the major problems of food of the tribals and the contribution of the Public Distribution System in solving it. Based on practical observations during the field investigation, workable suggestions are also made, which it is hoped, would be found helpful in solving the problems by the Government and other related agencies which are involved in the PDS. Policy makers also for the promotion of Tribal Development may find them insightful and useful. It is hoped that the findings of research study would be helpful in improving the living conditions of the tribals.

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