



## **Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Tribals and the Role of NGOs: A Sociological Enquiry**

**Jalandhar Sahu<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract:**

The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the corona virus pandemic, is a global pandemic caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus. The novel virus was first identified from an outbreak in Wuhan China in December 2019. The world health organization declared a public health emergency of international concern on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March 2020. As of 2022, the pandemic had caused more than 509 million cases and 6.21 million deaths, making it one of the deadliest in history. Lives of tribals are closely associated with forest resources which is their dwelling place. This pandemic has been impacting on all aspects of their lives i.e. their health, livelihood, economic and socio-cultural life. Many other factors such as the lack of access to effective monitoring and early-warning systems, and adequate health and social services are helping to degrade their lives further. Different restrictions, lockdown to curb this infection has a significant impact on the above said aspects of Tribal lives unless they are not educated properly on how to manage with restrictions. Although many government bodies try to alleviate the livelihood of Tribal during COVID-19, the impact is not long sustained, effective and deep penetrated. COVID-19 took away the precious lives, devastating the livelihood and deteriorating the crumbling healthcare further of tribals. This paper focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on the tribals and the role of NGOs.

### **Introduction**

As per 2011 Census, the population of Scheduled Tribes is 104,281,034 accounting for 8.6 percent of the total population of India. Odisha occupies a special position in the tribal map of India. The total population of the state is 41,947,358 out of which the Scheduled Tribes population is **95,90,756** which is 22.85 percent. Again, the tribal population of Odisha is 9.17 percent of the total tribal population of the country. In this state Scheduled Tribes are distributed in almost all the districts including even the coastal belt. There are 62 tribal communities in the state of Odisha.

---

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor in Sociology (Guest), Department of Sociology, Vikram Dev University Jeypore, Koraput, Odisha

Most of the tribal are seen to be isolated, economically backward. They also experience poor infrastructure, and bad healthcare system. It is seen that scheduled tribe (ST) was 45.3% (rural) and 24.1% (urban) are poor as compared to the national average of 25.7% in rural and 13.7% in urban areas (2011–12, Data. Odisha has the third highest percentage of tribal population of the country standing at 9590756. All the 62 different tribal communities spread over 30 districts and 314 Blocks in Odisha. They constitute 22.85% of the total population of the state and contribute 9.17% to the total tribal population of the country (2011 Census data). . Lives of tribal are closely associated with forest resources which is their dwelling place. This pandemic has been impacting on all aspects of their lives i.e. their health, livelihood, economic and socio-cultural life. Many other factors such as the lack of access to effective monitoring and early-warning systems, and adequate health and social services are helping to degrade their lives further. Different restriction, lockdown to curb this infection has a significant impact on the above said aspects of Tribal lives unless they are not educated properly on how to manage with restrictions.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To understand the Impact of COVID- 19 pandemic on tribal in the study area
- To evaluate how the NGOs played their role during Covid 19 pandemic in the tribal area.

### **Methodology**

Generally, Methodology means the Study of method. Selection of proper research methodology for topical issues is always important while conducting the research. For the purpose of the study following methods, tools and techniques has been used.

**At the time of Research, the researcher follows some parts of Methodology those are: -**

- *Study*
- *Sampling*
- *Sample Size*
- *Tolls and Techniques*
- *Source of data*
- *Study area*

The present study conducted in 5 rural tribal villages from Jeypore blocks of Koraput District, of Odisha.

## **Sampling:**

Sampling is a pattern of population drawn from larger population. It is a representation of the large section of population only. It has basic characteristics of the population what is drawn. Thus, our concern in sampling is about what types of units (Person) will be interviewed/ Observed with how many units of what particular description and by what method should be chosen. For the purpose of the study purposive sampling from non-probability sampling and Simple Random sampling method from Probability sampling has been used.

### **Purposive Sampling**

It is something in which the researcher purposely chooses persons who, in his judgment about some appropriate characteristic required of the sample members. For the purpose of the study the researcher chose some selected NGOs who worked for tribal issues during Covid – 19.

### **Simple Random Sampling**

Random Sampling is a part of the sampling technique in which each sample has an equal probability of being chosen. A sample chosen randomly is meant to be an unbiased representation of the total population. 80 respondents from 5 villages randomly selected for data collection.

### **Sample Size: -**

Sample is the small representation of larger whole. For the proposed study 80 tribal individual respondents from 5 selected tribal villages of Jeypore blocks of Koraput has been interviewed.

### **Tools and Techniques**

An interview guide is prepared for the collection of data. With the help of this interview guide, a set of questions will be prepared to collect data from selected samples with the techniques like interview, observation, interview guide etc.

### **Interview guide**

An interview guide is a research instrument consisting if a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. The interview guide has been used for the purpose of data collection.

## **Interview**

An interview is a conversation between two people (the Interviewer and the Interviewee) where questions are asked by the interviewer to obtain information from the interviewee. In these study 80 respondents from 5 tribal villages have been interviewed for the purpose of data collection.

## **Sources of Collection (Primary & Secondary)**

Collection of data is the first basic step towards the statistical analysis of any research problem. In finding result and collection of resources data play important role. Data collection is depending upon the quality of questionnaire and researchers' communication skills as well presence of mind. The present research work has been based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary and secondary sources of data have been collected by the investigator through field survey. Such data are in raw form and refined before using it for the purpose of the study and the primary source of data has been collected through interview, observation etc. On the other hand, secondary data has been extracted from the existing published or unpublished sources that are from the data already collected by others.

## **Tribal livelihood in the study area:**

Specifying the context of the tribal livelihood it was emphasized that the tribes depend for their livelihood on their surrounding natural resources, the main source of livelihood of tribal is agriculture, minor forest produce Saal, mahua, Amla, Harra, Behera, char, Imli. Tendu leaves and vegetables etc

## **The impact of covid19 pandemic on tribal livelihood**

Odisha, one of the front runners among the states in India has been fighting COVID-19 pandemic. To curb the pandemic, many state governments including Odisha have been implementing lockdown and different restrictions at different times. This pandemic is heavily impacting the precious lives and livelihood of human beings across the globe. But this impact is pronounced for the people who live in forests and hill areas mainly- Tribal because of remoteness, ineffective planning and execution from government bodies. So, the lives of tribal are getting worse in passing days in terms of livelihood and health care issues. In addition, the restrictions and lockdown imposition to curb the infection has deteriorated the livelihood of the tribal further.

### **Loss of livelihoods from Minor Forest produce:**

The lock down has affected collection, use and sale of minor forest produces (MFP) or Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) by tribals and forest dwellers. The NTFP collection season from April to June provides major income support to tribals (almost 60 percent of annual collection takes place during this period) and, most unfortunately, it coincides exactly with the lockdown. Since it is forest dwelling women who are most actively engaged in collection and sale of NTFPs, the adverse impact on women forest dwellers if this season is missed, will be severe, and will have ripple effects on the general health and resilience of the entire family for the coming year.

### **Food insecurity, loss of livelihoods and employment**

Poor access of tribal and forest dwellers to Public Distribution System (PDS) is reported from across the states. Provisions under the PDS are not adequately provided or are provided only to card holders. Tribal migrants have particularly faced problems to access PDS. There is an acute need to universalise PDS and nutrition support. There are also reports that tribals and forest dwellers are not able to get direct cash benefits as either they don't have bank accounts at all or banks are located far away from their villages. Wage employment has been badly affected due to the lockdown measures. As per reports in many states work under MGNREGA has registered a record low during the lockdown.

### **Issues of migrant workers**

There are reports of tribal migrant workers being stuck in cities with either no ration or eating merely one meal a day. It is found that the tribal migrant workers stuck in cities due to the sudden lockdown are more vulnerable than those who are in their own villages. In the villages some support system exists in the form of community being together, surrounding ecosystems including forests and agricultural produce helping them cope better. Those who are stuck in the cities however are without any support system, shelter, food, or water and facing acute hunger and almost a famine like situation. In addition, they have to often face police atrocities and criminalization, causing mental and psychological distress.

### **COVID-19 cases in study area:**

In the study area after interviewing 80 respondents the researcher found that 9 respondents in study area infected by COVID-19 virus.

## **Steps taken by Government to boost the rural economy during COVID-19 pandemic**

Ministry of Finance, Government of India, on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020, announced relief package under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) for the poor to help them fight the battle against Corona Virus. The relief package announced includes, inter-alia:

- One-time ex-gratia payment of Rs 500 per month for 3 months (April, May and June 2020) to women Jan Dhan Account holders. In pursuance of this, Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) facilitated transfer of Rs. 30944.9 crore benefiting 20.64 crore women Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) account holders under PMGKY.
- Ex-gratia of Rs.1000 in two instalments (Rs.500/- each) to the existing old age, widow and disabled/Divyangjan beneficiaries of the schemes of National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP). A total of Rs. 2814.50 crore as ex-gratia was released in two tranches in April and May, 2020 to States/UTs under PMGKY for the existing 282 lakh beneficiaries of NSAP schemes.

## **Role of NGOS**

### **Sova's Engagement During Covid 19 Pandemic – 2020**

South Orissa Voluntary Action (SOVA) has been working for holistic development of the marginalized and tribal people in the district of Koraput by strengthening community action for better health, education, livelihood, governance and child rights and child protection. The outbreak of COVID in 2020 and subsequent lockdown in stages in order to contain the pandemic has created uncertainty and fear among the people. During this critical period SOVA has extended numerous supports in the form of awareness generation, distribution of sanitary kit, voluntary support to block and Panchayat administration, relief aid to the marginalized community and nutritious food for children to ensure their wellbeing.

As a strategy, SOVA intervened to provide interim relief measures to the vulnerable ones with coordination of Panchayat, Block and District administration and utilized its village level volunteers for uninterrupted support during the pandemic. The details of daily support were shared with the district administration through the authorized mail id provided by the district administration.

The various activities undertaken by the organisation are as follows:



## 1. **Awareness generation:**

The Community radio of SOVA was an effective tool in disseminating information on different government advisories during the time of pandemic in 2020. As community radio disseminate messages in local tribal language, its outreach and acceptance in 25 km radii covering a population about 1.25 lac rural and urban communities has proven to be indispensable. Looking at the low awareness level among the rural tribal mass, mobile awareness campaign in the villages by public announcement in tribal language focusing on the guideline of the government were conducted. Public announcement was done in Koraput municipality area, neighbouring blocks, NACs and rural villages where the messages of COVID were announced. Along with announcement through mike; demonstrative model was enacted by the volunteers on the five steps of safe hand wash, mask use and social distancing. Focus was given to strengthen disinfection of the mask or clothes used for covering the mouth and nose.

### **Relief measures for the Vulnerable Community:**

During the period of lockdown, it was found that there were many vulnerable people who either depended on daily wage or were out of work. Apart from them, a few vulnerable groups like the PLHIV (person living with HIV & AIDS), people living with disability, people suffering from Leprosy, migrant workers and female headed family who are burdened with the livelihood of their entire family. SOVA supported these people with dry ration so that they meet their daily essential need and have a minimum food security for another thirty days. Dry ration was provided to 4278 vulnerable families to support their food security.

### **Safety Kit for FLWs, Police, Traffic Personals and Quarantine Centres:**

During the pandemic, the frontline workers, police, traffic personals were engaged in providing services to the community at different vulnerable points. These functionaries needed special protection and safety. SOVA, in consultation with the ICDS and NHM office, provided safety kit (containing mask, soap, sanitizer and glove) to the FLWs service providers. Apart from the frontline workers, SOVA felt it necessary to support the traffic Police engaged in their daily routine. The Jail authority of Koraput and Jeypore sub division also requested SOVA to support the prison inmates for better hygiene and sanitation to which the organization responded in time. SOVA staffs disseminated awareness program in the jail to sensitize them on frequent hand wash, use of mask, social distancing and avoid spitting everywhere. They were also suggested to maintain distance from those inmates placed under quarantine within the premises. Safety Sanitary kits were provided to 4279 FLWs, Police, traffic personal and jailmates.



The organisation also provided *Sanitary Pad* to the adolescent girls in the rural areas so as to ensure that they do not deviate from their sanitary practices. Sanitary pad was provided to 3208 adolescent girls from rural areas and migrant families to ensure that they continue with the safe sanitary practices.

### **SPREAD Intervention**

The Novel Corona virus outbreak and subsequent lockdown from 24th night in India have direct impact on life and livelihood of vulnerable groups like tribals & Dalits of south Odisha. Though Central Government & Government of Odisha have declared 16 types of relief packages but few households are still deprived of these packages due to various administrative & procedural reasons like lack of Aadhar card for PDS, left out from the NFSA (National Food security Act), and left out monthly pension. With this backdrop SPREAD initiated the humanitarian support of dry ration & hygiene kits to the needy vulnerable groups in 717 villages in Koraput and Nabarangpur Districts during Covid 19 Outbreak covering 3326 households from 66-Grampanchayats, 5 blocks of Koraput, Nabarangpur districts. Most of the villages are inaccessible pockets of the districts. At the same time SPREAD organised hand washing campaign and social distancing practices in 717 villages through the village volunteers. Koraput & Nabarangpur district administration issued lock down pass to all of the 150 volunteers of SPREAD that made easy them to move around the villages for the support to most vulnerable groups. From the first week of the April SPREAD volunteers-initiated awareness on covid-19 & hand washing demonstration & social distancing.

### **Conclusion**

The importance of NGOs cannot be underestimated for five main reasons. First, they intimately understand the needs of the community and are better positioned to help during a pandemic. NGOs work with a range of vulnerable populations, have a deep understanding of their needs, have relationships with communities for years, and are better suited as the first point of contact and assistance during a pandemic. Second, NGOs have the ability to adapt to pandemic restrictions, allowing them to continue supporting vulnerable populations. They can also adapt their existing programs to meet the needs of the pandemic and the community context. Third, NGOs play a key role in raising awareness and educating the public about Covid-19, as they can use the networks of trust they have built within the communities they work with. They can do this through effective programs on the ground, text messages, WhatsApp and social media. This is especially useful in raising awareness of the importance of vaccination. Fourth, NGOs can tailor their outreach programs to meet the needs of the local communities they serve. This puts NGOs in a unique position as opposed to government programs that take a "one size fits all" approach. Fifth, NGOs can step



in when governments cannot and provide services that governments do not. In the case of Covid-19 and the current pandemic, masks, soap, water and disinfectants are essential. Most of these 'necessities' cannot be afforded by many sections of the population. Although government recommendations require wearing masks, how many can afford them? In cases like this, NGOs can step in and distribute masks for free to those who cannot afford them. The above examples illuminate how NGOs have done this. Finally, the biggest constraint that every NGO faces is raising money to carry out its activities. This is where the public and donations from large organizations come in handy. During this pandemic, we have seen large and real outreach programs to raise funds for Covid-19 relief that NGOs of all scales and sizes have been able to channel into relief programs.

## References

Prasad RS. Tribal Health and Medicines in India. New Delhi: Anmol Publications. 2012.

Singh SJ. Shifting cultivation in Odisha and Chhattisgarh: rich agro-biodiverse systems,” Jharkhand J Develop Manag Studies Under Risk. 2016; 14:7023-36.

Joshi H. COVID-19 lockdown dents the economy of India’s forest dwellers. Available at: <https://india.mongabay.com/>. Accessed on 20 November 2021.

Nayak AN. Primitive tribal groups of orissa: an evaluation of census data, Orissa review (census Special). Available at: <https://magazines.odisha.gov.in/>. Accessed on 20 November 2021.

Bag H. NTFP policy regime after fra: a study in select states of India, regional centre for development cooperation, Bhubaneswar. Available

Tripathy AK. COVID-19 and lockdown in india: challenges for the tribal economy of Odisha. J Human Social Sci Res. 2020; 2:185-92.

Joshi H. COVID-19 lockdown dents the economy of India’s forest dwellers. Available at: <https://india.mongabay.com/>. Accessed on 20 November 2021.

Kukreti I. COVID-19: Tribal Handicraft Worth Rs 100 cr Unsold’, Down To Earth. Available at: <https://www.down.toearth.org.in/>. Accessed on 20 November 2021.



Barik S. For Odisha tribals, physical distancing has been a way of life. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/>. Accessed on 20 November 2021.

Mahmood, Jemilah (2009). 'The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Pandemic Preparedness' S Rajaratnam School of International Studies

<https://government.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/governance/civil-society-the-third-pillar-of-strength-in-fight-against-coronavirus/75642349>

<https://www.rashtriyasewabharati.org/>

<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/rss-annual-report-reflects-a-year-of-pandemic-related-service-across-india-301253050.html>

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/rss-in-the-time-of-covid-from-plasma-donation-to-conducting-last-rites-6548122/>

<https://www.indiatoday.in/india-today-insight/story/how-the-rss-s-covid-relief-campaign-is-helping-thousands-1805971-2021-05-23>

<https://www.indiatoday.in/india-today-insight/story/how-the-rss-s-covid-relief-campaign-is-helping-thousands-1805971-2021-05-23>

<https://qz.com/india/2008877/how-hemkunt-foundation-helped-10000-indians-during-oxygen-crisis/>

<https://www.cry.org/protect-children-in-covid-world-resilience-recovery/>

<http://iskconfoodrelief.com/>

[www.sovakoraput.org](http://www.sovakoraput.org)

[www.spread.org.in](http://www.spread.org.in)

**Publisher's Note:** *The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editors, or the editorial board.*