

# Impact of Forest on Socio-Economic Development of Tribals in Balaghat District

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## ABSTRACT

The tribals in Balaghat district, Madhya Pradesh, India due to their primitive agricultural techniques, poor education status and poor population growth have been conferred the status of ‘Scheduled Tribe’ by the Government of India. The community bears the brunt of inequities, reflected in their poor nutritional and socioeconomic status. The in-depth interviews with the mothers of the children suffering from moderate to severe malnutrition and several other interviews were conducted along with the study of impact of forest with the key stakeholders like anganwadi workers, Integrated Child Development Scheme supervisors, Accredited Social Health Activists, public distribution system shopkeeper and registered medical practitioners. Interviews with the key informants were conducted in the Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh. It was found that dissatisfaction with public services and indifferent attitude of public servants resulting in poor uptake of public services further accentuated the problem. A qualitative enquiry into the issue of high and persistent levels of malnourishment among these tribal children revealed several aspects which quantitative method may not have captured. This implies that while framing a policy for improvement in the nutrition status in such population, a holistic approach is required instead of focussing on one aspect such as supplementation of nutrition alone.

**KEYWORDS:** tribals, Balaghat, forest, socio-economic, nutrition, interviews, policy, workers

## INTRODUCTION

The largest number of Tribals in Balaghat is found in Tribals in Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh. Tribals in Balaghat are connected to Indo-aryan Dravidian tribes who have unique socio-economic status and life style. The major part of Tribals in Balaghat earning is spent on food and clothing. In Tribals in Balaghat community, the family is small but the kinship structures are quite strong. They follow strict marriage rules such as incest in a taboo, no marriage with outsiders is permitted, and monogamy is the general rule. The Tribals in Balaghat have expertise in medicine and the priests have their special importance. Tribals in Balaghat lived in the forests and carry out shifting, slash and Burn cultivation for thousands of years without any influence or competition from other Indian residents.

The tribals in Balaghat practice shifting cultivation in the forest areas. They say they never ploughed the Earth, because it would be a sin to scratch the breast of their Mother, and they could never ask their Mother to produce food from the same Patch of earth time and time again-she would have become weakened. For this reason, they used to live a semi nomadic life, practice Bear, or ‘dahiya’ cultivation-out of respect, not aggression. These techniques rather than being a cause of deforestation have been shown to be effective conservation devices, employed for centuries by tribal peoples. Woods men and hunters, they were reluctant to do work for others. They saw themselves as people of the forest, who could only live on the produce of the forest. It was below their dignity to become a laborer. One of the tribes for whom tattooing is integral part of their lifestyle is the Baiga tribes.[1,2]

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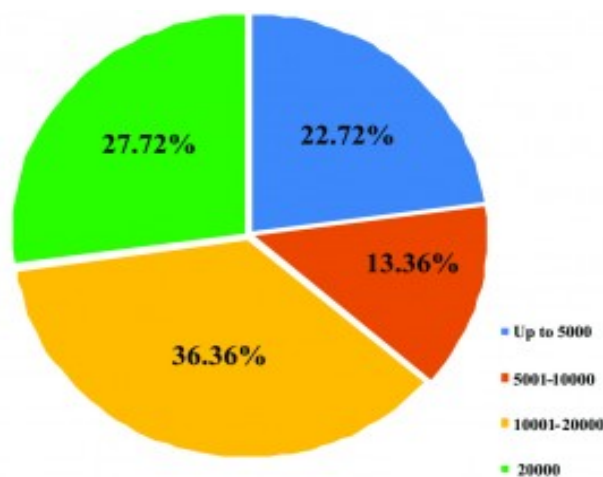
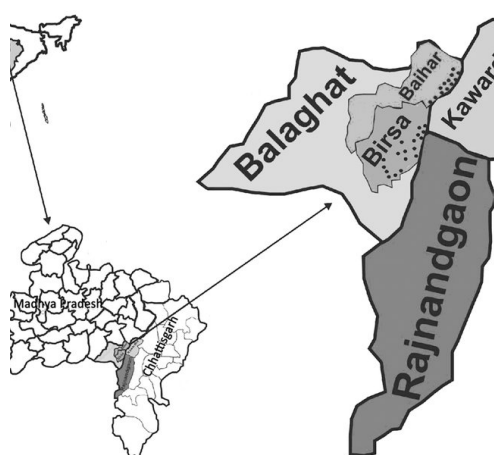




**Baiga tribe in Balaghat**

This Tribe inhabits the dense hilly forests in the eastern part of the Balaghat districts. A distinguishing feature of the Baiga tribe is that their women are famous for sporting tattoos of various kinds on almost all parts of their body. The baigas are strictly endogamous, though Baiga men who take non-Baiga wives may have their spouses admitted to the tribe by the performance of certain rites. The tribe is divided into several relatively endogamous jats. Each of these jats occupies a separate territory and there is considerable intergroup rivalry over the issue of superiority. The income of the Baiga comes from the manufacture of bamboo products, from the cultivation and sale of honey, and by hiring themselves out as laborers. The Baiga do not spin fibers or weave cloth. Clothing is purchased in local markets. Few implements are manufactured by Baiga artisans. Iron implements such as the axe (tangia), sickle (hassia), arrowheads, digging tools (kudari and sabar), wood plane (basula). The ceremony described above may be performed once in a lifetime. A less elaborate ceremony called the haldipani or churipairana marriage may be performed more than once. The latter ceremony is roughly equivalent to marriage in a registry office. The Baiga themselves are Bhumiara or are a Munda or a Kolarian people located in the central highlands of India. The name Baiga means Sorcerer, medicine man.

As India sought Independence from British rule, mythological traditions about Mahatma Gandhi began to emerge, superhuman status being ascribed to him by the Baiga. Nevertheless, Gandhi's attitude towards alcohol prohibition did result in some negative Baiga sentiment. Villages are located in areas convenient for cultivation, with consideration also being given to the aesthetic value and degree of isolation of the intended site. Village locations vary (Jungles, High hills, and valleys) but whenever possible, a location on top of a steep hill, with limited access by foot path is preferred. Men and Women share the responsibility for cooking (the husband assuming full responsibility when the wife is menstruating), gathering water, fishing, and wood cutting. Only men are allowed to hunt, and women are not permitted to make khumris or thatch roofing for houses.



**Lac producers in Balaghat**

The main problems the Baiga tribal face are that they possess small and uneconomical landholdings because of which their crop yield is less and hence they remain chronically indebted. Only a small percentage of the population participates in occupational activities in the secondary and tertiary sectors. Tribal government programmes have not significantly helped the tribal's in raising their economic status. The British policy had led to ruthless exploitation of the tribal's in various ways as it favored the zamindars, landlords, moneylenders, forest contractors, and excise, revenue and police officials. About 45 per cent of the tribal's are engaged in cultivation and most of them are landless and practice shifting cultivation. They need to be helped in adopting new methods of cultivation.

The government of India has recently started a unique scheme of establishment of Forest Development Agency. Under this scheme the registered Forest Development Agencies in each forest divisions receive forest development funds directly from the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India. This process of FDA Funding has replaced the old cumbersome process of fund flow via usual channel i.e. the state government, which used to consume lot of time and paper work. In the state of Madhya Pradesh 30 Forest Development Agencies in 30 Forest Divisions have been sanctioned and are operative.[3,4]

Many plants are conserved in their natural habitat by tribals due to magico - religious belief that they are habitat of god and goddess. The tribal culture prevalent in tribal pockets in Central India has been recorded in Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh. The survey study reveals that plants and flowers have a profound influence on them. Tribals worship trees and flowers as they believe that God and Goddesses reside in them. A list of such plants is presented in table -1

**Table 1: List of plants worshiped and conserved by tribals on account of magico - religious belief.**

S. No	Local Name	Vernacular Name	Scientific Name	Family Name	Name of God and Goddess residing in plants
1	Aam	Amra	<i>Mangifera indica</i> Linn.	Anacardiaceae	Lord Vidhyadhara
2	Arjun	Arjun	<i>Terminalia arjuna</i> W & A	Combretaceae	Lord Brahma
3	Bijapura	Nibu	<i>Citrus medica</i> Linn	Rutaceae	Lord Brahaspati
4	Bilva	Bel	<i>Aegle marmelos</i> Corr	Rutaceae	Lord Shiva
5	Nimba	Name	<i>Azadirachta indica</i> A. Juss.	Meliaceae	Serpent King
6	Basil	Tulsi	<i>Ocimum santum</i> L	Lamiaceae	Goddess Lakshmi
7	Baka	Agasti	<i>Sesbania grandiflora</i> (Linn) <i>pers</i>	Fabaceae	Lord Narayan
8	Karavira	Kerabi	<i>Nerium indicum</i> Mill	Apocynaceae	Lord Ganesh
9	Nilapadma	Kamal	<i>Nelumbi nucifera</i> Gaertn	Nymphaeaceae	Godess Ambika
10.	Sweta padma	Madar	<i>Calotropis gigantean</i> (L) R.Br	Asclepiadeceae	Lord Shiva

## Discussion

The socio-economic development for tribals in Balaghat by the government is :-

1. Capacity Building, Skill development, self-employment and alternate vocation training: These activities are proposed to be taken up in every forest village according to the micro plan of respective Forest Villages
2. Improvement in Agriculture: Providing irrigation water and simultaneously trapping rain water through stop dams, tanks etc. will definitely lead to rise in the water table and consequent increase in the resulting food, grain production of the respective forest village. At places lift irrigation schemes have also been proposed. Depending on the local condition land leveling and bunding has also been proposed.
3. Improvement in Energy Sector: The biogas is found to be most beneficial mode of energy production for the villagers. Therefore, attempt has been made to motivate the forest villagers to adopt bio-gas plants on a large scale. In addition to bio-gas attempts will also be made to popularize and install the improved chullhas together with Solar Cookers.
4. Improvement in access to drinking water: Other than the rain water trapping construction and repair of hand pumps and dugwells has been proposed.

5. Improvement in access to health services: Since, the basic responsibility of providing health services is that of the health department of the state. It is proposed in the project to construct some primary health centre buildings at suitable sites.
6. Improvement in access to school education: Since basic responsibility of providing education to the villagers is that of the education department of the state, it is proposed to construct school buildings as primary infrastructure where ever they are not existing.
7. Improvement in access to road communication: The year round working roads are the only needs through which the forest villages get connected to the main stream of development. Keeping this in mind construction and upgradation of the roads and also construction of culverts is proposed at appropriate sites.
8. Strengthening of social and democratic structure in the forest villages: Depending on the site requirement construction of community centres is proposed where villagers can organise their community meetings and also the cultural events. The construction of anganwadi centres will help in the upliftment of women folk. The anganwadi centres will also be of use in imparting vocational training to the women folk.
9. Forestry Activities: According to the project formulation guidelines some proposals can also be included in the project upto a limit of 15% of the total allocation for the respective forest village. Within this limit following to forestry operation have been included.[5,6]
10. Protection measures: Here villagers will be involved in the fire protection and forest protection measures through their respective forest committees. In this way the villagers will not only involved in the process of forest protection but will also get employment through their forest committees.
11. Demarcation: The condition of boundary pillars and boundary lines is not as satisfactory as desired. Therefore the villagers will be involved through their respective committees to undertake the construction of boundary pillars and cleaning on such demarcation lines which will also act as fire barriers. Other forestry activities such as plantation, rehabilitation of degraded forest, rehabilitation of degraded bamboo forest etc have not been proposed because of the short duration of the project, fund limit and working plan prescriptions regarding the areas where such forest villages are located. As far as the forestry activity of protection and demarcation is concerned these are fundamental and basic necessities of the forest management in any given area.

The ethnic and indigenous people have to depend upon several wild species for fruits, seeds, bulbs, roots and tubers which are used for edible purposes. The same is presented in table -2

**Table 2: Plants conserved by tribals for edible purpose**

S. No	Scientific Name	Local Name	Family Name	Uses
1	<i>Aegle Marmelos</i>	Bel	Rutaceae	Fruits are roasted and eaten
2	<i>Amorphosphallus paenonflodium</i>	Suran	Araceae	Petiole/ Bulb as vegetable
3	<i>Achyranthus Asper</i>	Chirchita	Amranthaceae	Tender shoots as vegetable
4	<i>Bauhinia Purpuea</i>	Keolar bhaji	Convolvulaceae	Leaves, Flowers, Seeds as Vegetable
5	<i>Bahhinia vahlii</i>	Sehar	Ceasalpiniaceae	Leaves as Vegetable
6	<i>Dioscorea alta</i>	Dudhia aru	Dioscoreaceae	Tubers as Vegetable
7	<i>Curculigo Orchioides</i>	Kali musli	Amaryllidaceae	Roots and Tubers as vegetable
8	<i>Xylia xylocrpa</i>	Jambu	Mimosaceae	Seeds asvegetable
9	<i>Entada pursaetha</i>	-	Mimosaceae	Seeds as vegetable
10	<i>Dioscorrea bulbifera</i>	ratalu	Dioscoreae	Tubers as vegetable

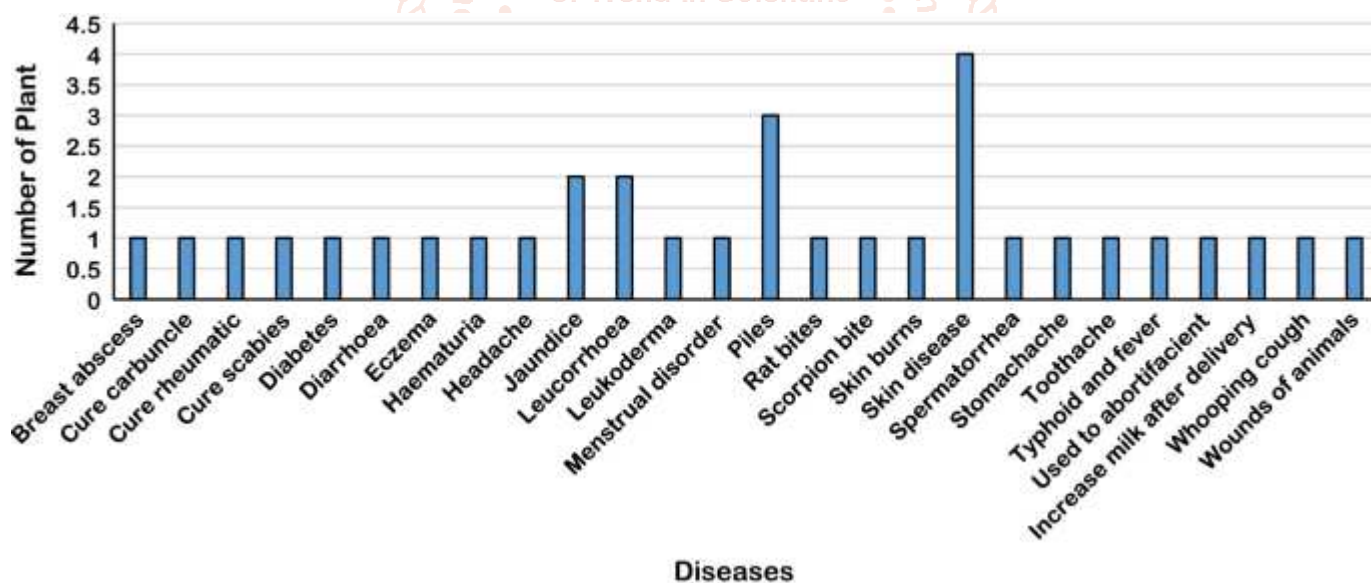
Tribals follow environmental conservation rule in harvesting edible plants which establishes ecological prudence. Tubers of edible plants like those of *Dioscorea* spp. are harvested by tribals when the leaves of the vine turns yellow and has physiologically matured. The wild tubers are dig carefully avoiding damage to associated species.

## Results

The word “tribe” means a unit of social organization, especially among primitive people consisting of a group of people claiming a common ancestry, usually sharing a common culture. They speak a language of their own, and have succeeded in preserving their social customs, artistic traditions and religious beliefs to a large extent. Tribes

in general have not been able to get rid of their socio-economic backwardness in most parts of India. The word "Tribal" is used in India to refer to inhabitants known elsewhere as "indigenous". British ethnographers classified tribal as "animists". As per the National Census, they are classified as "aboriginals" and are listed as 'tribes. The Hindi word for tribal is Adivasi, meaning "ancient inhabitants." Madhya Pradesh has a substantial tribal population. The Scheduled Tribe population in the state of Madhya Pradesh is 153.16 lakhs (as per Census 2011) which is 21.10 percent of the total population of the State. Hence, many people in Madhya Pradesh belong to the Scheduled Tribes category. The differences in the tribal community, spread over in various parts of the state, can be seen clearly not only on the basis of their heredity, lifestyle and cultural traditions, but also surfaces in their social and economic structure, religious beliefs, their language, and speech. Due to the different linguistic, cultural and geographical environment that they face, and its peculiar complications, the diverse tribal world of Madhya Pradesh has been largely cut-off from mainstream development. The tribes of Madhya Pradesh have preserved their culture and tradition despite outside cultural influence. Their culture is distinguished by the composite remains of the Scythian and Dravidian culture. The tribes of Madhya Pradesh are widely oriented towards religion and spiritualism. Their prevalent religion is Animism. Although, under the influence of modern-day trends and tradition, these tribes in the state of Madhya Pradesh have adopted other religious practices too, namely Christianity, Jainism and Islam. Quite a number of tribes in the state have also taken up the religious practice of Hinduism. The tribal population of Madhya Pradesh has carried on the practice of farming and cultivation. In order to supplement their income, some members of these tribal groups become labourers in factories, industries etc. To preserve the cultural heritage of these tribes, the central and the state governments are running various policies and programmes for their upliftment. In Madhya Pradesh, many programmes that aim to improve the overall health and socio-economic status of tribal people are under way.[7,8]

Nutritional evaluation of about 200 wild species of edible purpose has also been carried out in different nutritional laboratories of CSIR, New Delhi. These plants have been collected from tribal areas especially Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh. Due to high nutritional value of the most of the plant, it was observed that the tribals who still live in undisturbed forest areas and practice traditional food habits (consumption of wild cultivars and food varieties in forest from different season) are found to be more healthy and free from diseases



**Table 3 - Plants Growing in Sacred Groves in Balaghat forest area**

S. No	Name of plant	Uses
1	<i>Butea monosperma</i>	Medicinal, Dye
2.	<i>Cordia dichotoma</i>	Food, Medicinal
3.	<i>Ravuolfia serpentina</i>	Medicinal
4.	<i>Alstonia scholaris</i>	Medicinal
5.	<i>Helicteres isora</i>	Medicinal
6.	<i>Boswellia serrata</i>	Medicinal
7.	<i>Calotropis gigantean</i>	Medicinal
8.	<i>Carissa congesta</i>	Medicinal

- |     |  |               |
|-----|--|---------------|
| 9.  | <i>Diopyros Montana</i>                  | Medicinal     |
| 10. | <i>Bambusa arundinacea</i> (wild bamboo) | Miscellaneous |

Madhya Pradesh is home to 46 distinct tribes. Of these, 3 (Bharia, Baiga and Sahariya) have been classified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG's). A Tribal community is labelled as being PVTG if, its development indices are particularly low. They are usually characterised by the virtue of practising primitive agricultural techniques, very low literacy levels and negligible population growth. Below are the details of major tribal communities found in the state. Gond tribe stands First in terms of population not only in the state but also among the other major tribes of India. They are mainly found in the Vindhyan hills and Satpura mountain range. The main sub-tribes of Gond are Pardhan, Agariya, Ojha, Nagarchi, among others. Gonds mostly live in the jungles and the hills, working in agricultural fields and practising hunting. They collect wild fruits and herbs from the jungle for their livelihood. Bhil tribe is the third largest tribe in India and, second largest in Madhya Pradesh. The habitat of Bhil tribes is found mostly in Dhar, Jabua and West Nimar districts. The sub-races of this tribe include Barela, Bhilala, and Pataliya among others. They follow Hinduism and worship Lord Shiva, Lord Rama, Lord Ganesha, and Lord Hanuman. At the time of Holi festival, they celebrate the 'Goal Gadhara' festival. Kol tribe mainly inhabits the Rewa division and Jabalpur district of the state. They are also called Kolerian and Mundari tribes. The sub-races of this tribe are Rohiya and Rothail. They are mainly engaged in agriculture. Apart from these, there are some other tribal communities who also dwell in the region, namely the Pao tribe and Sahariya tribe. These tribes reside in the Shivpuri and Morena districts of Madhya Pradesh. The Sahariya tribe mainly worships Goddess Durga. A majority of the Pao tribes are thought to have originated from a good-willed dragon that also safeguards them in times of need. Mouth-watering dishes, multihued festivals, and a variety of religious exercises enable the rituals and culture of the Sahariya tribes to flourish. The Korku tribe mainly inhabits the Betul, Chhindwara, Khandwa and Burhanpur districts of Madhya Pradesh. They speak the korku language and identify as a hunter-gatherer community. They possess rich indigenous knowledge and have vibrant social systems. However, in recent years, they have been associated with very poor livelihood indicators owing to declining natural resource bases. The Bharias are a PVTG and reside in Patalkot of Tamia Block, Chhindwara district. They mainly depend on land and forest produce for their subsistence and are usually landless. For a very long time until recently, Patalkot was totally inaccessible by road. Bharias have good knowledge of ancient herbs and medicinal plants that grow along their valley. The Baiga tribe is one of the most ancient tribes which reside mainly in the forest. This tribal group is reckoned as a PVTG and is found in the Bajag block of the Dindori District in the state. The word Baiga literally means 'medicine man'. They practice shifting cultivation and speak many languages including Hindi, Marathi and Baigani.[2]

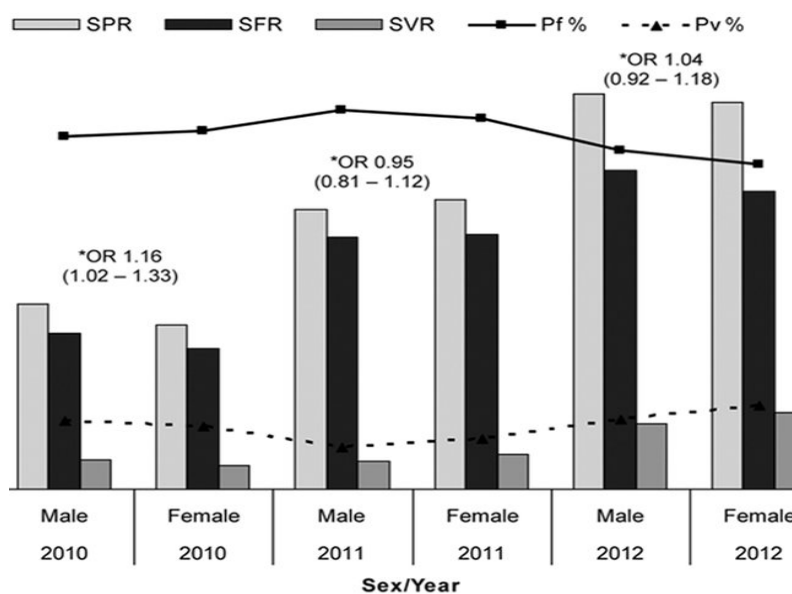
There are many sub-races within the Baigas viz. Bijhwar, Narotia and Nahar among others. Boneya tribe are engaged in hunting-gathering and converse in the Austro-Asiatic language along with Hindi and Marathi. They are also identified by different names like Korki, Kurku, Bopchi, Ramekhera, Kuri, Kurku-Ruma and form a major part of Madhya Pradesh's population. Damaria tribe has an enriched heritage of cultural embellishment as highlighted in wedding rites, dwellings, clothes, etc. This tribal group shares a close affinity with the Rajputs and exhibits brilliance in arts and craft. In Madhya Pradesh, the Dhanwar tribe has taken up several occupations, namely, hunting, food collection and working as agricultural labourers. They lead nomadic lives and rear cattle. This tribal group has developed its own cotton industry for betterment of livelihood. Kawar tribe are thought to have descended from the family line of the Kaurava rulers. Another tribal group is the Kharwar tribe. As per some scholars, they fall into the Dravidian family group. There are some famous myths regarding their growth and origin. Some hold the belief that this tribal group has a kinship with Suryavanshi Rajputs. A multitude of Kolam tribes, also identified as Kolamboli, Kulme and Kolmi, has settled down in every corner of the state. As per their past history, they worked as priests in the 12th Century. They are engaged in food collection, farming and other similar activities to meet their regular needs. The Majhi tribe makes boats in order to sustain their livelihood. Birhors live in small settlements at the edge of the forest. They are expert hunters and practice barter till date. They display mixed beliefs including animism, animatism and naturalism. Pahari Korbas live deep in forest areas and collect forest produce, fish, and hunt for a living. They have a rich heritage and regularly display it in their festivals, fairs and dance forms. Many tribes are found across multiple states in India. One such tribe is Abujh Maria, a sub-tribe of the Gonds. They live a life of complete isolation from the outside world and mainly practice slash and burn agriculture. Their main output is millet and rice. They are also one of the only few tribes that have managed to keep their quintessential culture alive. Kamar tribe mainly lives in the Rewa district of Madhya Pradesh. They make a livelihood by making bamboo handicrafts. Farming is practised as a secondary occupation. The tribal communities engage in livelihood practices that are heavily dependent on forest land, it is

pertinent to note their concentration in such areas. Failure in doing so may lead to further marginalisation and loss of livelihood for them. The following map illustrates the distribution of tribal communities in the state while also showcasing the natural landscape of the state, at the district level.

Ownership of land is a symbol of wealth and prosperity across cultures and communities. Madhya Pradesh is no exception, because tribes are usually characterized as hunter-gatherers who are mainly landless/hold little land, it is important to know just how many of them depend on land for a living. Land also serves as an excellent asset, which provides the owner a security in times of distress.[1]

The tribal population bears a disproportionate burden of communicable diseases, primarily those that are often referred to as diseases of poverty and underdevelopment. These include malaria, tuberculosis, skin infections, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV, typhoid, cholera, diarrhoeal diseases, hepatitis and viral fevers. Dengue is widely prevalent in several tribal areas in Madhya Pradesh.

The high incidence of malaria in tribal areas is due to a variety of factors including environmental risk, both in terms of vector ecology and personal exposure, geographic challenges to access of health services, coupled with poverty and limited health resource settings- fuelling an ongoing epidemic.



▷ (95% CI) of malaria prevalence between male Vs female

A study on malaria control, conducted by NIRTH in 2016 recommended that Mass screening and treatment may be an effective tool to control malaria in a densely forested, hard to reach areas with high and perennial malaria transmission in the district of Balaghat. The respondents of the study area stated that weakened immune response due to anaemia and malnourishments, coupled with poor sanitation and hygiene conditions; may have contributed to their suffering from recurrent episodes of infections, more than their non-tribal counterparts.

Tribal children are the worst sufferers of diarrheal diseases, especially due to the beliefs and practices regarding treatment seeking by their parents. In an ICMR led study, during May 2004 to April 2005, 1236 episodes of diarrhea were recorded in 580 children, giving an incidence of 2.13 episodes of diarrhea per child per year in tribal dominated villages near Balaghat

Being under-privileged and impoverished in the society, tribal communities are prone to various

infections including tuberculosis. According to a NIRTH study in 2015, tuberculosis was found to be a major public health problem among tribals of Balaghat. In case of Madhya Pradesh, disease burden study which calculates crude cancer in terms of Disability Adjusted Life Year (DALY) observed the highest DALY rate for lip and oral cavity cancer. For the rate of cervical cancer, MP was among the top five states in India in 2016. In terms of crude female death rate due to breast cancer, MP rank high. NFHS 2015-16 finds large scale prevalence of Asthma and thyroid (among men) among the tribes of Madhya Pradesh.[3]

### Conclusions

About 80% of the manganese production in India comes from Balaghat District. The recently discovered copper deposit at Malanjkhanda is regarded as the largest in the country. Bauxite, Kyanite, Marble, Dolomite, Clay and limestone are the other main minerals of the district. In 2006 the Ministry of Panchayati Raj named Balaghat one of the country's

250 most backward districts (out of a total of 640). It is one of the 24 districts in Madhya Pradesh currently receiving funds from the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF). About 80% of the district's area is covered with forest. It is also the District of Madhya Pradesh which has maximum Forest Density. Teak (*Tectona grandis*), sal (*Shorea robusta*), bamboo and saja are the main trees. Fauna includes tiger, leopard, bear, nilgai, deer, and gaur, and birds like peacock, Red Bulbul and Koyal. Kanha National Park (Mukki) lies in the district. Forests have laid a wonderful impact on socio-economic development of Balaghat. [8]

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