



Short Communication

Possible consequences of recent Supreme Court Eviction order on folk medicinal knowledge-A statistical analysis

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Abstract

In this work, we have presented the significance of the socio-cultural association of tribes with the forest. The 13th February 2019 Supreme Court(SC) order addressing the eviction of ~ 11 lakh of tribes and other forest dwellers under the Forest rights act (FRA) 2006 spread threat to the lives and health of these communities. Since, tribes/forest dwellers manage, protect, and nurture the forests where they reside for ages; they are the better and prime entity to look after their environments and have knowledge and motivations to protect forests than anyone else. This order may detriment the traditional knowledge of folk medicine and may disrupt well-established socio-cultural-ecological bonding. We have also given a statistical overview of total forest land, rural tribal population, and claim rejections under FRA-2006 along with quantitative descriptions of traditional medicinal knowledge hold by indigenous people in different sectors of India.

Keywords: Forest dwellers; tribal people; forest rights act 2006, Supreme Court forest eviction order; traditional medicines.

Introduction

There are 698 Scheduled Tribes spread all over India (Ref.- National Policy on Tribals-Draft), and more than half of them live within or close to dense forests and depend almost entirely on forests for subsistence. A collective term "Indigenous People" (or "Adivasis" and the constitutional term is "Scheduled Tribes") has been referring to these forest dwellers. Their experience unveils from the traditional irrigation systems (for example water harvesting methods, making of cane bridges in hills, pastoral farming), traditional health care system (use of ethno-zoological and ethnobotanical medicinal plants), and precision in the meteorological estimation, etc. With the advent of urbanization and industrialization, the government imposes compulsory acquisition of land for construction of dams, mining, national parks, and wild animal conservations. As a result of forced eviction, about 85 lakh tribal has escaped from the forest and their traditional abodes until 1990. Few individual cases are the Baiga communities from the Kanha Tiger Reserve during the year 2014, evictions of the ~ 156 families from Thatkola and Sargodu Forest Reserve in Karnataka and more than 1,000 people of Bodo, Rabha and Mishng tribal communities from the Orange National Park, Assam¹. The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution deprives tribes to control and ownership of natural resources and land essential for their livelihood. Thus forced eviction itself violates their rights given in Constitution.

There exist a paradox between two aspects that are the forest-dwelling community could play a vital role in sustainable forest

management and conservationists who firmly assume tribal communities to be deleterious for the wildlife and ecosystem². Government's policies portray themselves as more capable and reliable than local communities at protecting the national interest. However, the cultural faiths and customs in India are based upon the relationship between people and eco-system, particularly the trees and water resources. Many trees and flowers are thought to be a symbol of God and Goddesses by Tribal. For examples; *Ficus religiosa* (Local name: Peepal), *Elaeocarpus* (local name: bel, rudraksha), *Mangifera indica* (local name: Mango), *Saraca asoca* (local name: Asoka), *Neem* (*Azadirachta indica*), banyan (*Ficus bengalensis*), bel (*Aegle marmelos*) are of religious sanctity among tribes. The blackbuck in the Ganjam district of Odisha³ and the tiger in the Biligirirangana Hills Tiger Reserve of Karnataka⁴ are two community based program which confirm the key role of forest dwellers for the sustainable forest management.

Materials and methods

The data of forest land and geographic area of chosen states have obtained from the link: <http://niti.gov.in> and data for the tribal population have downloaded from the website: <http://tribal.gov.in> and <https://www.census2011>.

The information regarding claims on forest land by tribes, and other community as on 31 March 2019 is accessible at the website of the Ministry of tribal affairs, Government of India.

It is here imperative to specify that those states have prohibited in the investigation where no scheduled tribes exist, or the whole land of the state is community land.

Results and discussion

This work focuses on the Supreme Court order on 13th February 2019 related to the eviction of tribes from forest land whose claims rejected under FRA-2006. After widespread criticism and protests from tribal groups and conservation scientists, and a petition by the Centre, the Supreme Court temporarily stayed its order on February 28, 2019. However, the tribal community is living under threat to forced evictions despite their inhabitants at forest land for centuries. Out of the total 42,87,853 applications of individuals and communities received up to 31

March 2019, about 17,53,504 claims have rejected. Thus, 41.37 % of tribal are still under threat of forced eviction. Figure-1 shows the state-wise statistic of rejected claims. The red and blue bar in Figure-1 gives the number of claims received and the number of claims rejected, respectively, in each state under the Scheduled Tribes and other forest dwellers Act, 2006 as on 31 March 2019.

Figure-1 clearly shows a large number of rejections (in some states, it's nearly 50%). Thus, the majority of tribes and forest dwellers are under forced eviction threat from the land where they have been living for the centuries. The population of rural tribes in each state has shown in Figure-2.

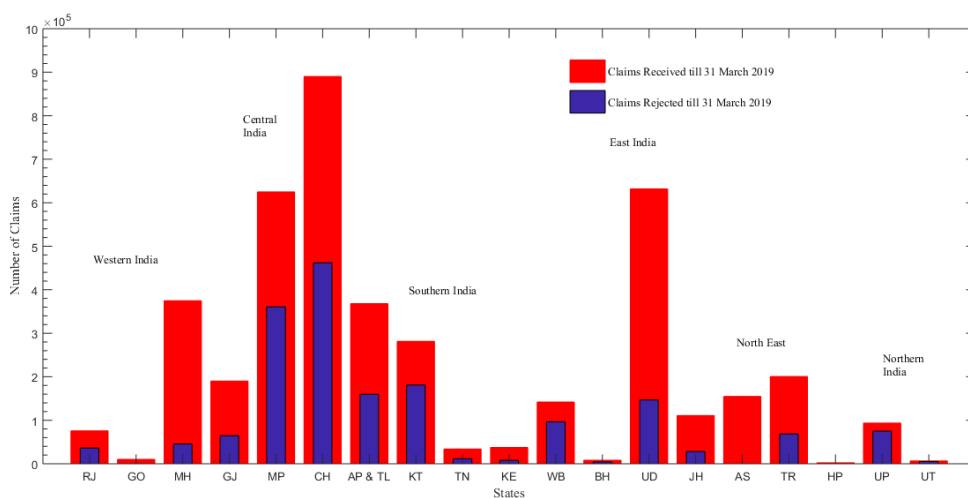


Figure-1: The statistics of total claims submitted and rejected by scheduled tribes and other forest dwellers under the forest right Act, 2006 as on 31 March 2019.

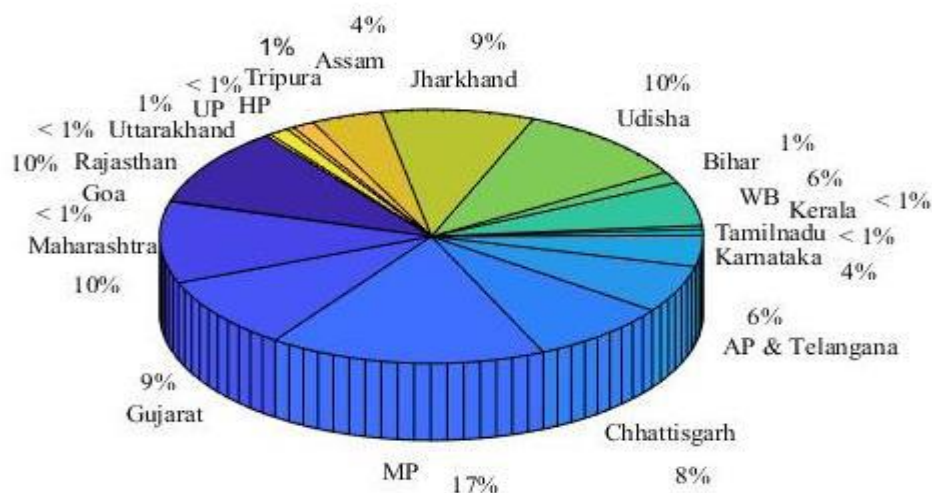


Figure-2: State wise statistics of rural scheduled tribal population for the chosen states of the Republic of India.

Figure-2 shows that the states of central India (Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh) and western India (Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Goa) are populated principally with tribes. Comparing Figure-2 with Figure-1, it has observed that the number of rejections is also higher for these states except Goa and Maharashtra. Figure-2 shows that the East Indian states Odisha and Jharkhand also accommodate the larger rural tribal population. Though, the claims rejected for these two states are ~ 25%. The rural tribal population is ~10 % in the south Indian states, and the rejected claims are roughly half of the total submitted claims. Thus, our analysis reveals that the tribes and forest dwellers are struggling for their permanence on native land where they have been domiciling for centuries. The forest land spread over chosen states along with the total geographic area of states is shown in Figure-3. Figure-3 shows a higher forest area for the Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, joint Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana) and Odisha. Interestingly, it can be seen from Figure-2 that these are highly tribal populated states too. Thus shows that the forests are more where tribal/forest dwellers reside.

Thus, our analysis extends the view that tribal and forest dwellers are blessing for forest conservation. It is because of their cultural faith with nature. Forest dwellers have settled a cultural setting with the ecosystem for their survival that ultimately creates a system of knowledge around communities which includes the use of plant-based medicines, cosmetics, no-wood forest products, and handicrafts. Thus, from thousands of

years, tribal people have explored the hidden medicinal properties of plants/trees to cure various diseases. The tropical, subtropical, temperate and alpine topography of north-east India reflects the occurrence of diverse type of medicinal plants and almost all forest land of north-east populated by ~200 tribes of different ethnic group who have indigenous health knowledge^{5,6}. The eastern zone is rich in minerals, flora, and fauna in dense forests and it is also an inhabitant of the tribal communities who uses various parts of plants and trees to cure disease in human as well as in animals and their brief account could found elsewhere⁷⁻¹⁰. Use of herbal plants by forest dweller communities in north India have studied and reported by many researchers¹¹⁻¹³. The uses of a variety of plant species belonging to different genera and families among tribal communities in south India have reported by many researchers¹⁴⁻²⁰. Central India covering Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh is a vast landlocked expanse of scrub-covered hills and sun-parched plains that make up one-third of India's forests fascinating for its principally populated tribal groups. The number of land claims by forest dwellers and tribal communities of central India rejected is 8,22,424 that is nearly half (~ 47%) of total claims rejected. Thus, the tribes of central India have a high threat of eviction from their native land. A number of workers have reported the folk medicine practiced by tribes of central India²¹⁻²³. In western India (Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan) many researchers have explored the ethnomedicinal uses of plants/trees by tribes and their close relationship with forest²⁴⁻²⁹.

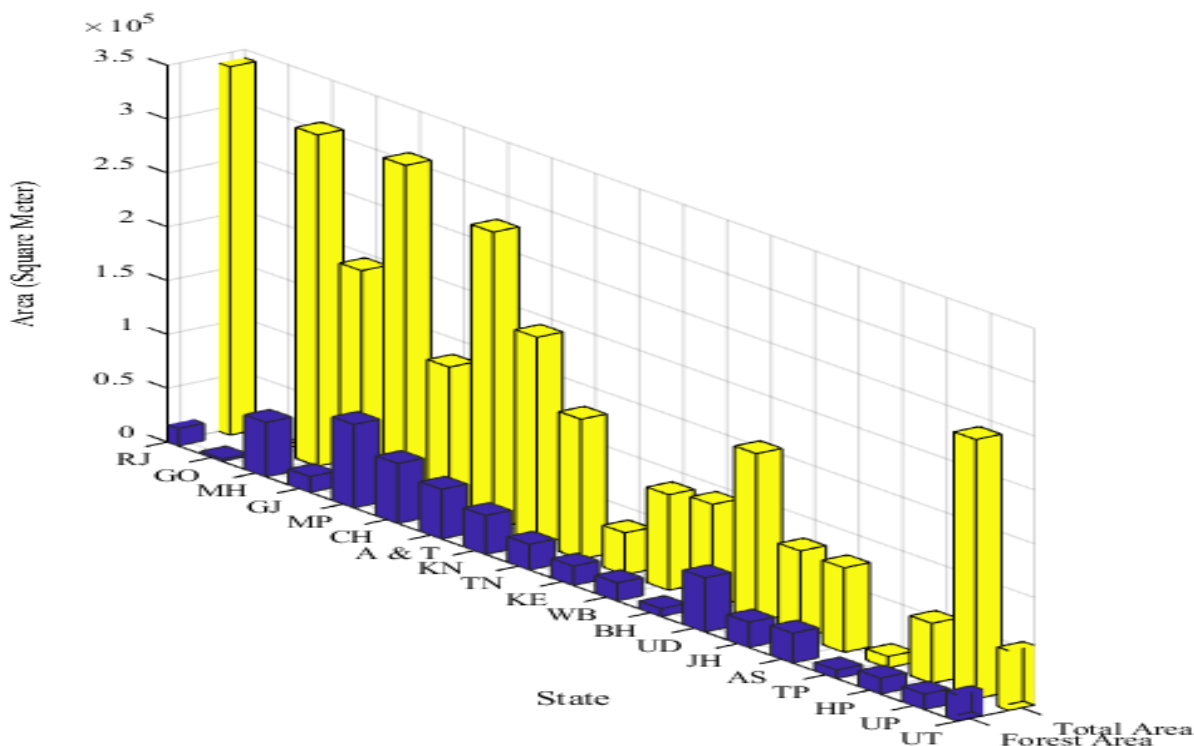


Figure-3: Statistics of area of forest land and total geographic land of chosen states of Republic of India. The yellow bar shows the total geographic area and blue bar shows the area of forest land.

Thus, there is a strong bonding between tribes and forests. The forced eviction of tribes from forest influence not only their livelihood but also the rich indigenous ethno medicinal knowledge would affect. A new forest conservation approach needs to draft by giving equal weight to the national interest and rights of the tribe.

Conclusion

In this work, we have statistically looked upon the rural tribal population, forest area and number of claims of tribes and other forest dwellers on forest land rejected under FRA-2006. Our analysis shows that the forests are more where tribes reside. The crux of the study is that tribal communities are beneficial for sustainable development and forest conservations. From the earlier studies based upon indigenous medical knowledge hold by various ethnic groups and the number of claims rejected under FRA-2006, we have expressed concern about the possible consequences on a rich knowledge of medicinal plants/trees that may befall due to the eviction of ethnic people from forest. The said eviction orders if further actualize, a well-established socio-cultural-ecological coupled system of tribes will break and numerous impacts would show up. The detriment influence on traditional folk medical knowledge is one of them. It is therefore essential to re-examine the rejected claims and award candidates to guarantee their normal rights.

Acknowledgment

The data presented in the work were obtained from the website of Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, and National Institution for Transforming India, Government of India.

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