

## Madhya Pradesh: a role model for tribal development

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The need for tribal development has been made out to be an incomprehensible art and science, reserved only for a few who can afford to graduate from the ivy leagues of the West. Not so in the heart of India, Madhya Pradesh. The speed at which the Madhya Pradesh government is working towards the upliftment of the tribal community is a testament to its focus and determination on creating Atmanirbhar Madhya Pradesh.

Madhya Pradesh is known as the heartland of tribal India. The tribal community makes up for one-fifth of the state's population. It boasts of evergreen forests, a vast array of flora and fauna, rich water resources like lakes and rivers, abundant reserves of minerals and precious metals. Over one-fourth of the area of the state is covered with forests. According to the estimates of the Forest Survey of India, published in the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2017, the total forest cover of the state is 77,414 sqm., which is 25.11 per cent of the total land area. This has increased by 68.49 sq km since 2017. This forest cover provides conducive ecosystem for the tribal communities to thrive naturally.

But the Madhya Pradesh government has made consistent progress over the last 17 years to mainstream the tribal communities. As a result, the state budget for FY 2020-2021 stands at Rs 8,085.99 crore. This budget is 10 times more than the one in 2003-04, right before the BJP government came into power in the state. The state government has also provided stability to the tribal community by initiating a campaign to disburse forest rights letters. So far, over 2,50,000 tribals have received the forest rights letters. Additionally, the government has reviewed and validated over 34,900 claims under the Forest Rights Act in the state, which had been rejected in the first phase of the campaign.

By kickstarting the 'Mukhyamantri Yuva Udyami Yojana,' the government is encouraging the spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation among Madhya Pradesh youth. This scheme is like a golden opportunity for the tribal youth of 18 to 40 years to start their own business. Under this scheme, the state government will provide subsidies for loans up to two crore. The successful implementation of this scheme will uplift the tribal community financially, and enable them to stand on their own feet,

eventually, helping others from their own communities to become a part of India's economic growth story.

The Madhya Pradesh Government has made considerable gains in building a sturdy health infrastructure for tribals. It has initiated the construction of new medical colleges in the tribal-dominated districts of Sheopur and Mandla, with financial assistance from the central government. On November 15, 2021, it launched the Hemoglobinopathy Mission to arrest the threat of blood-related diseases such as sickle cell anaemia, thalassemia, hemophilia. This mission will provide the tribal beneficiaries with free treatment for any such disease. Under the National Food Security Act, the government is consistently ensuring adequate nutrition for two lakh 25 thousand women of the special backward tribes of Baiga, Bheria and Sahariya. In this direction, it has directly deposited more than Rs 394 crore in their accounts in the past 16 months.

The tribal community has been an integral part of Madhya Pradesh. To honour their contributions, the state government dedicated 15 November 2020 to celebrate 'Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas' in the honour of the birth of Bhagwan Birsa Munda - the great freedom fighter and tribal icon. The Modi government took a note of this move and declared this as a day of national importance to celebrate the contributions of the tribal community, in a recent Union Cabinet decision. The Madhya Pradesh government has also decided to celebrate 4 December 2021, as Balidan Diwas. On this day, the state will celebrate the sacrifice of Tantya Mama, who is also known as the India Robinhood.

Such decisions provide a dual benefit. Firstly, they educate the future generations about the contributions of the brave tribal leaders like Birsa Munda, Tantya Mama, Khajya Nayak, Bhima Nayak, Rani Durgavati, Shankar Shah, Raghunath Shah, and many others. Secondly, they honour the tribal community, helping them assimilate in the mainstream of the society much more comfortably.

The state government has launched Devaranya Scheme to ensure that tribals continue to remain connected with Mother Nature for their subsistence, but more profitably. This scheme aims to achieve the twin objectives of improving people's health and livelihood of tribals, with an added benefit of environmental conservation. Under the scheme, the state government will create a complete value chain for the production and distribution of AYUSH medicines. Medicinal plants will be cultivated in reserved lands in tribal areas. The government will also establish more than 360 new AYUSH health and wellness centers in the state, along with AYUSH Super Specialty Hospitals in Indore and Bhopal. It will also upgrade Ayurvedic and Unani in the state. The boost to AYUSH and the tourism sector will open up new vistas of employment for the tribals.

With a view to cementing the commitment to safeguard the interests and traditions of the tribal community, the state government has strengthened tribal legislation. By implementing the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act 1996 in a phased manner, the Gram Sabha will be able to work effectively for tribal development.

Driven by the ideology of Antyodaya given by Pandit Deen Dayal Updhyaya, the Madhya Pradesh government is visibly committed to put each tribal household on the path of progress. It is this urgency that has turned Madhya Pradesh into a tribal-friendly state, and a role model for tribal development for other states as well.