

Tribal Livelihoods - Case study of Rajasthan

What was the situation in trading tribal products?

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- The Indian Forest Act of 1927 criminalised the livelihood activities of the tribals and disintitiled them to produce which their habitat bestows on them.

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- **Contract trading** -But the state claimed ownership and gave the right to procure and sell forest produce to contractors.

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- Adivasis were bound by the contract to sell only to the contractor, minimum rates for produce were not fixed; the contractor was under no obligation to buy.

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- **Restrictions** -When the tribal or Adivasis wanted to take produce from the forest they would have to inform the ranger who would send a guard to the location for physical verification.

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- On the basis of his report, the district forest officer would issue the permit.

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- **Penalties** -Anyone caught moving forest produce without a permit could be jailed for six months.

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- The “contraband” would be confiscated and the violator would be liable to a penalty equal to 10 times the value of the seized stuff and the vehicle it was being transported in.

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- The market committee was also under instructions from the forest department to immediately inform it if minor forest produce was detected in the mandis premises.

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- That the tribals suffered a huge loss of income because of restrictive laws and policies.

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What are the recent moves on tribal livelihood?

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- Many laws on trade and transport of minor forest produce has been eased.
- 26 items of minor forest produce has been included in the list of commodities that can be bought and sold in regulated mandis.
- Transit permits for transporting and trading in them has been abolished.
- The Mandi does not allow commission to be charged of the sellers. From buyers, the commission agents can charge 2% of the value as their fee.
- Sellers are required to pay an additional mandi tax of 1.6%, the mandi provides meals to farmers at Rs 5.
- If farmers, tribal or non-tribal, die of snakebites, or due to accidents while commuting to or from the market, their family is given Rs 2 lakh in compensation.
- A new trading yard has been setup, Allotments of new shops have been proposed, 1/5th of these have been reserved for tribal farmers.

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What are the outcomes of the move?

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- Recent moves had helped linking tribals with wholesale market directly.
- The government has not only provided the state's tribal people a source of livelihood but may have also given them a reason to conserve forest resources.
- More stuff has started arriving in the markets because transit permits are not needed.
- The availability of a trading platform and the resulting competition has resulted in higher prices.
- There was also good demand for forest produces, which traders claimed had higher medicinal properties than cultivated ones.

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What are the issues need to be addressed?

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- Incumbent traders want multiple shops for themselves and their kin.
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- Despite the easing of laws and policies, tribal farmers may not be getting the benefits they should.
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- There were complaints about police and forest officials insisting on transit permits and extorting money.
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- Transit permits for minor forest produce have not been entirely done away with, they are still required in non-tribal, sub-plan areas. Awareness among the tribals is also low.

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Source: Financial Express

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