The vulnerability of the tribal communities to illness is increasing in the neo-liberal development regime. Specifically, Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) are increasingly victimised by these development processes. Serious declines in status of health levels caused from unavailability, inaccessibility and unaffordability of resources, may lead to much higher mortality rates among the pregnant mothers and children in particular. These are important indicators of human development; and strengthening of these indicators are essential for an inclusive and sustainable development paradigm. But, the exclusionary practices of resource use in contemporary period, has contributed adversely on the health and wellbeing of PVTGs. The growing cases of malnutrition among children of PVTGs are an illustration of this. In this context, this paper attempts to draw an analytical linkage between depletion in natural resource – based livelihood system, failure of state institutions in delivering welfare measures and increasing number of child death due to malnutrition among the PVTGs; with specific reference to Juang tribal community in Odisha.

Keywords: Malnutrition, Tribe, Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), Juang Tribe, Nagada, Odisha.

Introduction

On the 2nd week of July, 2016, number of reports were published about the death of nineteen children due to acute malnutrition among the Juang tribes; in the state of Odisha. The death of these nineteen children was reported from ‘Nagada village’ of Chingudipal Gram Panchayat, Sukinda Block, located in Jajpur district of Odisha. With extensive media coverage, the death of these children became the primary focus of discussion within the government institutions, among the political parties and the people in general. The state government (i.e. Government of Odisha) immediately responded by sending a team of doctors from the Regional Medical Research Centre (RMRC), Bhubaneswar and senior administrative officer. The state government also setup of a field level task force and state level monitoring committee. Subsequently, a three member team of the central government consisting officials from the ministries of health, tribal affairs and women and child development visited the tribal hamlets. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) also
sought for a detailed report from the state government about this issue. Recently, on 12th of September, 2016, hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on survival risk of Juang tribes and considering the alarming situation of acute malnutrition, the High Court of Odisha issued notice to both the central and state governments and asked for a reply within three weeks’ time.

But, this was not the first instance where tribal children have died due to acute malnutrition in Odisha. In the year 2013, death of around fifteen children belonging to Paudi Bhuyan tribal community (another PVTG community in Odisha) due to acute malnutrition was reported. This report was from Lahunipara block of Sundergarh district in Odisha. An official survey during that time detected that around 195 tribal children of Paudi Bhuyan tribal community were suffering from severe malnutrition in Lauhunipara block only. Sometimes many deaths of undernourished children in tribal hamlets go unreported as they are located in interior forest area. After the death of PVTG children in Lauhunipara, the state government issued a guideline for a convergent health and nutrition plan of action (Das, 2016). This was initiated with an aim to address the health and nutrition needs of PVTGs in the state. This brings the need to study the increasing in number of malnutrition caused child death occurring among the PVTGs in Odisha. Further also to inquire, what are the causal factors for increasing child mortality among the PVTGs and the need for the state government to specifically initiate a convergent health and nutrition plan for the PVTGs? Did these specific initiatives and other welfare policies of the government, has been able to meet the health and nutrition needs of the PVTGs? If yes, to what extent and If not, why not? And, which could be the possible initiatives towards addressing the issue of increasing malnutrition among the PVTGs? This paper attempts to deal with these set of questions with a reference to PVTGs in general and the Juang tribal community in particular. Further, it attempts to draw an analytical linkage between depletion in natural resource – based livelihood system, failure of state institutions in delivering welfare measures and increasing number of child death due to malnutrition among the PVTGs.

**Methodology**

The understanding about the tribal communities, the PVTGs, and specifically about the Juang tribal community and the different causal

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2. As per the federal structure of the Indian constitution, Government of India (GoI) is referred as central government.
3. One of the Particularly Vulnerable Trival Group (PVTG) in Odisha.
Increasing Malnutrition-led Mortality among Juang Tribal Community

Factors of malnutrition were done by review of literature from multiple journal articles. Similarly, the details about the reported death of Juang tribal children due to acute malnutrition and immediate response of the government, NHRC, political parties, Odisha High Court, was done by conducting a content analysis of the reports published in newspapers and from the news reports aired mostly in regional television channels of Odisha such as OTV News, Kanak News, and ETV Oriya etc. Also, news reports aired in the national level news channels such as NDTV and Times Now were reviewed and analysed. The news reports relating to death of children in Nagada village, which got published both in print and electronic media were reviewed, dated from 14th of July 2016 to 31st of August 2016, as most of the reports and articles were extensively published during this period. The review of news reports published in multiple newspapers and television channels helped in validating the specific facts related to Nagada village and particularly the number of children died during that period.

Table - 01. A Census of Analysed News Reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the News Paper/ Channel</th>
<th>Type of News Report</th>
<th>Language of the News Report</th>
<th>No. of News Reports Analysed</th>
<th>Date/s of Publication of News Reports in 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Hindu</td>
<td>News Paper</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>July 15th, August 3rd and 6th.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Express</td>
<td>News Paper</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>July 17th, 20th, 22nd, 23rd, 30th and 31st.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times of India</td>
<td>News Paper</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>July 18th, 20th and 21st.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wire</td>
<td>Online News Portal</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>July 29th.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scroll.in</td>
<td>Online News Portal</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>August 30th.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETV Oriya</td>
<td>Television Report</td>
<td>Oriya</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>July 14th to 19th.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTV Television</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Oriya</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>July 18th to July 31st.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDTV</td>
<td>Television Report</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>July 18th, 19th and 22nd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times Now</td>
<td>Television Report</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>July 18th, 19th and 20th.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The state of Odisha is located in eastern part of India. Odisha is considered as a mineral rich state with large scale mineral reserves. Around 98 per cent of India’s chromite reserve, 92 percent of nickel reserve, 60 per cent bauxite reserves, 28 per cent of iron ore reserve, 28 per cent of manganese reserve and 25 percent of India’s coal reserve are located in the state of Odisha (Pradhan, 2006). However, according to the Raghuram Rajan committee report (presented in May, 2013) Odisha is the least developed state in the India. Odisha is home to the sixty two tribal communities – the highest number of tribal communities among all states and union territories of India. This constitutes around 22.85 per cent of the total population of the state. Out of the sixty two tribal communities, thirteen tribal
communities have been identified as PVTGs (as per the 2011 census). Majority of the hamlets of tribal habitation in Odisha are located in the forest and forested hill areas. From centuries, these tribal habitations are following a natural resource (particularly forest) based livelihood system. Most of these forests and forested hill areas are also home to large scale mineral reserves.

Sukinda valley in Jajpur district of Odisha (where the death of nineteen Juang children occurred due to acute malnutrition) is rich in Chromite reserve. According to media reports, on 2nd of January, 2006, twelve tribal people were killed and many were injured because of police firing in Kalinga Nagar industrial complex of Sukinda valley. These tribal people were protesting against the construction of Tata steel industry in Kalinganagar industrial complex. The Industrial Development Corporation of Odisha (IDCO) has acquired 13000 acres of land (including 6900 acres of private land) for setting of the Kalinganagar industrial complex in Jajpur district. Apart from Tata steel, Kalinganagar industrial complex is also home to many other large scale industries such as Nilachal Ispat Nigam Ltd, MESCO, Zindal, VISA etc. (Pradhan, 2006). And with the ‘State’ adopting a neo-liberal development model – causing large scale extraction and exploitation of forest and other natural resource reserves, there is an increasing threat towards the livelihood and survival of PVTGs.

Results and Analyses

This paper is divided into two sections. The first section of the paper focuses on discussing about the academic and administrative understanding of ‘particularly vulnerable tribal groups’. Further, it discusses about the Juang tribal community. The second section of this paper incorporates a brief understanding about Nagada village and analyses the causal factors of increasing malnutrition and morbidity and mortality among the Juang tribal community.

SECTION– I

Understanding the ‘Particular Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)’

The use of the term ‘tribe’ mainly refers to a particular community or social group. Many a times around the world, these particular communities are alternatively referred as ‘indigenous community’. According to Roy-Burman, the term ‘indigenous’ was first time used in the year 1957, during the deliberation of international agencies (cited in Xaxa V., 1999, p. 3590). The particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs) are generally characterised with their social and
educational backwardness. They are considered to be having marginal access to resources for development purpose, lower level of literacy, comparatively lesser population size, declining in numbers and some of these PVTGs are at the edge of disappearance (Sahani & Nandi, 2013). Most of these tribal groups are widely scattered with enormous differences in their ecology and economy, physical characteristics etc. Earlier to the categorisation of PVTGs, with the influences from colonial anthropological characterisation, these tribal communities and their living practices were often referred as primitive in nature. And, thereafter these tribal communities were considered as primitive tribal communities. But, with the increasing discourse of post-colonial anthropological scholarship and as an important reference to their vulnerable conditions, these specific tribal communities are listed as PVTGs. According to the information of the ministry of tribal affairs (Government of India) there are seventy five tribal communities listed as PVTGs, living across fifteen states and union territories in India. Out of the total sixty two tribal communities in Odisha, there are thirteen tribal groups which are listed as PVTGs, in this sense it is home to the largest number of PVTGs in the entire country.

Most of these PVTGs are experiencing decline of their original habitation. With the adverse changes taking place in their ecological surroundings, there is a growing threat to their survival in general – fundamentally in their nutritional and health aspects. Some of the PVTGs are facing the danger of disappearance. According to the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) report of 2003, health indicators of tribal population in Odisha are far below than the national average. The report highlights that among the tribal population of Odisha the infant mortality rate is 84.2, Mortality rate under five years of age is 126.6 children, underweight is 55.9 per cent, anaemia in children is 59.8 per cent, children with acute respiratory tract infection in 22.4 percent, children with dysentery and diarrhoea is 21.1 per cent, women with anaemia is 64.9 per 1000. Addition to this, a high rate of malnutrition has also been observed in the tribal populated districts of Odisha (ICMR Bulletin, 2003). Based on Gomez’s classification of malnutrition, Chhotray (2003-04) analysed that the PVTGs like Juang tribal community are in critical situation and living at the margins of survival.

**Juang Tribe**

The Juang tribes are located mainly in Jajpur, Kendujhar and Dhenkanal districts of Odisha. The prevailing believe among the Juang communities is that their tribe has arisen from earth at the place named Gonasika, from where the river Baitarani originates –
in the district of Kendujhar in Odisha. As per the census data of 1971 the total Juang population in India was 24,384 (George, 1982). But, according to one new estimation, the total population of Juang tribal community stands around 9000 only (Mohanty, 2016). When the total population of the country has increased significantly during this time, the total population of Juang tribal community has fallen by more than sixty per cent. This validates the level of vulnerability increased among the Juang tribal community.

In their dialectical language (i.e. ‘Kolarian’) the word ‘Juang’ means man. In other words they believe that the man (in this case Juang tribe) has originated from the same place where river Baitarani has its source. They classify their community into two groups. One is ‘Thaniya’ (those who are living in their original habitation) and the other group is referred as ‘Bhagudia’ (those who have moved different locations). In some habitations the Juang tribes claims themselves as ‘Patra-savaras’ 4, and they are that branch of the ‘Savara tribe’ who were historically used to dress themselves in leaves (Swain, 2016).

Juang tribe considers the village as the single community with a recognised territory. The village territory also includes their agricultural land i.e. both settled and shifting cultivation and the village forest as well. Apart from individual shelter for each family, the Juang tribal village also have a dormitory; which is called as ‘Majang’. This is the place where they celebrate their customary dance practice, which in addition is also used for the meeting of customary village councils. The visitors to the village from other villages were also given accommodation in the Majang. The village head is referred as ‘Nagam’, ‘Boita’ or ‘Dehuri’. A cluster including nearby villages constitutes a ‘Pirh’ for the purpose of inter-village dispute resolution. The head of this dispute resolution body is called ‘Sardar’ (Government of Orissa, 2016).

The Juang community members distinct themselves with two different clan groups. One is ‘Bandhu clan’ and the other is called ‘Kutumba clan’. The clan groups are exogamous and monogamy is commonly practised among the Juang tribes. As per their customs, they consider ‘Dharma Devta’ (Sun God) and ‘Basumata’ (Earth Goddess) as their supreme deities. The Juang pantheon also includes a number of forest, river and hill deities. Dancing in groups is a common practice for celebration among Juang tribes. During these celebration they use a particular type of drum known as ‘Changu’ (Ibid).

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4 ‘Patra’ mean leaf
The livelihood of Juang community solely depends on forest resources. They practice shifting cultivation in some patches of forest land. In addition to agricultural farming they regularly collect minor forest produces. In recent times, the government has pointed out shifting cultivation as a primary reason of forest degradation. But, from centuries shifting cultivation have contributed towards maintaining ecological balance in the locality. And, this balance has been gradually disturbed after the cycle of shifting cultivation was shortened over the years (George, 1982). The restriction on tribal communities to access their forest land by bringing forest reservation and protection laws has contributed towards alienation of tribal communities from their land and livelihood sources. Similarly, according to Swain (2016), restricted by the forest department to access the forest resources—particularly, food items such as forest grains and fruits, the Juang tribes is suffering from high rate of malnutrition and many other diseases.

SECTION – II

Nagada Village

Nagada village is located in Chingudipal grampanchayat, Sukinda valley of Jajpur district in Odisha. This village is home to Juang tribal community – one of the most PVTG in India. There are six hamlets in Nagada village named as Uppar Nagada; Majhi Nagada; Tala Nagada; Uhiapala; Guhiasala and Naliadaba. The Juang tribal hamlets are located in-between Kamaruni and Satakolia hills – forest hills in the region. The Juang hamlets are located both at top of the hills as well as foothills.

Table - 02. Village Profile of Nagada

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Details</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of families in all six hamlets</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Population in all six hamlets</td>
<td>579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children under five years of age in Tala Nagada, Majhi Nagada and Upara</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data compiled from news reports, also see (Das, 2016) and (Mohanty, 2016).

5 The village council of a particular village select a land area (called as ‘taila’) to be burnt and used for two years of cultivation. Every year one new and old taila are prepared. The new taila is used for cultivation of cash crop and oil seeds. After being used for two years the taila land are is vacated for twelve years to regenerate its organic forest cover (George, 1982).

6 The recent death of 19 tribal children occurred in these three Juang tribal hamlets (Mohanty, 2016).
Dynamics of Increasing Malnutrition-led Mortality among Juang Tribal Community

1. Weakening Livelihood Opportunities

Livelihood aids to accomplish subsistence requirements of survival. It comprises of people, food, income and assets or in other words the primary means of living. At the social level “a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from the stresses and shocks and provides for future generations (Chambers & Conway, 1991). In Nagada village the weakening of livelihood opportunities is one of the measure factor causing increasing number of malnutrition among Juang tribe. From centuries the forest hills are the only source of livelihood earning for Juang tribal community. Agricultural farming in forest hills and collection of minor forest produce are the major source of livelihood for them. For agricultural farming the Juang tribes of Nagada practice Podu cultivation⁷ (one form of shifting cultivation) in the forest hills. Similarly, the Juang tribes collect minor forest produce such as Sala leafs, fire woods, medicinal plants and mushrooms etc. from the forest hills. On most circumstances they sell sala leafs in the nearby weekly market. This helps them with a small amount of earning and the production from agricultural farming is kept for self-consumption.

However, the degradation of forest land over the years has caused serious damage to agricultural farming of Juang tribes. This has adversely impacted the self-sufficiency level of food production and consumption in the Juang tribal hamlets. Further, there is also a decreasing trend of forest resource and thereby decreasing the minor forest produce in the locality. Also, without the inclination towards industrialised model of economy and its required skills, the Juang tribes see limited livelihood opportunities outside their forest hills. This has cumulatively restricted the livelihood opportunities for the Juang tribes and subsequently restricted their ability to meet subsistence requirements of life.

2. Changing Food Basket and Rising Food Insecurity

Juang tribes live in and with the forest. As we discuss about the degradation of forest resource in their locality, it is fundamentally posing a threat to their survival needs. Among all food is the most

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⁷ A method of cultivation where piece of land is cleared for cultivation by burning and cutting forest patches. The cultivation in this piece of land is carried out for three to four years. Thereafter this patch of land was not used for any agricultural activity so that the soil fertility of the land can be restored through natural process (Dash, 2006).
fundamental requirements of life and it is essential to meet the nutritional requirements of the physical body. But, because of the declining agricultural production and minor forest produce the food basket of the Juang tribes is experiencing an adverse change. The food basket which was consisting of Rice, Maize, Pulses and Mushrooms etc. have changed to an inadequate food basket consisting of Rice and Salt. These are vital changes in their everyday food consumption. And these significant changes in their food consumption is impacting their ability to meet their nutritional requirements. Even at the household level, the female members are consuming less food compared to the male members. And this has greatly impacted the health condition of new born babies and especially children under the age of three years old. Moreover, an unhealthy child without necessary nutritional content in his/her body, become more vulnerable to the condition of food insecurity in the Juang tribal hamlets in Nagada.

The vicious cycle of insufficient food consumption and inadequate nutritional content among the tribal children is leading to the larger concern of food insecurity in the locality. Food insecurity denotes to conditions when an individual or at the household level, there is inadequate availability of food to eat. According to Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), Food insecurity occurs ‘when people must live with hunger and fear of starvation’ (FAO, 1999). Juang tribal hamlets in Nagada are living with similar situations of unavailability of adequate food and hunger – in other words they are living in condition of food insecurity. The condition of food insecurity is increasingly instigating malnutrition among the Juang tribal children in particular. Further, the unceasing intensification in severity of their undernourishment, is causing growing number of child death among the Juang tribes.

3. Location of the Tribal Hamlets

Among other factors, geographical location of the Juang tribal hamlets could also be considered as one of the reason for the increasing vulnerability among Juang tribes. Particularly, in the context of decreasing forest resources and their increasing dependence on government support. As the Juang tribal hamlets are located in the hills, the social support programmes of the government – as an alternative to their decreasing self-sufficient production and consumption has failed to reach out them. This is evident from the fact that no member of the Juang tribal community have ever step into a formal school until November 2015. The possible mode of access to government offices, political representatives,
schools and hospitals is only by walking. As the district collector
describes, “chopper is the best possible way to rich Nagada village”.
The aftermath of the death of nineteen Juang tribal children perhaps
was the only occasion when an administrative officer (whose
appointment is considered to be for public service in India) made a
visit to Juang hamlets in Nagada. The location of the tribal hamlets
is not to be seen as a problem causing death. But, this is mentioned
as a reason of non-implementation of welfare schemes of the
government in these villages.

4. Inaccessibility to Government Sponsored Welfare Services

The Juang tribal community in Nagada village is also facing
vulnerability due to their inaccessibility to government sponsored
welfare services. In India, government sponsored anganwadi centres
are institutionalised, keeping an objective of meeting the nutritional
requirements of the specific social groups such as children, adolescent
girls, pregnant and lactating mothers. More importantly, these
anganwadi centres provide health related referral services and
nutritional food, such as take home ration to these social groups. It
also aimed to meet the educational needs of children under the age
of five in particular. In this locality, the nearest Anganwadi centre
is located around eight kilometres away from Nagada village. Also,
the anganwadi worker lives at the foothills – in Deogan village,
located at a distance of ten kilometres from Nagada village. The
Anganwadi worker never visited Nagada, till the children started
dying. So, it is marked that the Juang tribes were inaccessible to the
welfare services delivered through Anganwadi centres. Similarly, there is no educational institution in the village. The
nearest government school is located in Deogan village which is
located at a distance of ten kilometres. Government schools are not
only providing education, rather they are playing an important role
in meeting the food requirement of the poor households. The provision
of ‘mid-day meal’ in government schools are considered as important
element in meeting the food and nutritional requirements of school
going children. With the absence of government school in Nagada
village the Juang tribal children are not able to avail the benefits of
government welfare services such as the mid-day meal scheme.
Traditionally, as well as today, for the purpose of drinking water the
tribal hamlets in Nagada are dependent on the natural mountain
streams. But, degrading forest land and the industrialisation in the
nearby areas has polluted the natural water bodies in the village.
They are still depending in the natural mountain streams for drinking
water. In other words they are drinking polluted waters. There is no
drinking water facility as an alternative to degrading environmental
conditions. Safe drinking water is vital to lead a healthy life. The absence of safe drinking water is impacting their health and immune capacity. Likewise, according to government records, six people in Nagada have been allotted money for construction of concrete house under Indira Awas Yojana. However, at present all houses in the village are thatched huts.

It is also of the fact that even if the Juang tribes are living in the forest, they do not possess the legal ownership of their houses and agricultural lands. The historical injustice to forest dwellers has been attempted to be addressed with the implementation of Forest Right Act (FRA) in the year 2006 – brought by the Government of India (GoI). The FRA Act has the provision of recognising and giving legal rights (both individual and community right titles) over ‘forest resource’ to scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers (Government of India, 2006). Odisha began implementing this act in the year 2008. But, in today’s date not a single Juang tribe in Nagada has been given legal right over forest resource under FRA provisions. Similarly, the other welfare schemes such as - Mamata Scheme 8, Janani Sishu Suraksha Yojna 9 and Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) 10 which are vital for the overall welfare of the tribal, poor and rural people have never been implemented in this village (Lahangir, 2016) and (Das, 2016).

5. Failure of HealthCare Institutions

With declining forest resources, weakening livelihood opportunities and inaccessibility to government sponsored welfare schemes, what are the possible alternative institutions which could be considered to address the health and illness among tribal children? Most feasibly, it is the health care institutions which are seen as the last hope to save an unhealthy child. Juang hamlets have a traditional health care system for getting treatment from the village deity. The traditional medicines by the village deity are mostly prepared from the medicinal plants available in the local forest. But, the availability of medicinal plants in the local forest region are decreasing at an unprecedented rate. The degrading forest lands and the cases of soil erosion are impacting the growth of diverse plant varieties in the region.

8 A conditional cash transfer scheme started in 2011 under which pregnant and lactating women were given financial assistance of 5000 for the first two live births.
9 Scheme of ministry of health and family welfare that ensures free institutional delivery programme for pregnant women at government health centre.
10 Provision of nutritional food for adolescent and pregnant mothers. Supplementary nutrition, take home ration etc.
The alternative hopes, the modern health care institution is no way accessible to Nagada village. In the recent decade the nearest hospital came up at Kaliapani locality, which is located at a distance of twenty five kilometres from Nagada. This hospital is a private hospital, run by a mega steel company – Tata Steel. In all sense, for the Juang tribes this hospital is inaccessible. According to the elder member of the village, the last vaccination drive in this village was conducted almost a decade ago by the government health department. With failure of all institutional mechanism, the Juang tribal community lives with a hope of their customary practices and perform prayers for the wellbeing of their undernourished children.

6. Early marriage of Girls

The marrying age of girls prevailing among the Juang tribes is also been seen as a factor contributing to the increasing malnourishment among Juang tribal children. Most of the girls in Juang community usually get married as early as thirteen years of age. And, they become smother soon after. With the changing phenomena of forest resources and limited food consumption, they live with little nutritional intake during pregnancy period. Subsequently, the children born are found to be severely underweight. Because of this most of the children do not have a healthy immunity against diseases like chickenpox and measles during their childhood. The increasing pollutants in drinking water sources and undernourishment also causing Pneumonia and Bronchitis like diseases. In recent times these are the important underlying factors which are making adverse impact towards the health and life of Juang tribes.

Government Intervention in the Aftermath of Death of Nineteen Juang Tribal Children

In the aftermath of the death of nineteen children from Juang tribal community, as the issue of Nagada got civil society attention through media reports, the government have also intervened as an immediate care taker. The government institutions highlighted some of their ‘first track intervention’. These interventions can be referred as fast track, primarily because these interventions are made in the aftermath of the death of Juang tribal children. Also, the characteristics of these interventions are temporary and curative in nature. The local government institutions (panchayati raj) institutions) have started providing cooked food as an emergency measure for all the villagers in Nagada. Addition to this the officials have distributed rice, biscuit, pulses and mosquito nets as an immediate measure. The construction of road (around nine
kilometres) to Nagada village has also been planned and discussed in the media within a short duration. Most importantly, lately so, the government has announced to set up three mini-anganwadi (anganwadi with single anganwadi worker) centres in the different locations within Nagada village. A special provision of providing eggs four days a week to the children, has also been promised. As everybody is waking up in the aftermath of growing number of malnutrition-led death among Juang tribes, the Tata steel company has also made some immediate intervention. Under the banner of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) intervention in the locality, the company started giving hot cooked meals to children in Nagada village. In addition to all these interventions from the government and the corporate bodies, the Tata steel company has provided six radio sets in all the six hamlet in Nagada village. It is said, the idea of providing radio is to link Juang tribal hamlets to the rest of the world. But, it is need to be deliberated, whether these are need based and prioritised intervention in Nagada or the interventions were made with a top down approach.

Conclusion

The ongoing developmental dilemma in the neo-liberal regime has shaped conditions of vulnerability among the tribal communities in general and PVTGs in particular. Their natural resource based endowment-set consisting of land, forest and water is gradually shrinking. The exploitative mode of natural resource use in the neo-liberal model of production system, is the fundamental cause of degrading forest resource. This has led to the widespread destruction of their livelihood sources. With the failure of the state intervention in ensuring their entitlements and wellbeing, they are living at the margins of survival. Dedicated institutions like Juang development agency, which was established in the year 1978 – with an aim to work for the wellbeing of the Juang community, has failed in all aspects such as appointment of human resources, financial support system and in terms of engaging with the local community (Swain, 2016). Similarly, there are increasing instances where the state is restricting the Juang community to access natural resources for fulfillment of survival needs. Recently, three Juang tribes (including two women) from Keonjhar district of Odisha were arrested in charges of felling trees in the forest. In protest hundreds of Juang people protested at the Harichandanpur section office of the forest department. The protesters claim that the forest department arrested the Juang tribes in order to cover up their inability to arrest the wood-smugglers (Orissapost, 2016). This highlights the increasing friction and trust deficit among the tribal communities and the state.
Most importantly, there is a need to recognise that the alienation of PVTGs from natural resources is the primary cause of their vulnerability; and well-being of these communities can never be achieved by restricting them from use of forest resources in particular. In fact, the historical injustice done to the tribal communities can only be corrected with the recognition of their rights, ownership and access to forest resources. This can be achieved with prompt distribution of ownership titles (both individual and community forest right) of forest lands to Juang community, as laid down under the forest right act of 2006. Similarly, there is an immediate need to strengthen the implementation strategies of food security provision under the food security act of 2013. This can be instrumental in addressing the prevailing and growing malnutrition among the Juang community. Also, establishment of institutions such as anganwadi centers and primary school, community health center are vital to the wellbeing of Juang community. As a long term measure, development planning for the PVTGs, needs to incorporate a bottom up approach and participation of local community members. The strengthening of democratic processes and ensuring a space for alternative and inclusive development model, can be vital in reducing the trust deficit among the citizen and the state. A failure in these aspects will lead to extinction of already declining PVTGs population in India.

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Increasing Malnutrition-led Mortality among Juang Tribal Community


