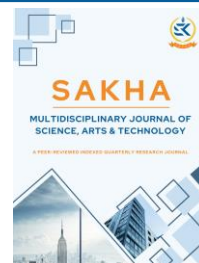




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### The Economic Impact of Minor Forest Produce Scheme of Tribals in Kariyalur Village on Kalvarayan Hills

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#### Abstract

*This study examines the economic impact of the Minor Forest Produce (MFP) Scheme implemented by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs among the tribal community of Kariyalur village in the Kalvarayan Hills. The scheme ensures Minimum Support Price (MSP) for forest products to prevent exploitation by middlemen and improve tribal livelihoods. In Kariyalur, Malayali tribes collect products such as honey, soap nut, amla, tamarind, and broom grass for income. The study finds that the scheme has improved economic conditions and market access, though seasonal availability and migration for alternative work remain challenges. Overall, the MFP scheme has contributed positively to the socio-economic development of the tribal community.*

**Keywords:** Minor Forest Produce (MFP), Minimum Support Price (MSP), Tribal Economy, Kariyalur, Kalvarayan Hills, Malayali Teibes, Forest Rights Act, Livelihood Development.

#### Introduction

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The Government of India has initiated the numerous schemes and programmes for the uplift of the tribals in the country, towards freebies and doles. Indeed, the tribals are the survived their life through sold the goods related to the hills oriented, more specific agricultural products. Also, the tribals economy related to forest goods might be more important than other. For this concern, the Government of India decided to introduce the scheme of mechanism for the development of value chain<sup>1</sup>. This was called as 'Minor Forest Produce (MFP)', which might be important than the other schemes. The major objective of the minor forest produce (MFP) scheme is support to the livelihoods of tribal peoples. The tribal culture is rooted in a "symbiotic relatively" with forest. The MFP is to safeguard the livelihoods of tribals by ensuring the fair price through a minimum support price (MSP) to stop exploiting by middlemen and promoting sustainable harvesting which are aligns with the tribal rituals and taboos that naturally to protect the forest. In Kariyalur Village, the tribals are benefiting through the MFP scheme, indeed their economy has grown gradually. This article delves to economic impact on the MFP schemes to the tribals in Kariyalur village a part of Kalvarayan hills.

### **Kariyalur Village**

Kariyalur village is located in the Kalvarayan hills in Tamil Nadu. There were 1261 scheduled Tribes which included 639 are females and 622 are males. <sup>2</sup>The majority of the tribals are Malayalis. <sup>3</sup>People from Kariyalur Village have collected the forest produce and sold to the local market which could be very profitable. These practices made sustainably and how they maintain their livelihood. It impacted their livelihoods, and its alignment with their cultural practices. It deals with the local forest department officers, forester and ranger and the local people and their panchayat president. The resident has collected forest produce; they market it and whether the process is truly profitable. This practices sustainably and they maintain their livelihood. Additionally, the data collected to further substantiate the research work. It addresses the scheme supports their cultural and additional improvements and expanded analysis to provide a holistic understanding the scheme operates on the ground in Kariyalur village.

### **Objectives the MFP scheme**

This scheme was introduced to ensure fair returns for forest-dwelling scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers, as a solution to problems like the perishable nature of

produce, lack of holding capacity, lack of marketing infrastructure, and exploitation by middlemen. These middlemen would buy from tribes at lower prices and sell high to customers. The scheme minimizes such exploitation, allowing tribes to sell directly and ensures only necessary government intervention at the right time. The scheme ensures marketing through MSP, which means Minimum Support Price (MSP) and the development of a value chain for MFP, this was structured by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. Measures were taken to ensure social safety for MFP gatherers, which was implemented in 2013. An important source of livelihoods for tribal peoples is the non-wood forest products or minor forest produce (MFP). This includes non-timber forest produce of plant origin such as bamboo, canes, leaves, gums, waxes, dyes, resins and many forms of food including nuts, wild fruits, honey and etc<sup>4</sup>.

The MFP, or Minor Forest Produce, provides both subsistence (such as essential nutrition) and cash income for approximately 100 million people who live in or near forests. It forms a significant part of their livelihood. MFP forms a major portion of their food, fruits, medicine, and other consumption items, and it also provides cash income. This means they earn revenue through the sale of these products. For the tribal communities, about 20 to 40 percent of their annual income comes from these minor forest produce, and they spend a significant portion of their time on it. Moreover, this MFP linkage is strongly connected to women's financial empowerment, because it is primarily women who are involved in collecting, utilizing, and selling these products. Forest dwellers have been granted ownership and governance of MFP through the PESA (Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996 and the Forest Rights Act of 2006. Under the Forest Rights Act of 2006, "minor forest produce" includes all non-timber forest products. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006 grants them the "right" to own, access, collect, use, and dispose of minor forest produce that has traditionally been collected within or outside village boundaries. This Act was designed to protect marginalized socio-economic groups and balance their right to a healthy environment with their right to life and livelihood<sup>5</sup>.

### **MFP in Kalvarayan Hills**

In the Kalvarayan Hills, the MFP products are available, and what some of these items are used for, and how they are selling them, and whether there are any charges for it or not. These products were usually under MFP products like mustard seeds, beleric myrobalan, curry leaves, and honey. This honey is usually collected for household use, and selling it is more for

tourists and similar purposes, The beleric myrobalan are actually very scarce here and the chebulic myrobalan or inknut will be more abundant, but the chebulic myrobalan themselves have now become fewer in number. The reason why these chebulic myrobalan are used is that outer part, is called epicarp, and It will contain tannin content, and the reason it's used is for food preservation for cosmetics, and also for medicinal purposes, these three aspects, they mainly focused for tannin, have tannin factories in Dindigul to preserve the leather. It is preserved there, and they mostly use it to carry out the extraction, and if we consume the outer layer of the seed of the chebulic myrobalan, it will help alleviate stomach issues and moreover, it is also used as a tooth powder<sup>6</sup>.

The product called wild date palm is used similarly to the cleaning tools we use at home, the wild date palm are bundled, dried and then used in various ways for sweeping. Next, as for curry leaves, they are taken in two ways: if they are fresh, they are used for cooking, and if they are dried, they are used for making spices and similar purposes. Similarly, it is mostly the tribes who collect the MFP, and in this Kalvarayan Hills area, which is in the Kallakurichi district, it is mainly the tribes who live there that do the collecting. It's not easily accessible to non-tribals, and they generally don't go there to collect; it's the tribes who handle it. In fact, in this region, within the forest area, there are both tribal and non-tribal zones<sup>7</sup>.

For the tribes, if they have claimed their rights under the Forest Act as scheduled tribes, they have the right to collect MFP free of cost. They can gather it without any charges, but they do need to pay a nominal fee of about one hundred rupees for transportation, since they might need to move it from one district to another. In the non-tribal area, what happens is that there aren't naturally occurring forests or trees. The forest department, through some scheme or with department funds, grows certain MFP products there, like Ilavam Panchi, tamarind trees, and similar items. Once the MFP yield is ready, a government officer inspects how much yield there is. Based on that, they set an amount for an auction. Whoever bids the highest pays that amount and can then harvest and collect the yield. That auction amount must be paid. However, for the tribes, these kinds of conditions do not apply. In fact, in this zone, it's mostly the tribes who reside there, is the Malayali tribes<sup>8</sup>.

### **Impact of MFP in Kariyalur**

The impact of MFP programme is in well manner, which operates with proper. Their economic conditions of the people brought the source of Malayali tribes. The report says that the MFP scheme is in satisfied manner. Indeed, both people and the officials of the village have aware

the programme. Under this programme this village was completely raised both social and economic phenomena. They have bus facilities, and everything is developed to a certain level. There are good roads, electricity facilities, and bus transport facilities are also good. Through buses, they have also been doing some business, like selling their MFP products. In addition, by using their own vehicles, whenever they need to go, they have safe roads, lights, and signals. Since it is a hills region, there are safety provisions, so they have a good opportunity to trade easily<sup>9</sup>.

The MFP products available in Kariyalur village are following below, Shikakai (soap pod), Amla (Indian gooseberry), Tamarind, Honey, Curry leaves, Broom grass (used for making sweeping brooms), Tapioca, Soap nut, Beleric myrobalan, Chebulic myrobalan, The beleric myrobalan and soap bark tree (Kungu kottai). All the items mentioned above are MFP products, and these are the products thus mostly found in the village of Kariyalur. In addition to this, sometimes also find bamboo. However, it can only be harvested once every 30 years, so it's quite rare. Still, bamboo is also available here. Similarly, in some areas, where the tribal people have acquired land rights through the Forest Act, they have guava, tapioca, jackfruit, and lemon available in those areas<sup>10</sup>.

These kinds of MFP products are obtained in that region. The villagers (tribes) collect these MFP products from there and sell them. All of this is seasonal. These are only available for a season; they aren't available all the time. So, during the respective season, they collect these. Now, as for soap nut trees, earlier, the price of soap nut was low in that area, but at that time, the yield was high. Now, the price is increasing, but the yield is low, because as the trees age, they lose their life. Now, it's nearly about 50 rupees per kilogram, whereas in the past, it was literally sold for about 5 rupees per kilogram. The villagers go into the forest and collect the soap nut, along with the previously mentioned MFP items, like broom grass, curry leaves, neem leaves, gooseberry, and the broom-making grass. They collect all of these, and some of them sell directly, or in the case of broom grass, they bundle it and give it as it is. Some people buy it, remove it, form a structure, and make it into a broom for sale. Some take it for their own use. Otherwise, they directly go to the market and sell. In the past, they used a middleman and gave it to them. That kind of business or commerce has been running and is still running<sup>11</sup>.

So, among what they get here, the most profitable for them is the honey found inside the forest. They collect about a 650 ml bottle and sell it. That 650 ml, they actually sell for around 1,200 rupees. If someone goes and talks, if they know someone and negotiate, they will give

it for 1,000 rupees. They will not sell it below that. So, compared to all MFPs, what is most profitable for them is this honey, according to the tribes in Kariyalur. To collect these MFP products, the tribes are allowed to go as deep as they want into the forest. Some go in-depth to collect soap nut, broom grass, curry leaves. As we mentioned earlier, they add curry leaves for flavor in food and sell them. Mostly, they dry the curry leaves and give them to masala companies. They don't directly give to companies; they either sell through a middleman or go down to the market and sell. Nearby Kariyalur itself, there is a market, like in other towns. They sell in that market, or from the hills, they bring it down and sell in the villages below. That has been a practice there. In this, we can see two ways. Now, if it's the middlemen coming from below, buying from the tribes here in Kariyalur, they have to pay around 100 rupees as a fee for transporting it out, since they are taking it to another place. In case the tribes themselves take it down and give it, in that case, that 100 rupees is waived for them by the forest department<sup>12</sup>.

### **Economic condition of the Tribes in Kariyalur**

The economic condition of the tribes in Kariyalur, the main purpose behind introducing the MFP scheme is to help them develop economically. It's essentially a government step to enable the tribes to sell their products. Unlike non-tribal people, who do not have the rights to collect from the forest, the tribes are granted those rights. Even the non-tribals want to collect, they must do so through the tribes, and only the tribes can market and trade those products. Non-forest dwellers cannot just go into the forest and collect or trade, because the law doesn't allow it. Thus, the MFP scheme is fundamentally aimed at boosting the tribes' economic activities. Through this scheme, they have the right to collect and utilize forest products for their own benefit. However, they do not have the rights to cut down trees for commercial purposes. Even for tribes, the permission is limited to collecting leaves or branches for cooking. This is how the forest department allows it in certain areas<sup>13</sup>.

The economic condition, it's clear that honey is the most profitable product for them, especially when compared to others. However, there are also significant risks involved. For example, they have to climb tall trees to collect the honey, which can expose them to dangers from insects or even animals. Yet, despite these risks, they continue to engage in this economic activity. Moreover, the combination of chebulic myrobalan, beleric myrobalan gooseberry is known as "Thirupala Soorum" in Ayurveda, and it's believed that consuming this mixture for about 48 days can help prevent illnesses. The local people in that region also believe in and

follow this tradition. Additionally, these three products are abundant in that area, which is definitely a plus point. However, even though the trees are abundant, as they age, the yield decreases. So, while the market value might be high, the quantity they can collect is lower, leading to reduced overall profits<sup>14</sup>.

Similarly, these products are only available seasonally, meaning they can only collect them for about a month during the season, and for the rest of the year, they lack of employment opportunities. Because of this, many have started to migrate elsewhere. Most of these tribal families now move to places like Mysore in Karnataka or Kerala for work. The jobs they take up there are mostly estate-based labor. Additionally, under the Forest Rights Act, the government grants land titles to the tribes for the lands they have traditionally used. This allows them to engage in agriculture on their own land. They learn these agricultural practices while working outside for three to five months, and when they return, they implement what they've learned on their own lands. This way, they gradually build their economic independence. So, instead of going into the forest to collect these MFP products and sell them, which often doesn't yield much profit, the tribes have started to choose alternative work. Rather than the low income from collecting and selling these products, they find better earnings in nearby agricultural or estate-based jobs. This shift has led many of them to seek employment outside their village. Moreover, with the land titles granted under the Forest Rights Act, they do have the opportunity to engage in agriculture on their own land. However, older individuals and women still continue collecting and trading MFP products as mentioned earlier<sup>15</sup>.

The land provided under the Forest Rights Act often lacks basic infrastructure, such as electricity, which makes it difficult for them to fully engage in farming. people used to grind and consume these forest products, like wild tubers and certain grains, right at home, along with rice. But now, the people from those tribes no longer use them in that way; instead, they sell these products in the market and have shifted to consuming rice. Because of this, the collection of MFP products has gradually decreased, and agriculture has become the main focus. Now, it's mostly older women who collect these MFP products from the forest, but instead of spending so much time gathering them, they've started focusing on agriculture. This way, they can earn daily wages from their land or from other agricultural work, which provides a more stable income compared to the seasonal nature of collecting MFP products. Therefore, they are gradually shifting towards agriculture. The land that is provided through

the Forest Rights Act, which has been cultivated by these communities for generations around the forest, is now being granted individual land titles by the government<sup>16</sup>.

Over time, most people have received these titles, and some are still in the process of obtaining them. Meanwhile, many have started migrating elsewhere, particularly to places like Kerala or Mysore—mainly Mysore—for work. They go there for tasks such as pruning and labor in plantation fields, especially in coffee estates. Typically, they stay there for about three to five months, earn a substantial amount—like one to one and a half lakh rupees—and then return home. They use that money to repay debts and support their families. Culturally, they have various deities and rituals, including both Shaivite and non-Shaivite practices. For instance, during the Chithra month, they celebrate the Mariamman festival, which is quite famous and brings together relatives from everywhere. During these events, families contribute a significant amount—about ten to twelve thousand rupees per household—to celebrate the festival. This shows how deeply they maintain their cultural traditions. Over time, as they return home after these stints, they begin to adopt some of these practices locally. In the next five to ten years, places like Kariyalur and Kalvarayan might become fully developed estates, similar to how Ooty and Kodaikanal are commercialized. This shows the ongoing development and the blending of traditional practices with modern livelihoods<sup>17</sup>.

### **Progress of MFP Programme**

The MFP scheme has the greatest advantage which impacted in the village. It's through this MSP that they gain significant benefits. Moreover, the MFP functions in the places Kalvarayan in Tamil Nadu, speaking with both the officials and the local people both negative and positive phenomena. It has some drawback, which made some modifications progressed to the next level. This means that instead of relying solely on MFP, they have moved forward and upgraded their approach. When they go into the forest and collect MFP products, for example, something like a particular plant used for making brooms, they might cut a bunch and sell it for around twenty or thirty rupees, and then, once it's processed and reaches the customer, it might cost about fifty rupees. But, to put it simply, if they work in places like Kariyalur or Kalvarayan, a husband-and-wife pair might earn about seven hundred rupees per day, maybe up to a thousand rupees. In contrast, when they work on estates, they can earn around two thousand rupees per day. That's why they are willing to go there, work, and bring back a significant amount of money. They use that income to pay off debts, cover living

expenses, and educate their children, and they also apply what they learn from these experiences back home<sup>18</sup>.

Over time, they gradually improve and upgrade their practices, and they take pride in their progress, saying that they are moving to the next level. They believe that in a few years, their villages will transform into fully developed estates, and they have the hard-working people to make it happen. Moreover, when we speak to the local forest authorities, we find that the number of people collecting MFP has gradually decreased over the years—maybe over the last five to ten years. This shift shows that instead of relying solely on gathering, the community is moving forward. Now, mostly older individuals or those who treat it as a job collect MFP. Additionally, the local people's claims about the medicinal uses of these plants, like for treating diabetes, may not be as relevant for the local population, since such conditions are less common there. However, people from other regions might find these uses more relevant, which explains why they collect them.

In these villages, there are also non-tribals living in the region, not just in Kariyalur, but throughout the area, and roughly about five hundred people might be involved, more or less. However, all of them stay there for business purposes. At the same time, many of the tribal people in Kariyalur have begun to initiate their own businesses as well. Some have even started petrol stations, and there's also noticeable progress in education. Some individuals are working in government roles, like the police, which shows that they are moving forward in terms of education as well. With smartphones in everyone's hands, they are also learning to use the internet and engage in online business. For instance, in a nearby village, there are shops selling natural products and they even handle online orders. Although this honey is cultivated rather than collected from the wild, it shows how the focus isn't just on the MFP scheme. Various ministries and departments, including the Forest Department and the Tribal Affairs Ministry, as well as the Revenue Department, have introduced many schemes to support development. These include training for driving licenses, providing free sewing machines for tailoring, and teaching beekeeping to produce honey, along with guidance on marketing it. They also provide saplings of various trees for free to encourage further development. This means that what they would have to buy for twelve to twenty rupees per unit elsewhere is given to them for free, which they appreciate.

The cultivated honey is provided by the Forest Department and the Revenue Department, encouraging the tribes to cultivate it at home instead of solely relying on wild collection. They teach them how to set up hives, how to cultivate the bees, and how to harvest the honey.

Moreover, beyond that, the Forest Department is also promoting eco-tourism. They buy pure honey from the tribes and sell it directly to tourists visiting places like the Periyar Falls in Kalvarayan, providing them with income. This is another noteworthy aspect. The government's efforts alone aren't enough; we need to inform people through advertising and outreach, including Ayurvedic medicine communities and tourists. When tourists visit, they can purchase organic, pure products that are healthy and free from adulteration, promoting a more health-conscious lifestyle. It's not just about benefiting the government or the tribes; it's about everyone benefiting from a healthier way of living<sup>19</sup>.

### Conclusion

The tribes also hope that the government will provide better infrastructure, such as reliable electricity, so that they can farm more effectively and not be dependent on rainfall alone. They also suggest that if the government could provide the necessary inputs for their land, like coffee seedlings, and then purchase the produce back, it would be even more beneficial and encourage them further. Thus, there has been significant progress; there's still room for further development in Kariyalur and beyond. The MFP scheme can become even more effective if we raise awareness, develop the products further, and ensure that everyone, including tourists and the general public, supports these efforts. This way, it benefits everyone and contributes to a healthier lifestyle. And as the government continues to allocate more funds and support, the entire initiative will become even more successful.

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