



Covid Infection in PVTGs

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Why in News

Six members of **two Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (Bondas and Didiayis)** in **Odisha** contracted **Covid-19**, the **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes** has sought a report from the state government and has termed it a “matter of grave concern”.

Also, **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) from Andaman** contracted Covid-19.

Key Points

- **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group:**
 - The classification among tribes was adopted by the Government of India (GoI) after the **Dhebar Commission (1960-1961)** stated that within the Scheduled Tribes there existed an inequality in the rate of development.
 - During the 4th Five Year Plan (1969-74), a **sub-category** was created within Scheduled Tribes to identify groups at a lower level of development. This sub-category was called “**Primitive tribal group**”, which is **now PVTG**.
 - **Criteria:** A **PVTG** is a GoI classification for tribes based on their:
 - Relative physical isolation,
 - Stagnant or declining population,
 - Low levels of literacy,
 - Absence of written language,
 - Pre-agricultural stage of economy, such as hunting, food gathering, shifting cultivation and terrace cultivation.
 - **75 tribal groups** have been **categorized by the Ministry of Home Affairs** as **PVTGs**.
 - The **Ministry of Tribal Affairs** implements the **Scheme of 'Development of PVTGs'** exclusively for them.

- **PVTGs in Odisha:**
 - Of the **62 tribal groups** in Odisha, **13 are recognised as PVTGs** - the highest in the country.
 - Odisha has a population of **2.5 lakh** belonging to the PVTGs.
 - The PVTGs of the state have been identified as: **Bonda, Birhor, Chuktia, Didayi, Dongaria Kandha, Juang, Kharia, Kutia Kondh, Lanjia Saora, Lodha, Mankirida, Paudi Bhuyan and Saora.**
- **Bondas and Didiayis Tribes:** The **Bondas** and **Didiayis** are found in the **Malkangiri district** of the state, which shares its border with Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.
 - The **Bondas**, scattered across **32 remote hilltop villages** in the **Eastern Ghats**, are believed to have come to India as part of the **first wave of migration out of Africa** about 60,000 years ago.
 - The **Didiayis** - an **Austro-Asiatic tribe** - live in the immediate neighbourhood of the Bondas. The population of Didiayis is 7,250 according to the 2011 Census. They live in the **Konda Kamberu hills** of Malkangiri.
- **Contracting Covid is a matter of grave concern:** According to the **2018** newsletter of the **Poverty and Human Development Monitoring Agency (PHDMA)**:
 - **Low Health Status:** Diseases like upper respiratory problem and malaria, gastrointestinal disorders like acute diarrhoea and intestinal protozoa, micro nutrient deficiency, and skin infection are common among PVTGs.
 - **Reasons:** Multiple factors like poverty, illiteracy, lack of safe drinking water, poor sanitary conditions, difficult terrain, malnutrition, poor access to maternal and child health care services, superstition, nonavailability of adequate health care services and deforestation.

Poverty and Human Development Monitoring Agency

- PHDMA has been created as an agency registered under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860.**
- It is under the administrative control of the **Planning & Convergence Department, Odisha Government.**

Way Forward

- In these testing times of Covid-19, the tribal population of both mainland India and Islands territory need proper attention. This must happen by respecting their way of living and providing ample opportunity while not interfering with their environment.
- However, the role of the government lies in monitoring and providing basic facilities of food, health and water. Here, civil societies have a key role to play.

Source: IE