



A Story from Chhattisgarh's Forests: Minor Forest Products as a Spark for Rural Industrialization

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The aroma of mahua blossoms fills the forests of Bastar, Chhattisgarh, in the early summer. Tribal families have been gathering mahua flowers, which cover the forest floor, by entering the woods at dawn with baskets for generations. Children assisting elders and ladies selecting flowers beneath the shade of sal trees make for a rhythmic, almost traditional, activity. The revenue was unpredictable, seasonal, and meager. However, things have started to shift in recent years. Raw food is no longer the only thing that comes from the forest. It has gradually started to take on the appearance of a dispersed, wallless factory.

A Village Called Tokapal: The Turning Point

As part of a forest-based livelihood program, a group of indigenous women established a Self-Help Group in the Bastar district's Tokapal block. In the past, a kilogram of raw tamarind cost ₹20 to 25. It was brought to cities by middlemen, where it was processed, cleaned, and sold for three to four times the price. Things changed when a Van Dhan Vikas Kendra (VDVK) was established. To clean, deseed, and process tamarind pulp locally, the ladies received training. There was a modest processing plant set up with simple equipment, drying platforms, and supplies for packaging. Their product increased in value in less than a year.

The Industrialization Hidden in the Forest

Many people associate industrialization with enormous factories, machinery, and smokestacks. However, it is quieter in rural Chhattisgarh. At village centers, collectors combine their produce. They weigh, document, and keep the products rather than distress selling them. Minimum support prices are guaranteed by cooperative federations. The next step is primary processing, which includes filtering wild honey, sorting sal seeds, and appropriately drying mahua to preserve quality. Value is increased by 20–30% with these easy actions.

After that, secondary processing starts:

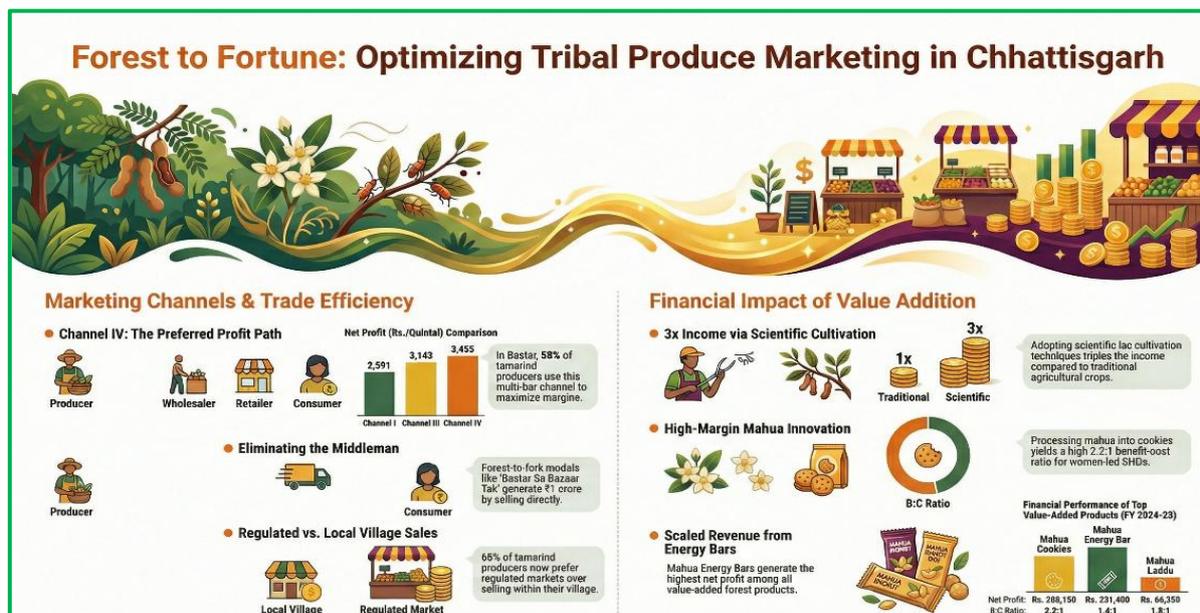
- Sal oil is made from sal seeds.
- Mahua is turned into confections and dietary items.
- Refined lac turned into a resin that can be sold
- Turning tamarind into pulp

In addition to collectors, each action generates jobs for processors, packagers, transporters, and sellers. An industrial ecology starts to take shape without the construction of a single huge factory.

Women at the Center of the Transformation

Women run Self-Help Groups that oversee a large number of processing facilities in the Dantewada district. Previously reliant on farming and seasonal work, these women now

oversee production, manage inventory, negotiate prices, and keep account books. Previously derived from meager daily earnings, income is now organized into monthly income. Here, industrialization embodies social empowerment in addition to economic growth.



The Multiplier Effect in Rural Markets

An increase in Minor Forest Produce (MFP) revenues was followed by noticeable ripple effects. Local stores reported increased sales. Families made educational investments for their kids. A few bought minor farm equipment. Once seasonal labor migrants, young people started remaining in the area during processing seasons. Moving processed items to district centers was a frequent task for village carriers. Small suppliers of packaging appeared. Instead of moving beyond the village economy, money started moving within it. This is the real start of rural industrialization—slow value retention, not abrupt industrial parks.

From Raw Resource to Branded Product

Branding has been one of the most noticeable improvements. Previously offered loose in bags, tribal goods are now carefully packaged with labels identifying their quality and source. Kanker's forest honey comes in sealed bottles. Cooperative branding is present on tamarind pulp. Standardized containers are used to sell sal oil. When presentation changes, so does market perception. Products associated with sustainability, organic sourcing, and tribal identity are becoming more and more popular among urban customers. New opportunities for premium pricing have resulted from this. The forest is now linked to sustainability and purity rather than being viewed as antiquated.

Balancing Ecology and Economy

The industrialization of minor forest produce does not necessitate deforestation, which is what makes it special. Actually, it makes conservation incentives stronger. Communities have an incentive to preserve the trees when they can generate a steady income from the sale of sal, tamarind, or mahua seeds. Future income will be consistent if forests remain healthy. Therefore, MFP-based industrialization balances ecology and economics, in contrast to extractive industries.

Challenges on the Ground

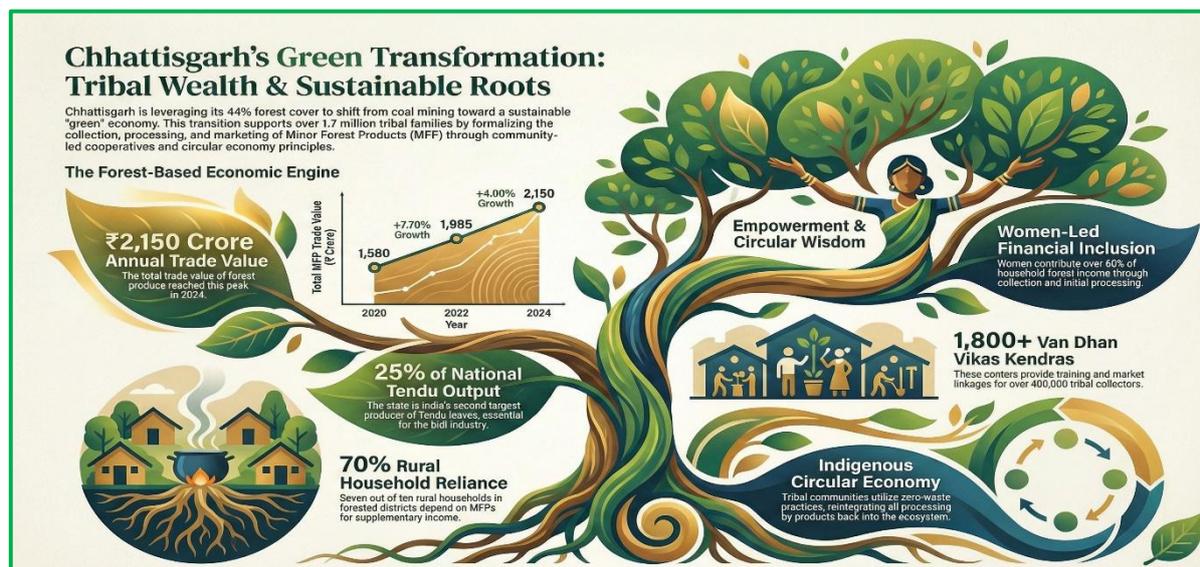
The change is encouraging but not yet complete. Storage facilities are still lacking in isolated areas. Profitability is impacted by changes in prices in domestic markets. During busy times, the availability of working capital may cause a delay in purchases. Gaps in technology impede scaling. Additional institutional support is needed for export requirements and quality certification. However, the direction of development remains clear in spite of these obstacles.

A Quiet Industrial Revolution

In the forests of Chhattisgarh, industrialization is not announced with headlines. It grows slowly through collective action.

- It begins when a tribal collector becomes an organized producer.
- It expands when raw produce is processed locally.
- It stabilizes when cooperatives negotiate better prices.
- It matures when branded products reach urban shelves.

Minor Forest Produce is doing more than generating income—it is reshaping rural economic structure.



Conclusion

Rural industrialization does not have to copy urban industrial models, as the story of Chhattisgarh's Minor Forest Produce shows. It may originate from community institutions, traditional knowledge, and local resources. When forests are incorporated into contemporary value chains, they become catalysts for the decentralized expansion of industry. Mahua to lac, Bastar to Dantewada, raw collection to branded enterprise—Minor Forest Produce is demonstrating that rural India has the seeds of its own industrial revolution within itself. The forest is now more than just a place to make a living. It is turning into the cornerstone of an industrial future in rural areas.

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