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NCST notice to Odisha govt over displacement of tribals

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BHUBANESWAR: The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has issued a notice to Odisha chief secretary Suresh Chandra Mahapatra over the plight of lakhs of scheduled tribe (ST) people displaced by various projects in different parts of Odisha.

The commission issued this notice on Wednesday after hearing a petition filed by rights activist and lawyer Radhakanta Tripathy. It has sought a reply from the top official within thirty days.

In his petition, Tripathy has cited various issues related to displacement of tribals in almost every district of Odisha. "The tribals suffer immensely due to the execution of projects related to dams, irrigation, industrial or any other reasons. Some of these projects including Hirakud Dam in Sambalpur, five major projects in Koraput like Machkund Hydroelectric Project (1950), Lower-Suktel Project in Balangir, Rengali multipurpose project in Angul, Balimela reservoir project in Malkangiri and many more," he added.

Odisha occupies a unique position among the Indian states due to a large tribal population. In the undivided Koraput district alone tribal displacement is 58 percent which comes to six percent of the total population of the district.

"Most of the villages in the affected displacement area still have no road, bridge over the rivers, lack water supply, adequate electrification, health and education facilities. Food scarcity, lack of basic amenities, digital connection pose serious violation of human rights," said the petitioner.

He said gross human rights violations of the tribals pose serious questions on the deliberation denial and

deprivation of the legitimate rights of the tribals. He requested the NCST to seek details of displacement (district wise) from the chief secretary of the state and seek replies on the rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced.

The petitioner said establishment of a commission for the displaced people is the need of the hour. He requested the NCST to constitute a committee and study the displacement issues by visiting the affected areas.