

# Karthumbi umbrella, praised by PM, is a success story of tribal women

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
JUNE 30

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi Sunday highlighted the 'Karthumbi' umbrella made by tribal women in Kerala during his 'Mann Ki Baat' radio programme on Sunday. Started in 2014, the umbrella brand is made at Attappadi in Kerala's Palakkad district.

Referring to the monsoon, the Prime Minister said about the Karthumbi umbrella: "These colourful umbrellas are strikingly splendid. And the special fact is that these umbrellas are made by our tribal sisters of Kerala."

Around 3 lakh umbrellas have been made so far by the tribal women at Attappadi,

which hit headlines a decade ago due to spurt in infant deaths, posing a threat to the existence of the tribal community.

"Malnutrition has been identified as one of the reasons behind mothers in Attappadi delivering unhealthy babies. Ensuring a source of income was essential for improving their living standards and overall health. Thus, the idea of manufacturing umbrellas came up," said Rajendra Prasad, president of Thambu, a tribal welfare organisation at Attappadi, which took the initiative.

'Karthumbi' was a cultural group of tribal children at Attappadi. The umbrella adopted it as the brand name. In 2014, when the initiative was launched, around 50 tribal women were given training in umbrella making. Ten of them

were given expert training outside Attappadi.

In the initial three years, Dubai-based Peace Collective, extended financial support for the umbrella project. In 2017, the State Tribal Development Department gave a revolving fund of ₹17 lakh. From 1,000 umbrellas in 2014, the venture has grown to selling 17,000 umbrellas a year in 2024. From 50, the number of trained tribal women has gone up to 360.

Most of these women work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. The umbrella manufacturing has been designed to ensure an additional source of income for women. It is seasonal, starting in February and umbrellas would be ready by monsoon in Kerala (June).