



Tribal Economy and Tourism (Special Reference - North Pune District)

Dr. Umesh Chindhu Bhokse

Arts & Commerce College, Chakan.

Corresponding Author – Dr. Umesh Chindhu Bhokse

DOI - 10.5281/zenodo.18884727

Abstract:

Tribal communities represent one of the most ancient socio-economic systems, closely integrated with nature through subsistence agriculture, forest-based livelihoods, and indigenous knowledge systems. In northern Pune district, particularly in the Khed, Ambegaon, and Junnar talukas, the Mahadev Koli tribal community traditionally depends on paddy cultivation, collection of minor forest produce, animal husbandry, fishing, and local exchange networks. In recent decades, the expansion of tourism—especially eco-tourism and cultural tourism—has emerged as a significant external force reshaping the tribal economy. This paper critically examines the traditional economic structure of tribal society in the study region and analyzes the transformations induced by tourism-related activities. Using secondary data from government reports, academic literature, and regional statistics, the study evaluates changes in income patterns, employment opportunities, market access for forest produce and handicrafts, and impacts on cultural practices and natural resources. The findings indicate that tourism has the potential to diversify livelihoods, enhance cash income, and create new opportunities for youth and women through homestays, guiding services, and cultural performances. However, the benefits remain uneven due to infrastructural gaps, environmental risks, cultural commercialization, and the dominance of external intermediaries. The study concludes that community-centered, eco-friendly tourism is essential to balance economic growth with cultural preservation and environmental sustainability, ensuring inclusive development of tribal communities in northern Pune district.

Introduction:

Tribal culture is one of the most ancient and rich cultures in the world. Oneness with nature, a simple way of life, and traditional knowledge are the main characteristics of tribal communities. Historically, the tribal economy has primarily been a subsistence economy, which included forest resources, hunting, fishing, and shifting cultivation. However, with the forces of globalization and modernity, the nature of this economy is changing rapidly.

In today's era, tourism has evolved from merely a means of travel into a major engine of economic development. Especially the concepts of eco-tourism and cultural tourism have given a new identity to tribal regions. When

tourists visit tribal hamlets, tribal art, handicrafts, folk dances, and traditional food culture gain access to a global market.

However, the relationship between tourism and the tribal economy has become a double-edged sword. On one hand, tourism has created employment opportunities for tribal youth and increased their income; on the other hand, the growth of tourism has also given rise to challenges such as intrusion into their indigenous culture, environmental degradation, and interference from the outside world.

The present research paper attempts a critical study of the nature of the traditional economy of tribal communities in Khed, Ambegaon, and Junnar talukas of northern Pune

district, the changes brought about by tourism, and how the overall development of tribal communities can be achieved through sustainable tourism.

Objectives of the Research:

1. To analyze the traditional economic sources of tribal society (such as agriculture, collection of forest produce, and handicrafts) and to review their present economic condition.
2. To explore the new employment opportunities made available to local tribal youth and women due to the tourism sector.
3. To evaluate whether tourism contributes to the conservation or degradation of tribal culture, traditions, and natural resources.
4. To study the increase in the annual income of tribal households resulting from tourism activities and the changes in their standard of living.
5. To identify and highlight the lack of infrastructure, environmental risks, and social challenges encountered while developing tourism in tribal areas.
6. To examine the effectiveness of government policies implemented for tribal development and tourism.

Research Hypotheses:

1. Tourism development creates new employment opportunities for local people in tribal areas (e.g., guides, homestays, handicraft sales).
2. Tourism increases the market demand for traditional tribal products and handicrafts, thereby contributing to an increase in their income.
3. Income generated from the tourism sector can be more sustainable than the income derived from traditional agriculture or forest-based livelihoods of tribal communities.

Research Methodology:

To fulfill the requirements of this research paper, data collection has been carried out through secondary sources. This involves the use of journals, reference texts, subject-related websites, magazines, newspapers, various scholarly articles, and reference books.

Data Analysis:

The Mahadev Koli tribal community is predominantly found in the hilly and western regions of Northern Pune district. Administratively, the tribal population is concentrated in the Khed, Ambegaon, and Junnar talukas of North Pune:

Ambegaon: The western part of this taluka (the Ghodegaon area and the hilly region of Bhimashankar) falls entirely within the tribal belt.

Junnar: The villages situated along the Ghatmatha (mountain passes) and nestled in the Sahyadri ranges are tribal-dominated.

Khed (Rajgurunagar): A large number of tribal communities reside in the hilly western region of Khed taluka. Together, these three talukas are recognized as the 'Tribal Belt' of Pune district.

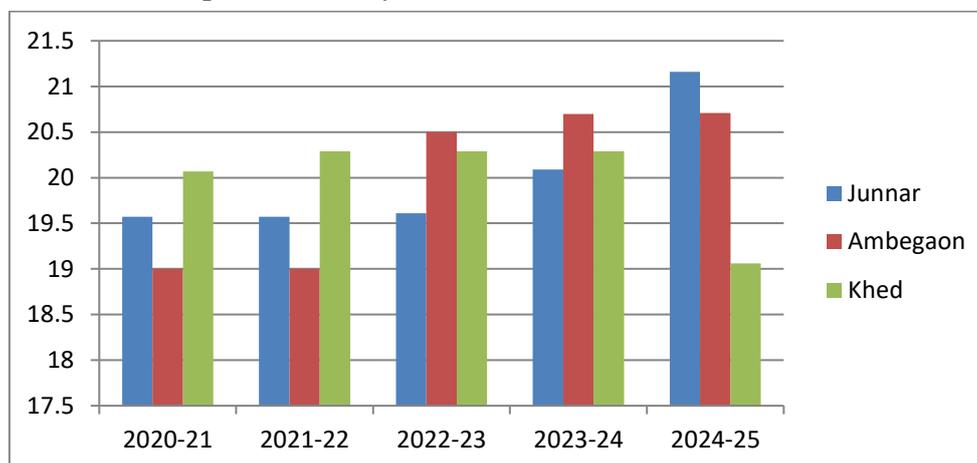
Nature of Tribal Economy and Livelihood - Paddy Cultivation (Rice Farming):

The western regions of Khed, Ambegaon, and Junnar talukas in Northern Pune district receive heavy rainfall. Consequently, paddy (rice) farming serves as the primary backbone of their economy. On the hilly slopes, rice is cultivated using step farming (terrace farming) techniques. Varieties such as Indrayani and Ambemohor are majorly produced in this region. "Based on the following data, a study of the area under paddy cultivation over the last five years has been conducted."

Table No. 1 Area under Paddy Cultivation (in Hectares)

Sr.No.	Taluka/Year	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
1	Junnar	11800	10800	10824	11085	11660
2	Ambegaon	5421	5647	5710	5843	5910
3	Khed	7176	7249	7249	7249	6815

Sources:- [http:// mahades.maharashtra.gov.in](http://mahades.maharashtra.gov.in)

Graph No. 1 Paddy Cultivation of North Pune District

Basis: Table No. 1

Graph/Table No. 1 reveals that among the Khed, Ambegaon, and Junnar talukas of Northern Pune district, Junnar taluka has the largest area under rice cultivation. It is followed by Khed taluka. The high cultivation in Junnar is due to its significant tribal population and favorable climatic conditions, including an adequate water supply for rice crops. In contrast, the area under cultivation in Khed taluka is decreasing due to the presence of the MIDC (Industrial Area). In Ambegaon taluka, other crops are grown more extensively than rice. These include: Vegetables: Potato and Tomato. Cereals/Millet: Nachni (Finger Millet) and Varai (Barnyard Millet). Rabi Season Crops: Gram (Harbhara), Peas, and various other vegetables.

Collection of Forest Produce:

Forests are a crucial source of livelihood for tribal people. They collect various forest products and sell them in local markets. In remote areas, collecting and selling Hirda (Chebulic Myrobalan) and Behada (Belleric Myrobalan) as medicinal plants is a significant source of income. Items such as honey, gum, amla (Indian gooseberry), and various medicinal herbs are collected from the forest and sold locally. During the summer, seasonal wild fruits like karvanda (black currants) and jamun (java plum) are sold in cities to support the family's income. In the monsoon season, wild vegetables such as karli, loth, and kurdu are gathered and sold in markets like Junnar or Manchar. Among all these products, the highest income is earned from the Hirda plant, as detailed below:

Table No. 2

Sr.No.	Year	Income Rate (Per Quintal)
1	2020-21	1800 ₹
2	2021-22	2750 ₹
3	2022-23	1400 ₹
4	2023-24	1850 ₹
5	2024-25	2850 ₹

Source: Ambegaon APMC

"Table No. 2 above shows the income generated from the sale of Hirda (Chebulic Myrobalan) over the last five years. It is observed that the income received from Hirda was at its highest in the financial year 2024-25, reaching ₹2,850 per quintal. Conversely, the income was at its lowest in the financial year 2022-23, at ₹1,400 per quintal. In the remaining financial years, however, the income shows a steady upward trend. This indicates that the revenue generated from Hirda is consistently increasing."

Animal Husbandry:

"Animal husbandry is practiced as a supplementary business to agriculture. Cows and buffaloes are reared, and their milk is supplied to dairies. Goat rearing is often referred to as the 'Cow of the Poor.' During emergencies, goats are sold to meet financial needs. Additionally, indigenous (Gaovran) chickens are reared at a domestic level."

Fishing and Hunting:

Fishing is carried out in the rivers and streams flowing through hills and valleys. This fishing was primarily done for self-consumption or for local exchange. Earlier, the prevalence of hunting was higher, but it has now become limited due to legal regulations.

Correlation Between Tribal Economy and Tourism:

The relationship between the tribal economy and tourism is deeply intertwined and complex. Tourism can serve as a powerful engine for the economic development of tribal communities.

1. Economic Value of Natural Resources:

The tribal economy is primarily based on 'Jal, Jangal, Jameen' (Water, Forest, and Land). Tourism transforms these natural resources into economic assets. For instance, tourists visiting sanctuaries or scenic spots create direct income sources for the local tribal population.

2. Employment Opportunities and Skill Development:

The tourism sector opens up various employment avenues for tribal youth:

Guides: With their profound knowledge of the forest and local culture, tribal youth can work as excellent guides.

Hospitality: Through 'Home-stays', locals can earn income by providing accommodation to tourists in their traditional homes.

Transport: Providing local transportation services for tourists to explore the area.

3. Market for Handicrafts and Traditional Products:

Tourism provides a global platform for traditional tribal craftsmanship:

Product Sales: Tourists pay good prices for items like bamboo crafts, Warli paintings, traditional jewelry, and wood carvings.

Local Produce: Selling authentic products like medicinal herbs, honey, and wild vegetables strengthens the local economy.

4. Cultural Preservation and Income:

Tribal dance, music, and festivals are major attractions for tourists. Cultural tourism not only helps in preserving these traditions but also ensures that artists receive remuneration for their performances.

Challenges and Risks:

While beneficial, tourism also has some negative impacts on the tribal economy:

Cultural Commercialization: There is a risk of losing the soul of the art when it is performed solely for monetary gain.

Environmental Degradation: Mass tourism can damage the lands and natural resources that tribal communities depend on.

External Interference: Often, large profits from tourism are taken by outside contractors, leaving local tribals with only low-paying jobs.

Conclusion:

The 'Golden Mean' (balance) between the tribal economy and tourism lies in Eco-friendly Tourism. If tourism is planned with the local community at its center, it can become the key to the holistic development of tribal society.

Findings:

Although agriculture is the primary source of income in this region, it is predominantly dependent on rainfall.

1. Small landholdings and the hilly terrain limit the use of modern machinery. Rice is the main crop, grown primarily for family consumption, which is why it is termed

'subsistence farming.' Very little produce is left for sale in the market.

2. The collection of forest produce, such as Hirda, Behda, and Gum, is a vital means for tribal communities to earn cash.
3. Research indicates that tribal people do not receive a fair price for these goods; middlemen or traders often purchase the produce at low rates. The economic income of the locals can only increase if the 'Tribal Development Corporation' or 'Cooperative Societies' are strengthened.
4. In remote areas where farming is difficult, animal husbandry (rearing cows, buffaloes, and goats) is proving to be a stable source of income.
5. The growth of milk collection centers in parts of Junnar and Ambegaon has improved the economic status of tribal families. In particular, goat rearing acts like an 'ATM,' providing immediate cash during financial crises.
6. For tribal communities living near dam reservoirs (e.g., Dimbhe, Chaskaman), fishing has emerged as a new profession.
7. Tourism destinations like Junnar (Shivneri, Lenyadri) and Ambegaon (Bhimashankar) are creating employment through 'Eco-tourism' and 'Homestays.' However, these benefits have not yet fully reached the common tribal population.

Recommendations:

1. **Agro and Nature Tourism:** This region includes the Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary, Dimbhe Dam, and the ranges of the Sahyadri Mountains. Tribal hamlet houses should be developed for tourism purposes. Arrangements should be made for tourists to stay in local homes so that they can experience authentic tribal lifestyles.

2. Cultural Tourism and Heritage; Cultural centers should be established to showcase Warli painting, Tarpa dance, and local folk music performances.

3. Adventure Tourism: Junnar has been declared a “Tourism Taluka,” and this advantage can also be extended to Khed and Ambegaon.

Trekking and Guide Training:

Local tribal youth can be provided employment as “trained guides” at places such as Shivneri Fort, Hadsar, Jivdhan, and Naneghat. With proper training in historical and geographical knowledge, they can effectively guide tourists.

Camping Sites:

Eco-friendly camping sites should be developed near dams (e.g., Chaskaman and Dimbhe).

4. Skill Development and Branding:

Forest Produce Processing Centers:

Forest products such as hirda, behda, amla, and honey can be processed and sold in attractive packaging. This will eliminate the need for intermediaries and ensure that profits go directly to the tribal communities.

Handicraft Centers:

“Tribal markets” should be established at major tourist destinations for the sale of bamboo products, baskets, and decorative items.

5. Infrastructure and Promotion:

Digital Presence:

A dedicated app or website should be developed to provide information about tourist destinations in the region, including contact details of local guides and home stays.

Connectivity:

Roads leading to tribal hamlets should be improved, and solar energy should be used to provide electricity in remote areas.

References:

1. Books:

1. Butler, R., & Hinch, T. (2007). *Tourism and indigenous peoples*. Butterworth-Heinemann.
2. Gare, G. (n.d.). *Tribes of Maharashtra and their problems*. Continental Publications.
3. Hasmani, A. S. (2019). *Tribal development and problems*. Vidya Prakashan.
4. Richard, B. (2023). *Indigenous tourism: The ethnomathematics of strategies*. Elsevier Publications.
5. Shah, V. (2011). *Tribes of Gujarat: An economic study*. [Publisher unknown].

2. Government Reports & Publications:

1. Government of India. (2025). *Census reports: Tribal population and occupational status*. Registrar General & Census Commissioner.
2. Government of Maharashtra. (2024). *Annual reports of the Tribal Research and Training Institute, Pune*.
3. Ministry of Tourism. (2024). *Sustainable tourism and eco-tourism guidelines*. Government of India.

3. Journals:

1. Socio-economic impact of tribal tourism. (2021). *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*.
2. Sustainable development of tribes through tourism. (2021). *International Journal of Research*.
3. Tourism development in tribal areas of Maharashtra: A critical study. (2022). *Various Marathi University Journals*.

4. Websites & Online Resources:

1. American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA). (2025). *Native tourism research & data*. <https://www.aianta.org>
2. <http://mahades.maharashtra.gov.in>
3. National Congress of American Indians (NCAI). (2025). *Building tribal economies toolkit*. <https://www.ncai.org>
4. Zenodo. (2025). <https://zenodo.org>