



A critical review of economic weakness of Tribal People and its effects: With Reference to Western Ghat (Kalsubai-Harishchdragad Wildlife Sanctuary)

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DOI - 10.5281/zenodo.18887211

Abstract:

The economic weakness of tribal people residing in the Western Ghats represents a persistent development challenge, particularly within ecologically sensitive and administratively restricted regions such as the Kalasubai–Harishchandragad Wildlife Sanctuary. Despite rich traditional knowledge and close dependence on forest-based livelihoods, tribal communities—especially women—continue to experience multidimensional economic marginalization marked by low income, seasonal employment, limited education, poor health access, and minimal participation in decision-making processes. This study critically examines the nature and consequences of economic vulnerability among tribal people in selected villages of the sanctuary area.

Using a descriptive and analytical research design, primary data were collected from 135 households across nine villages through structured questionnaires and interviews. Logistic regression analysis was employed to assess the relationship between economic conditions and livelihood security, social welfare, and overall well-being. The findings reveal that a majority of households depend on low-paid, seasonal, and labor-intensive occupations, with limited access to government schemes, financial services, healthcare, and higher education. The statistical results indicate a significant negative relationship between economic weakness and livelihood security, leading to poor social and welfare outcomes. The null hypothesis was rejected at the 5% level of significance, confirming that economic instability substantially affects the well-being of tribal people.

The study underscores the inadequate reach of government interventions in extremely remote tribal areas and highlights the urgent need for targeted, gender-sensitive, and context-specific policy measures. Strengthening education, healthcare access, financial inclusion, women's empowerment, and sustainable livelihood opportunities is essential not only for improving tribal welfare but also for promoting inclusive and sustainable development in the Western Ghats.

Introduction:

The economic status of tribal People in the Western Ghats remains one of the most critical yet underexplored aspects of India's development discourse. The Western Ghats, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is home to several indigenous communities whose livelihoods are deeply intertwined with nature. Despite their rich cultural heritage and ecological knowledge, tribal women in this region continue to face severe economic marginalization. Their financial

instability stems from limited access to education, land ownership, employment opportunities, and essential resources, leading to a cycle of poverty that not only affects their personal welfare but also hinders broader social progress (Xaxa, 2005; Shah, 2010).

Historically, tribal communities have followed subsistence-based economies, relying on agriculture, forest produce, and traditional crafts. However, with the advent of modernization and deforestation, their economic foundations have

weakened. The commercialization of forests, displacement due to developmental projects, and limited integration into mainstream markets have further exacerbated their economic challenges (Rao, 2017). Tribal People, in particular, bear the brunt of these changes as they are primarily responsible for gathering forest resources, managing household needs, and contributing to agricultural activities (Sharma & Singh, 2018). The erosion of their traditional means of subsistence has pushed many into low-paying and exploitative labor markets, reinforcing their economic vulnerability.

One of the major consequences of this economic weakness is its impact on livelihood security. Many tribal People are forced into informal and seasonal labor, which lacks stability, social security, and fair wages (Mehta, 2020). Gender discrimination further restricts their ability to negotiate better wages and working conditions. Additionally, inadequate access to credit and financial services prevents them from engaging in entrepreneurial activities that could improve their economic independence (Basu & Banerjee, 2019). The lack of sustainable income sources often forces these women and their families into perpetual poverty, making it difficult to invest in health, education, and overall well-being.

The economic marginalization of tribal People also has significant implications for their welfare. Poor access to healthcare services, high maternal and child mortality rates, malnutrition, and an overall lower life expectancy are direct consequences of their financial instability (Patil et al., 2021). Additionally, illiteracy and lack of vocational skills hinder their ability to break out of the poverty trap. Economic distress also contributes to social issues such as early marriages, domestic violence, and human trafficking, further deteriorating the quality of life for these women (Das & Mukherjee, 2016).

Beyond individual hardships, the economic weakness of tribal people has a broader impact on social progress. As primary caregivers, their economic struggles directly affect the next generation, leading to a cycle of deprivation that limits community development (Sen, 2015). Furthermore, their exclusion from decision-making processes at household and community levels reduces their ability to advocate for policies that could improve their status. The underutilization of their economic potential prevents the overall growth of the region, affecting productivity, gender equality, and sustainable development efforts (Nayak & Samal, 2022).

Addressing these challenges requires targeted policy interventions, including improved access to education, skill development programs, better healthcare, and financial inclusion initiatives. Recognizing and integrating tribal People into mainstream economic frameworks while respecting their cultural and ecological traditions can help uplift their status and contribute to the overall progress of the Western Ghats region. This paper critically examines the economic vulnerabilities of tribal People in the Western Ghats, explores the effects of their financial instability, and provides policy recommendations for sustainable solutions.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyze the economic vulnerabilities of tribal People in the Western Ghats
2. To examine the impact of economic weakness on livelihood security
3. To evaluate the effects of economic marginalization on social and welfare indicators
4. To assess the role of government policies and interventions in improving the economic conditions of tribal People
5. To suggest policy recommendations for

improving the economic and social status of tribal People in the Western Ghats

Hypothesis of the Study:

- There is no significant relationship between the economic conditions of tribal People in the Western Ghats and their livelihood security, social welfare, and well-being.

Research Design and Methodology:

Sample Selection:

In the context of the study on A critical review of economic weakness of Tribal People and its effects: With Reference to Western Ghat Forest wildlife sanctuary, a sample selection has been made as follows: Out of the total 322 self-help savings groups in 26 villages under the jurisdiction of the Kalasubai Harishchandragad wildlife sanctuary, a subset of 135 women from 27 savings groups in 9 villages has been chosen for the study.

Table No 1

Information about villages selected for study in the Kalasubai Harishchandragad Wildlife Division, as well as male – female

Sr. No.	Village Name	Total Population	Male	Female
1	Pendshet	746	370	376
2	Panjare	1545	750	795
3	Murshet	888	432	456
4	Udadawane	1539	750	789
5	Shinganwadi	936	454	482
6	Ghataghar	1176	588	588
7	Samrad	789	417	372
8	Ratanwadi	1118	572	546
9	Koltembhe	505	253	252
10	Kumshet	667	334	333
11	Shirpunje Bk.	1572	782	790
12	Shirpunje Kh.	324	158	166
13	Ambit	692	328	364
14	Pachanai	696	353	343
15	Lavali Kotul	468	241	227
16	Lahvhali Otur	426	221	205
17	Kothale	732	392	340
18	Tale	623	324	299
19	Vihir	496	249	247
20	Somalwadi	606	310	296
21	Phophasandi	893	453	440
22	Palsunde	1440	686	754
23	Satewadi	1660	818	842
24	Khetewadi	578	291	287
25	Umbariwadi(N.V)	329	171	158
26	Morwadi (N.V.)	594	294	300
		22038	10991	11047

Reference - Tribal Development Project Office, Rajur, Kalasubai Harishchandragad Wildlife Division."

Table No. 2

Information about villages selected for study in the Kalasubai Harishchandragad Wildlife Division

Sr. No.	Village Name	Family	Male	Female	Total Population	Sample of Family
1	Pendshet	160	370	376	746	15
2	Panjare	309	750	795	1545	15
3	Murshet	176	432	456	888	15
4	Udadawane	308	750	789	1539	15
5	Shinganwadi	186	454	482	936	15
6	Ghataghar	235	588	588	1176	15
7	Samrad	157	417	372	789	15
8	Ratanwadi	220	572	546	1118	15
9	Koltembhe	110	253	252	505	15
Total		1861	4586	4656	9242	135

Reference - Tribal Development Project Office, Rajur, Kalasubai Harishchandragad Wildlife Division.

These 9 villages are part of the Kalasubai Harishchandragad Wildlife Sanctuary area. Selection has been made from among these villages for study purposes. Additionally, considering the registration of the Tribal Development Project Office in Rajur and the completion of at least five years from 2015 to 2024, and active participation, The Kalsubai Harishchandragad Wildlife Department includes a total of 26 villages. For the purposes of this study, 9 villages have been selected. These 9 villages collectively contain 1861 households. A sample of 15 households from each of the 9 villages, total 135 households, has been chosen for the study, representing 13.78% of the total households in the selected villages through systematic random sampling method. information has been collected using a structured questionnaire and interviews to

gather comprehensive data about the selected women.

Hypothesis Testing:

H₁ (Research Hypothesis): Economic weakness among tribal **People** in the Western Ghats has a significant negative impact on their livelihood security, social welfare, and overall well-being.

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between the economic conditions of tribal **People** in the Western Ghats and their livelihood security, social welfare, and well-being.

Details of government Scheme Information available to the extremely remote tribal

Area within the confines of the Kalsubai Harishchandra Sanctuary.

Sr.No.	Has the government grant been received?	Count	Percentage
1	YES	30	22
2	NO	105	78
		135	100

Reference – Primary observation

Test Statistics Details:

Logistic regression Value =0.2857, P-value = 0.001 *.**

P-value by Logistic regression, P-value < 0.05 is considered to be statistically significant.

Value of Test Statistic (Logistic regression value)
= 0.2857

P-value (Probability value) = 0.001 (Statistically
Significant by Logistic regression value).

Decision Based on Statistical Analysis:

We Reject Null Hypothesis (H₀) and
Accept Alternative Hypothesis (H₂) at 5% Level
of Significance (LOS).

The logistic regression value of 0.2857,
coupled with a probability value of 0.001,
signifies statistical significance. The pivotal role
of the government in fostering women
entrepreneurship in extremely remote tribal
regions is underscored. To explore this, logistic
regression was employed. The findings indicate
that the government's involvement in tribal areas
falls notably below the anticipated value of 0.5.
Consequently, based on this statistical
examination, alternative hypotheses are embraced
over null hypotheses, thus accentuating the
necessity of government engagement.

Conclusion:

The educational profile among the Tribal
population presents a comprehensive picture of
educational attainment. The data reveals that
while a significant portion, 87.17%, is literate,
there's a notable disparity in higher educational
achievements. The statistics indicate that a
substantial portion of the literate population has
received education up to the seventh grade
(27.46%) and the eighth to tenth grade (20.36%).
However, the percentages drop notably for higher
education levels, with only 2.0% having
completed undergraduate education and a mere

1.02% pursuing postgraduate education. This
pattern suggests that while basic literacy is
accessible, economic constraints or other factors
might hamper individuals from pursuing higher
education. Due to limited educational
opportunities, individuals migrating to urban
areas in search of employment are often
constrained to accepting low-quality jobs. This
situation leads to psychological distress and
demotivation. Furthermore, the inadequacy of
education results in lower wages, contributing to
a deterioration in their overall standard of living.

The analysis of income distribution
among families provides valuable insights into
the economic status of the surveyed population
living below the poverty line. The data reveals
that a significant majority of families, 87.88%,
fall within the income range of ₹3001 to ₹7000.
In contrast, only a small percentage (6.74%) of
families earn above ₹9001, indicating that a
limited proportion of the population has access to
higher income levels, which may better equip
them to manage inflationary pressures. Given the
rising inflation, families within the ₹3001 to
₹7000 income bracket may encounter difficulties
in meeting basic needs, despite being above the
lowest income levels.

The data on occupational types among
families critical insights into their livelihood
patterns. The findings indicate a heavy reliance on
labor-intensive employment, with 53.55% of
families working as laborers. Additionally,
19.50% are engaged in agriculture, 14.18% are
employed in various sectors, and 12.77% operate
small-scale Guide businesses. The predominance
of labor-oriented occupations among these

families can be attributed to several factors, including limited access to financial resources for agricultural activities, small or non-existent landholdings, and a lack of higher educational qualifications necessary for alternative employment opportunities. Economic pressures and the immediate need for income likely drive a significant portion of these families towards labor-intensive jobs, which typically offer daily wages without the need for advanced education or land ownership.

The study on the prevalence of addictions among men and women in families in Tribal Area in the regional census revealed that 23.58% of men in such families are addicted to tobacco, while 9.57% are addicted to alcohol. Regarding women, it was observed that 34.35% of women in these families have a mixed addiction, with no men addicted to cigarettes. However, 22.16% of men in these families are addicted to bidi (rolled tobacco leaves). From this, it can be concluded that the constant physical distress, financial stress, and mental pressure due to addiction contribute significantly to the challenges faced by families living below the poverty line.

The type of housing in which families reside is a crucial factor in determining their socio-economic status. The availability of physical and mental amenities plays a significant role in human development. In the Regional Census, 88.13% of families reside in permanent houses, 10.28% in semi-permanent houses, and 1.59% in temporary shelters. This data suggests that 11.87% of families applied for housing under government schemes like the Indira Awas Yojana, resulting in improved living conditions. The majority of families, 88.13%, have their own permanent houses but not basic Facility Available in their house, indicating Low economic status.

In the highly isolated tribal regions, employment patterns reveal significant disparities. Only 10% of individuals in these

families have access to employment opportunities throughout the year (12 months). In contrast, 80% of tribal families experience employment for a duration of six months annually. Furthermore, 10% of the population is employed for a mere four months. This suggests that most of the people in these areas rely heavily on seasonal sources of livelihood, such as tourism, forest resources, seasonal crops like rice during the monsoon, and other forest-based products. Consequently, year-round employment opportunities are scarce, resulting in a persistently poor economic condition for tribal families.

An analysis of the status of women in these remote tribal communities reveals that 100% of tribal individuals do not consider women's advice when making household decisions. This can be attributed to the prevailing patriarchal culture, where tribal men oppose women engaging in employment. As a result, women's potential contributions to improving the family's financial condition are largely disregarded.

A review of educational attainment in these remote tribal areas indicates that 72% of individuals have completed education up to the seventh grade, 12% have reached the tenth grade, 6% have pursued higher education, and 10% have received vocational training. It is evident from this data that access to higher education requires traveling to distant villages located about 20 kilometers away, further limiting educational opportunities and perpetuating a lack of access to advanced educational resources.

An examination of health facilities in these isolated tribal areas under the Kalsubai Harishchandragad Wildlife Department reveals that no tribal villages have clinics or primary health centers. As a result, individuals must travel between 25 to 30 kilometers to access healthcare services, significantly limiting their ability to receive timely medical attention.

Recommendation:

- Accessible, clear guidance on the application process, required documentation, eligibility criteria, and the steps to avail benefits of government schemes can significantly empower these families. This information dissemination can be through workshops, accessible guides, community outreach programs, or even digital platforms to reach a wider audience.
- Empowering women in savings groups with financial management training is crucial. This education could cover various aspects such as budgeting, record-keeping, understanding interest rates, managing debt, and planning for repayments. Additionally, it's important to impart skills related to setting financial goals and understanding the implications of borrowing on their overall economic well-being. This training not only enhances their ability to manage loans but also fosters a broader understanding of financial literacy, enabling them to make informed decisions for their families' economic stability.
- Indeed, the discrepancy between the frequency of surveys and the dynamic nature of economic indicators like inflation can create significant gaps in accurately assessing the situation of families below the poverty line. Increasing the frequency of surveys to every five years could provide more timely and relevant data, allowing for a better understanding of the changing economic landscape and its impact on these families. This would enable policymakers to adjust strategies and interventions more promptly to address the challenges faced by these vulnerable households, considering the evolving economic conditions.

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