

# Location, Livelihoods and Tribal People: Exploring the Linkages in India

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## Abstract

The intricate nuances shared between human beings and the land put forth a complex phenomenon in the context of geographical studies. Geographical location inhabited by a living person tends to impact the several socio-economic facets of one's life, out of which livelihood opportunities available to an individual remain a prominent facet. This study investigates the impact of location on the livelihoods of tribal people in the Indian states. Spatial patterns of the livelihood opportunities available to people are severely impacted by the proximity to the urban conglomerates. Since antiquity, tribals have lived in consonance with the natural world, depending upon the natural resources even for their basic survival existence. However, since the onset of industrialisation began and economy started to revolve around service sector with the subjugation of the primary sector, tribals due to their geographical location have been at a disadvantageous position proportionately. In order to investigate the connections between location, livelihoods and tribal people the research provided here poses the following query: What impact does a tribe's location have on its members' livelihoods? This study adds to the corpus of work already mentioned by examining how location affects tribal livelihoods.

**Keywords:** Livelihoods, Location, Tribal People

## Introduction

The livelihoods<sup>1</sup> of tribal communities in India are a multifaceted, intricate and dynamic phenomenon

<sup>1</sup> The term "livelihoods" refers to the overall measure of how individuals or a particular group of people (even as tiny as a single-person home) make a living within the constraints imposed by their social, political, economic, and environmental environments (Ajala, 2008).

with perceptions that vary depending on factors like geography, community type, age, gender and education as well as changes in resources, services, infrastructure and social, economic, cultural, ecological and political factors (Kumar et al., 2009; Islam & Sofi, 2013). Among all these factors' location have a significant impact on the livelihoods of Tribal people as commonly tribal people inhabit in the isolated places and their household's location cut them to access the resources which are available for the others those who are not residing in the isolated locations. In the 1990s, the livelihoods approach emerged as a leading framework for recognising poverty issues and for providing guidance on development policies in developing countries, particularly in rural areas (Ma et al., 2023). Location is a multifaceted, intricate variable that needs meticulous examination. Apart from the "access" dimension of the location variable, there exist other factors that influence patterns of adaptation and diversification (Kamanga et al., 2009). The broad perspective of impoverished people's lives that Gordon Conway and Robert Chambers promoted in a 1992 IDS discussion paper served as the philosophical foundation for modern livelihoods studies.

From a micro-spatial perspective, the spatial patterns of rural livelihoods vary depending on the type and distance to urban regions; small and medium-sized cities have a greater impact on the means of sustenance for the rural poor. The impact of cities on rural livelihoods are spatially more varied due to the geographic setting. Research on livelihoods from a spatial perspective aid in the better targeting and modification of measures aimed at reducing poverty. Under the guidance of this framework, studies on livelihoods have been conducting analyses that take into account vulnerable circumstances and modify structures

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in order to explain livelihood outcomes in various contexts (Ma et al., 2023). The study of the spatiality of rural livelihoods from a macro-spatial perspective is made possible through the lens of geography (King, 2011) to address the spatial characteristics of livelihoods elements, the means of subsistence for rural communities vary depending on the sort of location they live in; for example, non-farming livelihoods are adopted in mountainous areas, the reliance on agriculture that uses less water in drought-prone areas and forestry in rainforest areas.

Thus, it may be stated that livelihoods are location-dependent; some areas have access to more resources (both human and physical) and provide their residents more chances than others (Ajala, 2008). In choosing livelihoods, people will occupy varied livelihoods on the basis of their location like they will work as farmers in one area and herders in another, fishermen and sailors in still another etc. geographic surroundings greatly influence people's actions. Arctic and tropical regions, grassy steppes that provide a natural habitat for nomadic shepherds and their herds and the seacoast with its commerce and fishing opportunities are not the same as mountainous areas with their forests and mines (Hayes, 1914). Research based on region type shows that contextual effects on rural livelihoods are widespread (Ma et al., 2023). It is difficult for people to make a living in marginal environments such as deserts, delta and riverine regions, flood plains and mountainous areas with steep slope gradients. Aside from the institutional elements that are prevalent in such a region or country, specific places in rural areas may also offer better opportunities or limits to livelihoods due to areal heterogeneity (Ajala, 2008)

Livelihood systems are shaped by spatial processes, which in turn shape livelihood systems. The spatialisation of livelihoods indicates that processes from the past and present continue to have significance in creating specific spatial arrangements that will impact future livelihood opportunities (King, 2011; De Haan, 2003).

## Methodology

The research relies on secondary data collected from books, articles, published reports and government documents from the respective departments. The conclusions are drawn based on the author's interpretation

of the published research. This paper primarily focuses on qualitative research, providing descriptive analysis that highlights the influence of location on tribal livelihoods.

## Analysis Framework

The livelihood idea is widely used in many academic domains. These fields use livelihood frameworks to comprehend how political and economic systems influence social actors' possibilities for livelihoods. Livelihood frameworks must consider access as a geographical construct, and access negotiations as a means of producing, reproducing and even renegotiating socio-spatial interactions over time. Access is a key concern in study on livelihoods in development studies. Physical circumstances, such as location or stature, can shape access (Ribot, 1998). Tracing access spatially helps to understand where certain resources are gathered and how social interactions reflected via geographical locations shape access. Access, however, is also a product of the social dynamics that come together in specific locations in addition to sheer location.

It's claimed that certain livelihood paths and social networks for rural people are shaped by historical and modern geographies, necessitating an expressly geographical study in order to comprehend the processes (King, 2011).

## Location, Livelihoods and Tribal People

"Location" describes the actual physical location of the community (Wigle, 2008). It determines one's means of living; certain areas have access to more resources (both physical and human) and offer their residents more chances than others (Ajala, 2008). The livelihoods of tribal communities are significantly impacted by their geographic location (Wang et al., 2023) Livelihoods were referred to as *genres de vie* in traditional French geography, which denotes the collection of livelihood tactics used by a human group in a certain area (De Haan, 2012). Research in geography has made it clear that, in order to comprehend the vital processes that influence livelihood production and the opportunities accessible to individuals, location must be at the centre of livelihood analyses (McSweeney, 2004). Geographical differences lead to the emergence of distinct livelihood activities (Satpati & Sharma, 2023).

A major aspect influencing the choice of livelihood is the household's geographic location. Analysing the patterns of household distribution across various livelihood categories can provide an empirical information to support government layout planning and aid in the understanding of how geographical factors influence livelihood choices. Research indicates that the location-related factors that affect rural households—like transportation accessibility and elevation—have a big influence on the livelihood strategies they choose. Therefore, increased accessibility can facilitate a wider range of livelihood activities for individuals. This emphasises the need of developing road capacity, bolstering village accessibility and advancing local transportation (Huang et al., 2022).

The analysis of tribal people's location in context of livelihoods concerns the relevance of location to livelihood options while simultaneously challenges the traditional and unduly simplified definition of "access to land." Land access is the capacity to make use of, manage, distribute and profit from resources while taking into account people's ability to make a living (Brahma & Mushahary, 2021). In any agriculture-based economy, such as India's, the rural population's ability to support themselves largely depends on their access to land (Yates, 2004). For millions of Indians, the land is their source of income because nearly 70% of the country's population relying on land (Government of India, 2013). In addition to the lands, tribal land rights encompass forests, water, mountains, subsurface and other natural resources. This makes it possible to say that tribal people in India depend heavily on their access to land and forests for their subsistence and survival.

The means of livelihoods for tribes in India vary by area and tribe, based on the availability of natural resources including land, water and forests. The majority of tribal people live in the state's forests and most remote areas for ecological and historical reasons. These communities follow a variety of customary land tenure schemes, many of which have been altered by laws and policies from the state. The land tenure system in clans is based on customary rights over land, forests and trees. Each tribe has its own land use and tenure systems, as evidenced by the practices of swidden and terraced farming. For instance, in the cases of Dongaria Kondhs and Kutia Kondhs, the Kondhs clans were referred to as muttas and may be further separated into their linkage-based regions

(Padhi & Panigrahi, 2011). So, possibilities for tribal people's living are greatly influenced by their geographic location.

In addition to physical location, a number of other variables also impact livelihoods, including: (i) Socioeconomic variables: the choice of livelihoods, for example, can be greatly influenced by the market distance, and the educational attainment of the heads of the households (ii) Climate Change: effects climate change can amplify already-existing vulnerabilities and threatening sustainable development and lowering the ability to respond adaptively. (iii) Institutional variables: access to basic services, institutions and governance capacities can affect livelihood activities (iv) Home characteristics: variables including the dependency ratio, active labour force in the family and asset ownership in the home can also influence livelihoods.

Development procedures have the power to change tribal populations' methods of subsistence. Tribal communities' means of subsistence may be impacted by national laws and safeguards, such as those stipulated in Schedules V and VI of the Indian Constitution. The lives of individuals and communities can be shaped by the intricate interactions between these elements. But these livelihoods are also influenced by other variables including market interdependencies, national policies, development processes and sustainability considerations. Hence it can be said that the livelihood pattern of tribal societies is determined by a number of elements, including educational attainment, ethnicity, and the availability of resources and infrastructures in addition to social, cultural, ecological, economic and political concerns (De Haan & Zoomers, 2005; Kumar, 2009; Haldankar, 2016; Deb & Mahato, 2020; Carney, 1998).

### **Exploring the Linkages between Location, Livelihoods and Tribal People in Indian Context**

In India tribal population is scattered in small pockets in isolated locations throughout the country except Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Puducherry and Delhi. The way of life of tribal people in India is a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon. Tribal people have long lived in harmony with nature and the forest. In plains, tribes rely heavily on agriculture for sustenance, while those in mountainous areas may have more dependence on hunting and gathering

due to the rugged terrain. These distinct environments shape the cultural practices and traditions of each tribe, influencing their relationship with the land and resources. These mountains provide doors for activities that are more suited to mountainous environments. Indeed, inaccessible, fragile and marginalised distinctiveness shape the entire spectrum of activities in the highlands that rely on local resources (Mehta, 2016). Consequently, their continued separation from other people in the mainstream led to the creation of an autonomous means of subsistence.

Their lives and livelihoods are closely linked to the natural world. As a result, tribal communities have a trait of the segregation from the general population. The tribal economy is primarily based on natural resources, as there is a mutually beneficial interaction between tribal livelihood activities and natural resources such as forests, land and minerals but in recent decades, there has been a shift in tribal livelihoods from being primarily based in forests to being based primarily on land (Das & Mishra, 2020). The survival of over 90% of India's tribal population depends on the land. It is to be expected that the principal source of sustenance for tribal people in India is agriculture, particularly forest-based agriculture, which is essential to the country's economy. The complex, dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon of forest-based livelihoods among tribal communities in India is influenced by various factors such as community type, age, gender, education and social, economic, cultural, ecological and political factors. It is also affected by changes in resources, services and infrastructures (Kumar et al., 2009).

Tribal people's reliance on subsistence farming, horticulture, pastoralism, hunting, gathering, forest products, subsistence agriculture, raising livestock, specialised crafts and traditional agricultural methods like shifting cultivation are all influenced by their geographic location. For example, the Jarawa tribe in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands hunt, fish and gather forest food for their daily needs. In the foothills of the Himalayas, the Lepcha people in Sikkim has long engaged in terrace farming. The Koli people of Maharashtra, Gujarat states have historically been fisherman, and they rely on fishing for their living. Their proximity to the ocean influences both their cultural customs and economic endeavours. The Niyamgiri Hills in Odisha are home to the Dongria Kondh people. Their main sources of income include ceramics

and basket weaving, as well as agriculture (including shifting cultivation) and the collection of non-timber forest products like fruits and medicinal plants. The Saura tribe, who live in the districts of Rayagada and Koraput, are engaged in agriculture, namely in the production of paddy and horticulture. They also work with animals and weave and make crafts using bamboo. The Santhal community in Jharkhand engages in agriculture, specifically focusing on horticulture and subsistence farming while the Munda people are primarily agriculturalists, although they also raise animals and make handicrafts like metalwork and basketry. The Kurumba tribe, which resides in Kerala's Nilgiri Hills, is engaged in agriculture, mostly in the production of coffee and horticulture.

The inadequate provision of livelihood resources makes the existence of the Sahariya tribe of Madhya Pradesh a nomadic life. As such, the people are always migrating to find work. Therefore, whenever anyone needs the labour, they reach out to the intermediary and he contacts the Sahariyas, who are then sent. The process facilitates a lack of care in their original habitat and exposes them to harsh conditions in the temporary settlers (Patel, 2023).

Tribal communities in India primarily depend on agriculture due to a number of factors, such as their geographic location in hilly, forested, or ecologically diverse regions; in addition, they may lack access to alternative livelihood options such as education and employment; and finally, lack of infrastructure. Urban migration tends to be restricted by elements including social marginalisation, cultural ties to rural areas and landlessness. Because tribal communities may not have easy access to industrial development or metropolitan centres, agriculture serves as the main source of income and subsistence for tribal people. Most tribal communities engage in agricultural practices including terrace farming, jhum agriculture (shifting cultivation) and agroforestry.

Like landlocked nations, tribal communities in isolated mountainous areas of India frequently encounter difficulties reaching mainstream markets to sell their agricultural products, handicrafts, or forest resources because of their geographic limitations. Their inability to connect with metropolitan centres where marketplaces are more accessible is hampered by the rough terrain and

lack of transportation infrastructure (Sachs et al., 2001). In present Government of India making efforts through various schemes i.e., Equity support to National/ State Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC/ STFDCs), Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Tribes (VCF-STs) and Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission, Marketing and Logistics Development for Promoting Tribal Products from the North Eastern Region (PTP-NER), to create a transparent and effective system for the production, acquisition, processing and marketing of tribal goods by creating backward and forward linkages, in order to assist and encourage entrepreneurship and livelihood options for the tribal community.

Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Tribes (VCF-STs): projects and units that are being established in the manufacturing, services and related sectors—including start-ups and those being nurtured in technology business incubators—that guarantee the production of assets from the funds invested in the unit will be taken into consideration. So, through the provision of alternate sources of income, by building infrastructure (irrigation canals, roads and bridges) in places inhabited by tribes the government has been attempting in recent years to enhance the economic condition of tribal groups by providing them livelihoods opportunities.

NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India) recommended the Ministry of Tribal Affairs to develop sector-specific programmes in a mission approach to support tribal livelihood in January 2020. The Group of Ministers (GoM) for “Skill Development and Employment Generation” suggested in October 2020 that the Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM) – Mera Van Mera Dhan Mera Udyam” be launched as an umbrella programme. In light of this, the two schemes namely (i) ‘Institutional Support for Development and Marketing of Tribal Products’ and (ii) ‘Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and Development of Value Chain for MFP’ (with two sub-components of MSP for MFP and Van Dhan Yojana) were combined to become the Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission (PMJVM).

Throughout the Northeast, Marketing and Logistics Development for Promoting Tribal Products from the North Eastern Region (PTP-NER) scheme aims to directly

improve the livelihood of over 6000 tribal suppliers and craftspeople. The programme was initially scheduled to run for two years, from 2021–2022 to 2022–2023; however, it has now been extended to 2024–2025. The scheme helps tribal artists take advantage of chances to increase their income by establishing backward and forward connections through sourcing and procurement, aggregation, skill and entrepreneurial development, marketing, transportation and publicity.

## Conclusions

Geographical location profoundly shapes the livelihoods of tribal communities. Tribal areas are often rich in natural resources including forests, water and land. These resources are important in shaping livelihoods of the tribal communities. For instance, tribes living in or around forests may rely on forest produce for their sustenance.

Recognising the importance of location and understanding regional backwardness dynamics can guide policymakers towards effective poverty reduction strategies. Targeting backward areas rather than individual households may yield better livelihoods opportunities for the tribal people (Park et al., 2002; Ding Leng, 2018). The intricate phenomenon of spatial poverty traps in rural areas is caused by several sets of circumstances that support concentrations of persistent poverty within and between regions. Geographic isolation (i.e., difficulty of access due to terrain) and geographical remoteness (i.e., physical distance from large towns or the coast) are similar to many regions. Poverty trap patterns are shaped by interlinked sets of social, political and economic forces. “Market failures” cause underinvestment and resource exploitation without the balancing advantages for pro-poor growth in these areas. In many isolated rural locations, “state failure” refers to the lack of infrastructure (Bird et al., 2002). Developing infrastructure, funding educational and skill-building initiatives, adopting sustainable resource management techniques and defending the rights and safeguards of tribal groups are all essential components of a holistic strategy to tackle these issues. In tribal communities, we may encourage inclusive and sustainable development by giving tribal people the means to fully engage in the economy while protecting their traditional heritage. So, through a better understanding of the spatial dynamics of tribal groups in the context of regional backwardness policymakers and development

professionals may effectively configure strategies to tackle specific challenges and foster inclusive growth and development.

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