***Original Research Article***

**Evaluation of the Socioeconomic Status of Local Tribes in AchanakmarAmarkantak Biosphere Reserve of Mungeli District**

**ABSTRACT**

Chhattisgarh is one of the tribal-state of India in which most of the tribes are concentrated in the dense forests of Achanakmar Amarkantak Biosphere Reserve (AABR). Tribal primarily depend upon agriculture, forest products, handcrafts, and medicinal plants for their existence. Traditionally, Gonds are agriculturalists, and Baigas are actively engaged in the medicinal aspects of plants to treat ailments. However, with time, the social, economic, and cultural life of the tribes in forest reserves has changed due to increased anthropogenic pressure on the wildlife, which has endangered their survival. These tribes often practice collecting forest products and selling them in the market for livelihood. To address these issues, we have done a comprehensive study of AABR fall under, Khudia and Lormi Region of Mungeli District of Chhattisgarh State. We have observed seven tribes viz., Gond, Baiga, Kanwar, Oraon, Muria, Bharia and Kol, among them the Gonds were dominant. We have included the type of family, assets, drinking water, house/land, livestock, toilet facility, availability of electricity and Fuel for Cooking for the evaluation of the socioeconomic profile of the study area. The outcome of the present research work emphasized the strategic execution of a sustainable marketplace for an upsurge of the socioeconomic status of tribes by encouraging the selling of herbal products, high-value forest produce, and handicrafts. Further effective implementation of tribal welfare schemes might help them most.

**Keywords:** Socioeconomic status, local tribes, AchanakmarAmarkantak Biosphere Reserve, Mungeli, Lormi, Khudia, tribal welfare.

**INTRODUCTION**

The tribes have learned to live in hostile environmental conditions and play a crucial role in managing and conserving nearby biodiversity for a long time with their rich culture, living tactics and rituals. Food and Agriculture Organization stated that the traditional knowledge of tribal people provides valuable insights towards eco-restoration. The Indigenous tribes in the Achanakmar-Amarkantak Biosphere Reserve (AABR) in Chhattisgarh are the Gond, Baiga, Kanwar, Oraon, Muria, Bharia, and Kol communities (Mollick*et al*., 2022). The Baiga tribe is particularly associated with the collection and processing of medicinal plants from the Achanakmar forest, for treatment of common ailments (Mahato *et al*., 2022). Achanakmar Wildlife Sanctuary has existed since 1975 under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. Later, the AABR was established in 2005 that occupied Chhattisgarh and some regions of Madhya Pradesh. Later, ATR was declared in 2009 under AABR in the lap of the Maikal ranges. Prasad *et al*., (2022) quoted that the AABR has tropical moist deciduous vegetation that is enriched with rich pool of germplasm .

The tribal communities have evolved their livelihood approaches based on their ethnic knowledge and exist in adjacent proximity to the biodiversity-rich landscape. Each tribal community has a unique culture and tradition with a particular type of economy and the associated work. Land and forest are their assets. Therefore, they have always maintained a close relationship with the land and forest. Their economy is highly subsistence and agro-based. Most importantly, with the march of time, the tribal community has been exposed to modernization and subsequent human development, which has enabled them to explore numerous means of livelihood (Das *et al*., 2020). The socioeconomic condition of any family or person depends on their occupation and income. Thus, the socio-economic conditions of tribes in AABR reflect a complex interplay of traditional practices and modern challenges. Efforts to improve the socio-economic conditions of tribes in AABR require a multifaceted approach, focusing on sustainable development, education, healthcare, and the protection of their cultural heritage. Shylendra*et al*. (2023) mentioned that these challenges are crucial for empowering local tribal communities and ensuring their rights and livelihoods.

The socioeconomic conditions of the local tribes depend on two factors, they are economy and occupation (Lakshmi *et al*., 2019; Chakravarthi *et al*., 2017). The type of family (e.g., nuclear or joint), house, land availability, livestock diversity, availability of electricity, assets, drinking water facility, toilet facility, and fuel for cooking are some crucial aspects of measuring the socioeconomic profile of the local population at a base level. Many tribal people rely on agriculture, forest produce, and traditional crafts. Additionally, the forest provides essential resources, including wood, medicinal plants, and wild fruits, which are vital for their livelihoods. The main problem encountered limited access to formal employment opportunities often leads to reliance on daily wage labor, particularly in agriculture or manual work in nearby towns. Efforts are ongoing to improve educational infrastructure. Afterward, healthcare access is poor, with reliance on traditional medicine and limited government health services. Last but not least, the tribal communities maintain rich cultural traditions, but they face challenges from modernization and loss of land, which threaten their identity and lifestyle. Thereby, the present study was conducted to evaluate the Socioeconomic Status of Local Tribes in AABR.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study area for the present research work was AABR falls under, Khudia (22.47°N,81.55°E) and Lormi (22.35°N,81.78°) region of Mungeli District of Chhattisgarh State. The Socioeconomic Status of Local Tribes in AABR was evaluated from January 2024 to June 2024. The data were collected using questionnaires and personal interviews. A total of 53 people (common residents) were interviewed who were engaged in marketing and stall putting in the local market. The interviews were conducted in remote villages. The informants were questioned for their socioeconomic profiles as per the questionnaire prepared. We have selected five villages viz., Khudiya, Kanchanpur, Karidogari, Aurapani, and Salgi for the present research work. The data were collected via personal interviews and questionnaires. A total of 150 villagers were selected for the personal interview and questionnaire as per the literacy level of respondents. All the data were processed, tabulated, and graphically summarized using MS Office.

**Results and Discussion**

We have exhaustively gone through the evaluation of socioeconomic profiling of local tribe’s residents in AABR. These tribes face challenges, especially in the economic context which impacts their sustainable existence. We have done studies in Khudiya, Kanchanpur, Karidogari, Aurapani, and Salgi villages and collected the socioeconomic data shown in **Table 1**. We have observed that the maximum family belongs to a Nuclear Family (NF) and recorded that Kanchanpur has 76 % of NF. Moreover, we have found that mobile and television were dominant assets and Khudiya village population has maximum accessibility to assets. Later, we have seen that almost every villager has access to drinking water. Afterwards, we noted that almost every villager has their own house/land. Then, we observed that poultry and goats were dominant in the study area and few people had bullocks as livestock. After that, we have found that nearly every village has its own house/land. Furthermore, we recorded that almost every village has its own toilet facility and Salgi has comparatively less accessibility to toilet facilities. Additionally, we have observed that Khudiya village has maximum access towards LPG and noticed that the large population still uses wood for cooking. We have also found that the Hindu religion is the most dominant (above 80 %) in the study area. Data related to the aforementioned statements are graphically presented in **Fig 1** to **Fig 9**. No similar study was conducted earlier as per our best knowledge and beliefs. However other factors have been divulged. For instance, Literature viz., Sanyal*et al*. (2022), Singh *et al*. (2022), Rathia *et al*. (2018), Sinha *et al*. (2012), Prevot*et al*. (2014), Chakma *et al*. (2006), and Gautam *et al*. (2022) have been reported that the local inhabitants of AABR are actively engaged in farming, forest labor, selling forest products, agriculture, traditional medicine, and handicrafts (i.e., bamboo mats, baskets, jewelry, and decorative kinds of stuff) as a major source of income. Additionally, they reported major areas of employment for tribal include Forest-based activities, daily wage work, collection of forest produce, mahua liquor business, handicrafts, and agriculture.

**Table 1. Socioeconomic Profiling of Local Tribes in AABR of Mungeli District**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Study area** | **Respondent** | **Type of Family** | | **Religion** | | | **house/Land** | | **livestock** | | | | | **Availability of electricity** | | **Assets** | | | | | | **drinking water Facility** | | **Toilet** | | **Fuel for cooking** | |
| **NF** | **JF** | **Hindu** | **Christian** | **Other** | **Yes** | **No** | **Cow** | **Buffaloes** | **Bullocks** | **Goats** | **Poultry** | **Yes** | **No** | **Cycle** | **Bike** | **Mobile** | **Mixer** | **Refrigerator** | **Television** | **Yes** | **No** | **Yes** | **No** | **LPG** | **Wood** |
| **Khudiya** | **50** | **36** | **14** | **40** | **9** | **1** | **48** | **2** | **16** | **12** | **5** | **34** | **41** | **50** | **0** | **10** | **24** | **46** | **14** | **9** | **41** | **50** | **0** | **47** | **3** | **29** | **21** |
| **Kanchanpur** | **25** | **19** | **6** | **22** | **3** | **0** | **25** | **0** | **8** | **7** | **3** | **18** | **19** | **25** | **0** | **4** | **12** | **21** | **8** | **3** | **25** | **25** | **0** | **23** | **2** | **18** | **7** |
| **Karidogari** | **25** | **14** | **11** | **23** | **2** | **0** | **24** | **1** | **7** | **5** | **2** | **16** | **16** | **25** | **0** | **6** | **10** | **19** | **6** | **2** | **20** | **25** | **0** | **24** | **0** | **16** | **9** |
| **Aurapani** | **25** | **13** | **12** | **21** | **4** | **0** | **25** | **0** | **7** | **6** | **3** | **17** | **20** | **25** | **0** | **9** | **8** | **20** | **4** | **3** | **19** | **25** | **0** | **25** | **1** | **13** | **11** |
| **Salgi** | **25** | **10** | **15** | **25** | **0** | **0** | **23** | **2** | **6** | **5** | **2** | **19** | **17** | **24** | **1** | **6** | **7** | **16** | **7** | **2** | **17** | **25** | **0** | **20** | **5** | **11** | **14** |

**Fig 1. Socioeconomic Profile: Type of Family**

**Fig 2. Socioeconomic Profile: Assets**

**Fig 3. Socioeconomic Profile: Drinking Water Facility**

**Fig 4. Socioeconomic Profile: House//Land**

**Fig 5. Socioeconomic Profile: Livestock**

**Fig 6. Socioeconomic Profile: Availability of Electricity**

**Fig 7. Socioeconomic Profile: Toilet Facility**

**Fig 8. Socioeconomic Profile: Fuel for Cooking**

**Fig 9. Socioeconomic Profile: Religion**

The tribal communities constitute a significant segment of the Indian population, characterized by their distinct ecology, economy, society, and religious beliefs (Jaiswal *et al*., 2020). Thereby, their socioeconomic profiling of them could be a necessary part of their upliftment. The economy and livelihoods of tribal populations in Chhattisgarh primarily involve agricultural practices and the collection of forest resources, such as herbal products and high-value forest produce, including Sal butter (Paltasingh *et al*., 2014; Marchang *et al*., 2018). But, still, tribal communities encounter numerous challenges, including the exploitation of natural resources, threats to traditional livelihoods, the erosion of traditional knowledge, and issues related to tribal rights within conservation efforts (Nimisha *et al*., 2020; Venugopal *et al*., 2019; Singh *et al*., 2015). Furthermore, various opportunities exist for enhancing the socioeconomic status of tribes through government initiatives, including education, job-oriented vocational training programs, entrepreneurship, skill development workshops, and minimum wage (Alam *et al*., 2023; Das *et al*., 2019). Thus, the study concluded that more insight into diverse socioeconomic portfolios is required to be evaluated for effective planning of tribal welfare in terms of their linkage to modern lifestyle trends as well as ensuring their association with the forest ecosystem. Nevertheless, the Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana, Schemes for Scheduled Tribes, Support to Tribal Research Institute scheme, Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Residents, and Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (Act, 2006) are potent initiatives taken by the government for tribal welfare (Priyadarshini *et al*., 2019 & Mandi *et al*., 2020; Gupta *et al*., 2018; Minz*et al*., 2020). But, the effective implementation of such programs is still questionable. Thus, our research work will focus on the integration of tribal welfare program accessibility to tribes along with our existing work. Singh et al. (2024) have divulged that the population density of seedlings, saplings, and trees was higher in the Mixed Sal Forest Closed Site, in contrast to to Pure Sal Forest Closed Site.  Most recently Bali et al. (2024) investigated the biodiversity, biogeographical features, and ethnobotanical worthiness of the AABR and glorified its perilous role in upholding ecological balance and subsidiary role in livelihoods of the local populations.

**Conclusion**

AABR includes one or more protected areas as well as surrounding territories that combine conservation efforts with sustainable use of natural resources. The forest serves tribal communities not only for their livelihood but also for their socio-cultural life. There is a close relationship exists between tribes and the forest ecosystem therefore they cannot survive in isolation. But their dependence on the forest was always overlooked. There was always a conflict between the local Adivasi's needs and the forest's preservation. Tribal communities have effectively utilized natural resources through communal practices and sustained land-use methods. Despite their rich cultural heritage and ecological knowledge, deforestation, changes in land use, and restricted access to forests present significant threats to their livelihoods. Therefore, the enhancement of the socio-economic status of the local tribal population will occur through sustainable practices in the production, harvesting, processing, and marketing of forest products, as well as through pilgrimage and ecotourism.

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