



## A Case Analysis of Latehar, Jharkhand: Socio-Economic Determinants of Rural Tribal People with Particular Concern to Livelihood

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### Abstract:

*A significant number of forest dwellers and rural populations globally depend on the utilization of forest resources for their livelihoods. Utilizing forest resources for livelihood enhancement is both cost-effective and environmentally sustainable, promoting equitable distribution. The provision of forest resources is of immense significance to the tribal inhabitants of Jharkhand. To develop comprehensive livelihood plans for the local community, it is essential to analyse both the advantages and disadvantages of forest-based tribal subsistence. The level of education, social engagement, family structure, landholding size, primary occupation, housing conditions, farm power, agricultural implements, livestock ownership, material possessions, aspirations, extension contacts, information sources, employment and migration status, forest resource utilization, knowledge of forestry practices, adoption of forestry practices, attitudes towards forestry, income derived from forestry, and gross annual income are pertinent factors in developing strategies for upliftment. This study examines these aspects in the underdeveloped district of Latehar in Jharkhand state. The interconnection between tribal populations, their reliance on forest resources for subsistence, and their poverty is complex, necessitating area-specific research. Developing a research plan that incorporates multi-disciplinary approaches is essential for analysing the role and potential of forest resources in tribal livelihoods, poverty alleviation, socio-economic development, nutritional security, environmental conservation, migration control, and rural development, along with the evolving patterns and underlying causes of these changes. The findings of this study indicate that, despite residing in resource-rich areas, tribal communities occupy an unfavourable position across multiple dimensions. The low socio-personal and economic status of tribal communities is evident in acute poverty, limited employment opportunities leading to migration, insufficient communication and extension services, inadequate infrastructure, and substandard education and healthcare facilities. Residents of the study region rely significantly on forest resources for their livelihoods, exhibit positive attitudes toward forestry, possess a solid understanding of forestry methods, and demonstrate a motivation to improve their quality of life.*

**Keywords:** Livelihood, Forest, Education, Socio-Economic, Migration, Infrastructure.

### 1. Introduction

Collecting and selling tiny forest goods such as nectar, amla, soapnut, treemass, etc., was a method of supplemental control for indigenous societies even before the British era. As the tribal people were forced into an adapted commerce economy due to the outlawing of movement development and chasing, minor forest objects became more essential as a source of money. However, mediators and temporary workers for

small-scale forest products controlled access to the commercial and forest sector, rendering them powerless. A growing human population is extending the separation between forest residents and the natural environment, despite efforts by federal and provincial governments to bridge the gap. Although agriculture and agricultural labor bring in more money for the tribal community in Jharkhand, India, the gathering and selling of small forest goods remains their principal source of income. The dwindling economic opportunities for forest dwellers have put a significant strain on the forest resource. So, to make forests last longer, this study will investigate what makes forest conservation unsustainable now, how these factors interact with people and the state through policies, programs, plans, and the ways in which people are involved in the process of making these decisions and keeping tabs on how well they work.

Latehar is the district headquarters of one of the twenty-four districts in Jharkhand state, eastern India. The natural landscape, arboreal features, and minerals of Latehar are renowned. The Latehar district comprises nine separate blocks. In 2006, the Government of India identified Latehar as one of the 250 most disadvantaged districts, and this region is a fortunate beneficiary of the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF). Several regressive areas exhibit inadequate social and economic advancement. Manika, a rural block located in the eastern part of Latehar district, is among the district's underdeveloped regions. The block's population is predominantly tribal, and its literacy rate is below the state average. The predominant portion of the populace depends on agriculture for sustenance, despite the land's unproductivity resulting from the area's rugged topography and absence of contemporary irrigation facilities. Numerous inhabitants of Manika also rear livestock and participate in the collection of minor forest products (MFP). It is a regular practice for individuals to explore woodlands in pursuit of MFPs for sale at local markets. These MFPs comprise Tendu leaves, mahua flowers, and sal seeds. The inhabitants cultivate cattle, goats, and chickens for sustenance and commerce. The neighborhood faces several infrastructure challenges, including inadequate roads, an energy deficit, and substandard healthcare services. Consequently, greater emphasis must be placed on efforts that offer forest inhabitants sustainable employment and subsistence alternatives. The sustainable and robust preservation of Latehar for future generations can be achieved through the decentralized, effective, and efficient management of forest resources by local entities.

## **2. Study Area and Methodology**

Latehar, a major district in Jharkhand, is part of the Chotanagpur plateau and was founded on April 4, 2001. The district comprises two primary natural divisions: the central plateau, averaging 1,073 feet in elevation and situated at the district's center, which contains the town of Latehar, and the lower plateau. The district is predominantly forested. 2245 square kilometers, about 47.22% of the total land area, is forested. Despite the widespread distribution of trees across the region, more than fifty percent of the total area in Latehar is forested. The average temperature of Latehar is 25.6 degrees, distinguishing it from other districts due to both its lower average temperature and the relative aridity of the air during the monsoon season. Perennial springs and rivers are infrequently dispersed in Latehar. Aside from the rainy seasons, the forest regions are technically deficient in water resources. Following the wet season, all streams and rivers frequently begin to desiccate. The majority of the population in the Latehar district depends on agriculture and related activities for their livelihood. The primary economic drivers for the inhabitants of the Latehar region are forestry, agriculture, and mineral resources. The economic activities of the residents are substantially impacted by tendu leaves, bamboo and its products, mahua, fruits, leaves (used in the production of dona and pattal), lac, among others. Minor forest products are essential for the sustenance and future prosperity of tribal and forest inhabitants.

The current study employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to achieve its objectives. Data was compiled using primary field surveys and secondary sources. Secondary sources included literature from journals, research papers, forest department statistics, village registries, online resources, previous studies, annual reports, and other pertinent documents from various governmental and non-governmental organizations. Structured interviews with a sample of respondents, direct observation, and a participatory rapid rural assessment exemplified primary sources. Primary data collection concentrated on household and

village levels, whereas secondary data encompassed block, village, and individual levels. Data at the village level was aggregated for the established timetable, encompassing the following: i) Location and geography; ii) Sociological aspects; iii) Demographic trends; iv) Agrarian characteristics; v) Livestock population; vi) Vegetation status; vii) Aspirational characteristics; viii) Land utilization patterns; ix) Both manmade and natural resources; x) Skilled labor potential and employment status; xi) Economic infrastructure; xii) Basic amenities; xiii) Specific challenges. Conventional methods for evaluating indices and scales were employed to provide scores to perceptions and responses through questions encompassing statements, levels, indicators, ranges, ratios, labels, and rankings.

**Table 1: Characterisation of Respondent to Questionnaire**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Response Parameters</b>
Personal and Socio-Economic	Factors such as age, educational qualification, social engagement, family make-up, land holding size, primary occupation, marital status, housing situation, housing type, housing affordability, farm power, farm implements, livestock ownership, material possessions, income from forestry, and gross annual income
Psychological	Aspirations, forestry-related expertise, willingness to adapt new methods, and outlook on the field;
Communication	Use of information sources, and extension contact
Occupation	Employment status, migration status, and utilization of forest resources
Assets	Livelihood assets status of the respondent based on different capitals;
Forest Livelihood	Livelihood importance of forest resources, livelihood generation from forest based employment, contribution of forests resources to total livelihoods, encouraging factors of forest based livelihood and discouraging factors of forest based livelihood.

The data collected from these interdisciplinary approaches was subsequently employed to formulate recommendations for the restoration of degraded and unproductive land, as well as to evaluate the feasibility of forest-based sustainable livelihood alternatives designed to alleviate poverty and protect the environment in a specific region. Table 1 illustrates the classification of questions posed to respondents based on their relevance to different characteristics of their life and sources of support. Fifteen replies were randomly gathered from a village external to the sample pool to evaluate the timetable prior to the actual survey implementation.

Participants were selected utilizing a proportionate stratified random selection method, which considered the extent of their land holdings: marginal (up to 1.0 ha), small (1.1 to 2.0 ha), medium (2.1 to 4.0 ha), huge (more than 4.0 ha), and large (4.1 ha and above). A random sample including 20% of all homes across various land ownership categories, totalling around 264, was utilized as the sample size.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The following is a breakdown of the respondents' levels of education: 38.42% had no formal education at all, followed by those with a primary school diploma or less, 18.29% with a middle school diploma or less, 4.88% with a high school diploma or less, 1.83% with a bachelor's degree or more, and 0.61% with a master's degree or more. Considering that the average level of education among those questioned is only 1.56, it is evident that the vast majority of them are illiterate. Many reasons contribute to the low literacy rate. These include parents' low socioeconomic position, a lack of local educational options, gender equality in the workforce, and a generalized disregard for the importance of education.

**Table 2: Land holding of the Respondent participants**

Sl. No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Marginal	124	47.0
2	Small	69	26.1
3	Medium	47	17.8
4	Large	24	9.1
<b>Total</b>		<b>264</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows that marginal farmers accounted for 47% of the total respondents, while small farmers for 26.1%, medium farmers for 17.8%, and big farmers for 9.1% were in the bottom quartile. With an average land holding size score of just 1.46, it's safe to assume that most farms in the area are on the smaller side. This might be because of the community's emphasis on nuclear and neo-local families, which promoted the early practice of land divisions among and between spouses. In addition, the poll yielded the following results: 58.7% of respondents are still working in agriculture, followed by 22.7% in wage labour, 6.8% in business, 4.9% in service, 3.8% in caste occupation, and 3.0% in other occupations. When asked about their "primary occupation," the majority of the respondents (mean score of 2.46) identified as working in agriculture. Many of the respondents are directly or indirectly involved in agriculture in some way, shape, or form. Farming was often a supplementary source of income for families whose main income came from wage work, commerce, services, caste employment, or some other source. Also, it was found that, 84.1% of people who took the survey had bullocks in their stable. By contrast, 5.3% of the population had five or more bullocks, and 16.3% had three to four, with the rest having no draught animal. The results show that, in terms of agricultural implement possession, most respondents (50.7%), followed by a low level (28.7%), and a high level (20.6%). On average, respondents possessed 7.62 distinct types of agricultural machinery. It was critical that the majority of respondents had access to appropriate farming equipment as their income was derived from farming and related activities. The average number of furniture and home products possessed by respondents was 7.82. Although survey takers possessed a diverse array of home goods, the overall impression was unsatisfactory, particularly in contrast to the more developed, refined, and noticeable material possessions. This kind of scenario could be caused by a combination of factors such as poverty, low literacy, ignorance, inadequate infrastructure, etc. Finally, the data revealed that 67% of the participants come from low-income or extremely low-income families, with 25% being from middle-income families and 8% from high-income families making up the smallest groups. Most homes in the study area had a low gross annual income, falling between Rs. 50001 and 100000, according to the mean score (2.07 out of a possible 4). One possible explanation is that most of the people who have responded are either wage earners or subsistence farmers who don't have much access to capital. Crop monoculture, poor soil fertility, unpredictability of weather, outdated irrigation systems, outdated scientific understanding, and outdated

equipment and machinery all contribute to farmers' meagre incomes. Similarly, most wage workers do not have specialized skills and cannot rely on a steady income due to unpredictability in their jobs and poor wages.

In terms of “grading and sale of forest products”, “time and stage of harvesting of forest produce”, “extraction and processing of forest products” and “multipurpose trees and shrubs” respondents exhibited “extensive” knowledge. On the other hand, when it came to “preparation of planting material”, “soil working methods for tree planting”, “application of fertilisers and manures”, “spacing & plantation geometry,” and “tenant operations” (e.g., pruning), their understanding was lacking. Respondents' reliance on forest resources in their own backyards, on farms, and in nearby protected areas was found to be substantial. Involvement in the logging, processing, and selling of various multipurpose trees and shrubs improved the participants' comprehension of the processes associated with these pursuits. Respondents' knowledge of nursery operations, plantation, protection, and administration processes was “to a modest extent”, but it was only due to their limited involvement in these areas.

#### **4. Conclusions:**

The study revealed that numerous low-income indigenous households in the district depend significantly on agriculture, wage labour, livestock, and forest resources for their survival. The findings of this study indicate that, despite residing in resource-rich areas, tribal communities are disadvantaged in multiple aspects. The low socio-personal and economic status of tribal communities is evident in acute poverty, limited employment opportunities leading to migration, insufficient communication and extension facilities, inadequate infrastructure, and substandard education and healthcare services. Employment in wage labour across various vocations available to tribal populations is characterized by seasonality, instability, inadequate compensation, and potential health risks. Livestock rearing is less profitable for tribal communities due to insufficient access to improved breeds, capital, fodder, and grazing land, as well as inadequate stall feeding practices, scientific livestock management, veterinary services, training, knowledge enhancement, and marketing facilities. The majority of families in the research area exhibit a precarious status regarding total livelihood assets, attributed to insufficient holdings of physical, natural, financial, human, and social capitals. The diversification of livelihoods through the utilization of existing resources is a vital strategy for reducing poverty and improving the socioeconomic conditions of marginalized tribal populations in the region. The study indicates that the local tribal population depends significantly on various forest resources for survival, which constitute a substantial portion of employment and income for local households. The locality must implement targeted livelihood interventions, including biogas production, agroforestry, energy plantation, pasture development, timber plantation, tasar silk rearing, lac cultivation, bamboo planting, fruit farming, mechanized Sal leaf plate production, and value addition to forest products, to enhance, secure, and sustain forest-based tribal livelihoods.

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