



PERSISTENT WORKLESSNESS AND STRUGGLE FOR LIVELIHOOD AMONG TRIBES: A CASE STUDY OF SAHARIYA TRIBE

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study paper is to offer a thorough comprehension of the state of being without job and the difficulties associated to employment that the Sahariya tribe in the Shivpuri area of Madhya Pradesh, India, encounters. The Sahariya tribe, primarily inhabiting rural and marginalized regions, have many challenges that hinder their ability to attain sustainable livelihoods. The study utilizes a multidisciplinary methodology, integrating sociological, economic, and anthropological viewpoints to investigate the underlying factors, outcomes, and possible remedies for the employment dilemma faced by the Sahariya tribe. The data has been collected from ethnographic fieldwork using participant observation, case studies, Interviews and focus group discussion methods. The data shows that Sahariya tribe is still struggling to secure their basic needs. They do not have sufficient income and livelihood sources. They are dependent upon forest for the same and to combat these issues they migrate continuously.

KEYWORDS – Sahariya, PVTG, Livelihood, Worklessness, Survival

1. INTRODUCTION

Tribes constitutes around 8.6 of the total population in India. Out of them there are 75 Particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs)¹ who are showing a declining trend in population. One of the main reasons is lack of resources and livelihood opportunities among them. Their sources of livelihood include hunting, food gathering, pastoralism, slash-and-burn agriculture, and settled cultivation. During the colonial rule there have been some change in their economic and social life, but the major changes occurred after the independence in India. Later on, development of labor market and means of communication led to movement of non-tribal to the tribal area and this resulted in large scale land alienation through fraud, deceit, indebtedness, sale, etc. (Xaxa,2015). From the beginning, the tribal society has always been descended from Land and Forest, and they have relied entirely or in part on nature for their daily needs and survival. But due to it large scale migration and displacement came into place. The main distinguishing characteristics of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes are their rurality, illiteracy, economic backwardness (lower income, higher incidence of indebtedness, fewer assets, etc.) and social retardation (low status, disabilities, etc.) (Rayappa and Grover, 1979, p.2). Sahariyas are one of the PVTGs that are mostly inhabited in the Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. They continue to be a socially, economically, and politically marginalized group that migrates frequently in search of resources for their way of life. Being uprooted from their traditional ecology, they are forced to migrate. They used to be landholders of the area but a lack of awareness and some financial needs led them to sell their lands and then migrate in search of livelihood. The economy of Sahariya is based on the sale of agricultural

¹ PVTG – Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) defined by The Ministry of Tribal Affairs as “tribal communities with pre-agricultural technology, stagnant or declining population growth, an extremely low level of literacy, and a subsistence economy.” Retrieved from <https://tribal.nic.in/downloads/NGO/Latter-Notice/14.pdf> on 8th June 2023.



products and commodities gathered from the forest. Covid-19 was another factor which has further complicated the lifestyle of this tribe. They were wandering for two-time meal during that.

The objective of this study is to list out the livelihood and work-related opportunity among the Sahariya tribe and what are the major challenges they are facing in the same. The study will contribute in shaping the programs and policies for economic advancement of Sahariya tribe.

2. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The present study has been conducted among the Sahariya tribe of Shivpuri and Pohri block of Shivpuri district, Madhya Pradesh. Shivpuri is in the northwest part of the state of Madhya Pradesh. Its area is around 10278 km². Forests cover 45% of the total area. Madhav National Park and the Karera Bird Sanctuary are in this district. The allocated agricultural land area is only 11% of the total geographic area, and it is rain-fed. About 40% of the population is made up of tribal people. Sahariya is the main tribal community of Shivpuri district and constitutes 11.27% of the total population. Members of the Sahariya tribe are mostly dependent on forest products, agriculture, and daily wage labor to sustain their lives.

Methods - Data has been gathered from the 6 villages and 2 urban slums of above mentioned two blocks. This study reports on ethnographic fieldwork conducted from 7th February 2023 to 29th May 2023, employing a range of qualitative methods which includes – Participant observation, in depth interview schedules, case studies and focus group discussion with participant and stakeholders. Thematic analysis of the data has been done using grounded theory approach.

3. RESEARCH FINDING

Sources of livelihood - Sahariya were found to be involved in following earning sources –

1. Daily wage – Due to absence of sufficient land and settled income opportunity Sahariyas were found to be involved in daily wage-based labor in construction works, agriculture lands of others and some part time work in shops. They refer to it as the '*beldari*' system, in which they are employed to perform labor-related tasks. They used to get a sum of Rs 250-300/ day. As per them it was fixed sometimes, they used to get work and sometimes not. On average they found 3–4-month work. Most of the women were seen involved in this as men used to consume alcohol. As per them '*Kam mil jat hai ta kha lait hain*' which translated that if we get work then we eat and sometime they also sleep hungry. As per Ram Adivasi* '*majduri naiyan ta kachu naiyan*,' which means we don't have anything if there is no paid labour.

2. Fraction agriculture - Most of them were either landless or have only fraction of land with them. They were practicing agriculture along with wage work. In some hamlets like in Kakra and Madkhera people have cleared forest and started practicing temporary agriculture. According to them sometime we spread seeds in plain parts of the forest and if god's will we get some crops. The agriculture depends upon the rain.

3. Selling the forest-based products - Collecting non-timber and timber-based forest products (NTFP) is one of the few additional occupational patterns that have been observed. They used to sell wood, bark, glue, and various medicinal goods brought from the forest; this is usually done by women, especially older women. Some people in Madkhera village bring chhani and piya baans (local names) from the jungle and sell them for 15 and 7 rupees per kilogramme. They walk into the forest and look for plants, then extract roots and barks. They dry it out and then sell it to vendors who come to collect it in their own cars. They claim that it is a demand-driven job, in which suppliers request a certain quantity of plant materials from Saharias, which they then deliver. Those are used by vendors to make medicines. Many of them are concerned about the low cost of these products.

4. Basket weaving - Basket weaving has been observed in the communities of the Pohri blocks. They bring forest stuff, make wooden baskets, and sell them in the nearby shops. As per them during winter they get chance to bring material for it and then make it. They used to sell it in a cost of 20-30 rupees.



Fig. Images Clicked during the fieldwork in the villages Hatod and Guashala in Shivpuri District



Challenges and Barriers of Livelihood

1. Worklessness and Job Insecurity – There is wide prevalence of lack of work among the Sahariya. Almost in every village around 80-90% of the people used to migrate in search of work for their survival. Most people aged above 40-50 years are neglected for the job due to their inability, they were dependent upon adults for food and other needs. Some were also involved in rack-picking and then selling it. Everywhere there is shout for work. The Sahariya tribe also faces job insecurity due to the seasonal nature of their work. They are often hired on a daily wage basis, which means they have no job security or benefits. This makes it difficult for them to plan for the future and provide for their families. In times of drought or crop failure, they are left with no source of income, pushing them further into poverty.

2. Lack of resources, Degradation and Prohibition by forest officials - Their local livelihood opportunities have been severely impacted by the loss of forest land, and they are now either uprooted or have to work extremely hard to make ends meet in their own communities. Due to recent developmental induced changes their resources have been destroyed which leads to increasing their problems. Also, now a days they are being prevented to access the forest-based materials as per locals they are threatened and sometimes asked for a money if they want to use the forest.

3. Landlessness and agriculture - As per the land committee report of Andhra Pradesh in 2004, Up to 50% of the land owned by indigenous people has been transferred to non-indigenous individuals. If this trend is not halted through decisive executive measures, it is likely that indigenous people may lose all their land in the near future. Most of the Sahariyas were found to be landless whereas earlier they had lands but due to some compulsion related to health, food and other they had to mortgage their lands. In the villages like Hatod, Hathigara, Arjungawan and Lakhangawan people say that they were the one who came these places first and cleared forest and made land for their use. But in these places, there is clear domination of the Sardars and Gurjars who migrated from other places. Now Sahariyas are working as a laborer in their farms. Some used to say that *we are working as laborer in our own lands*. Animal attack is frequent due to their vicinity in the forest and this mostly destroys their crops and cattle's rearing.

4. Geography and Climate change – The area is semi-arid condition. Crop production per hectare is determined by the timely arrival of the monsoon and soil fertility. The region has sporadic drought-like conditions with rocky soil. Due to contemporary agriculture and water usage patterns, the district has a water shortage. The urban water usage is a new contributor in water scarcity. Seasonal flood also damages their crops. In villages like Madkhera and Kakra there is a small river tributary which creates a havoc during the rainy season as most of the farms of the Sahariyas are situated in the plains of it.

5. Status of Government Initiatives and Mechanization of work - The majority of rural employment programmes are characterized by their ad hoc nature. These include the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA),



which guarantees 100 days of employment to rural households, and the Special Central Assistance (SCA) scheme, which provides financial assistance for the development of tribal areas. However, these initiatives have not been able to fully address the root causes of worklessness and employment issues among the Sahariya tribe. Among the Sahariya they hardly get work from the government so they are bound to work in private. They say that now a day's work is being done through the machines so we do not have work to do.

6. Educational and Skill Gaps: Among all the participants around 5-10% were there who were having education till intermediate level and rest have left education at their early stage due to financial burden in their family. Educational infrastructure and their stakeholders not functioning properly. They were not aware about the scheme and benefits which are provided to them which was one of the reasons for their lack luster condition. Some schemes have been initiated to provide them basic skills but participation rate is very low due to fear and low level of confidence.

7. Third Party interference – Due to low level of awareness they are not equipped enough to take benefits and this led them to become victim of the third party. As per the official of the *Adim Jati Kalyan Vibhag* (A department dedicated to tribal welfare by govt. of Madhya Pradesh) most their money which is provided to them in scheme of Kisan Samman Nidhi (KSN), Nikshay Yojna and Ladli Laxmi Yojna. They are firstly taken by the intermediary who help them in proceedings. So only little amount reaches to them. **Case study** - There is one village *Jakhnaud* in Pohri block. From where a group of people including women and children went for working in sugar mill in Gujrat because the mill person has contacted one teacher who use to send labor upon request. That teacher took money for it. The group arranged their own vehicle and travelled day night to reach. There they found that they have to work in farms and that too in low wages. They worked there for few months and didn't get paid upon asking they said that they will be paid. After sometime when they got frustrated, they contacted the teacher for it he stopped picking up calls and he was the one who took all the money leaving them hopeless.

Case - 2 As per stance in the Government website, name of the two people was registered and they were getting allowance for unemployment since many years. Later on, upon inquiry it has been found that they died few years back and someone else was taking their money.

Result in Migration and Displacement – Due to this reason of worklessness and lack of resources of livelihood Sahariya tribe is having nomadic life they keep on migrating in search of work. whenever any person needs the labor, they contact the intermediary and he contacts Sahariyas and then sends them. It leads to leaving their original habitat without care and exposing to unfavorable conditions in the new temporary settlement. In some villages Ahera, Harnagar, Ganguli and other places near the vicinity of the Madhav National Park. government has ordered to vacate these places due to introduction to the Cheetah. Recently Many villages have been vacated due it around Kuno National Park. Upon inquiry it has been found that they have not got proper compensation due to lack of land record which they couldn't maintain because of lack of all-season house. Thus, migration of the Sahariyas is for survival and livelihood.

4. DISCUSSION

As per the voices of the locals they were practicing agriculture and dependent upon forest for their livelihood but later on due to rich resources of the area lot and lot of immigration took place and it resulted in loss of their traditional livelihood. Geography and seasonal climate are other contributors into it. Now the larger percentage of the population is relying on the daily wage based-work for their sustenance. Due to the domination of other immigrated caste and community groups now they have been restricted to their places. They are also threatened. In place like Piproniya where Sahariyas have been allotted around 5 beeghas (1.35 Acre) of land for agriculture but due to the fear of caste groups they are not able to do so. It pushes them further towards marginalization. Recent development activities are another reason for their livelihood loss and that too without any resettlement for them. Introduction of *Cheetas* in the area has made this tribe to roam here and there. Sahariyas are neither educated nor skillful enough for the government jobs. At the same time growing dearness has sent them to beg for the survival. Only lesser number of the schemes and training programs are properly function into the area. In 21st century the technological and mechanical bloom has adversely affected the life of them. As per the recommendation of the National Advisory Council (NAC) for



developmental challenges pertaining to PVTG there government should develop livelihood strategies and design development programme as per their rights and needs. Also, initiatives to empower their livelihood. But in reality, very lesser number of government plans have been translated into reality leaving Sahariya to struggle for their daily survival.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, most of the Sahariyas are struggling for the work, everywhere people were seen shouting for works. they don't have any secure work or job where they can rely for their needs. As per the word of Dileep Adivasi for us it's like '*roj ka kuwa khodna aur roj pani peena*' which means for everyday life they have to search work so that they can survive. It was one of the famous floating lines among the Sahariyas. Further due to loss of the traditional livelihood and incompetency with recent opportunities they are still striving to secure their two-time meal. It largely picturizes the life of PVTGs. The absence of adequate developmental initiatives in India has consistently resulted in the tribal community residing on the periphery, lacking sufficient economic means for sustenance. Thus, there is urgent need to focus over the life of these tribes so that we can save their declining population.

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