

Environmental Studies: A Socio-Economic Perspective of Tribes in Jharkhand

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Abstract

Agriculture is the major subsistence occupation of the tribal population in Jharkhand. Their socio-economic activities are mostly related to the environment. Therefore tribal people are very much concerned about their surroundings. Tribal people consider nature as a goddess. They are very protective of forest land. Therefore 29.45 percent of the total geographical area of Jharkhand is covered by forest land. These tribes are very much dependent on the forest for their day-to-day needs, including food, shelter, tools, medicine, and in some cases even clothes. Some medicinal plants and trees are sisham, amaltas, lajvanti, gular, bakain, mahua, neem, Sharifa, and sindur. These species are very useful in curing different diseases and also have economic value. Tribal people are habituated to more and more plantations in their surroundings. Therefore tribal people are socially and economically involved with nature and the environment. Thus, they are very much concerned about environmental conditions.

Keywords: Tribal, Agriculture, Environment, forest land, Medicinal plant

Introduction

The environment is the center point of all the life forms that exist on the earth. Our healthy life cycle depends upon the environmental conditions. Now these days Environment is the main issue among scientist, sociologists, geographers and philosophers. In the present scenario, development is mostly associated with urbanization. The processes of urbanization are related to industrialization and economic development. Thus impact we can see is in the form of climatic change, global warming, natural hazards and pollution. So the people are now very much concerned about the environmental issues. Different communities have taken so many steps to make our environment a better place to live. Here researcher can drive the minds of all the people toward the specifically tribal community of Jharkhand. Jharkhand is the 28th state of India formed on 15th November 2000 by the separation from Bihar. A total of 32 tribes inhabit the Jharkhand state including 8 primitive tribal groups.

Objectives

- To identify the socio-economic activities of tribal related to environment
- To highlight the religious and cultural programmed of tribal to protect environment
- To suggest some measures for the eco friendly environment

Study Area

Jharkhand is located between 21°59' N to 25°18' N latitude and 83°20' E to 87°57' E longitude. The total geographical area of Jharkhand is 79,714 Square Km. Ranchi City is the capital of Jharkhand.

There are five administrative divisions namely south chhotanagpur, North Chhotanagpur, Kolhan, Palamu and Santhal Pargana. These administrative divisions are divided into 24 districts. The total population of Jharkhand is 3,29,88,134. The scheduled tribe accounts for 26.2% of the total population of the state. The total scheduled tribe population is 86,45,043 comprising 32 scheduled tribes in Jharkhand.



Database and Methodology

The methodology adopted in the present study is both qualitative and quantitative. To study the socio-economic activities researchers use primary and secondary data both. A few qualitative techniques are also proposed to be used in gathering primary data/information from the respondents. Secondary data is available through agencies like the National Sample Survey, Census of India and Central Statistical Organization.

Religious values and affinity towards environment

The tribal people of Jharkhand have a strong bond with the environment. Their all rituals, culture and economic activities are directly and indirectly related to the environment. Therefore tribal people are very much possessive about their environment or we can say Jal, Jangle and Jammen. Most festivals of the tribes are related to some specific plant or tree and animals. That shows tribes of Jharkhand take the environment as the most important place of their life. Therefore they celebrate every important step of life like childbirth, marriage etc with nature. The thought of the tribes is if our environment is rich and healthy then we will be also rich and healthy. Some important festivals of tribes of Jharkhand are as follows:-

Karam

This festival is about the brother-sister relationship. In this festival, people go to the forest in groups and cut one or more branches of the karam tree. Then the branches are brought to the village and planted in the center of the ground. So the tribal people have great importance of this karma tree in this festival. Therefore they use too about planting more and more karma trees. Karam tree branches are also put in agricultural fields in the growing period of the crops because these branches are also used as insecticides.

Sarhul

This festival is celebrated as welcoming of spring season or nature. In this festival, the priest of the tribal community has given some predictions about rainfall and temperature conditions of the current year. This prediction decides the upcoming scenario of the agricultural productivity of the present year. In this festival, tribal people use the flower of the sakhua (Sal) tree to give to each other and wish them a happy Sarhul. So the tribal people have specific importance on the sakhua (Sal) tree in their rituals.

Soharai

This festival is celebrated in October month. During this festival, tribal people give special take care of their animals. Because all the agricultural activities like plugging the agricultural field, separation of grains from crops etc have been done by domestic animals. Therefore tribal people thought that if these animals were healthy then only we could properly do agricultural activities. This thought is reflected in the concerned behavior of tribes about their surrounding animals.

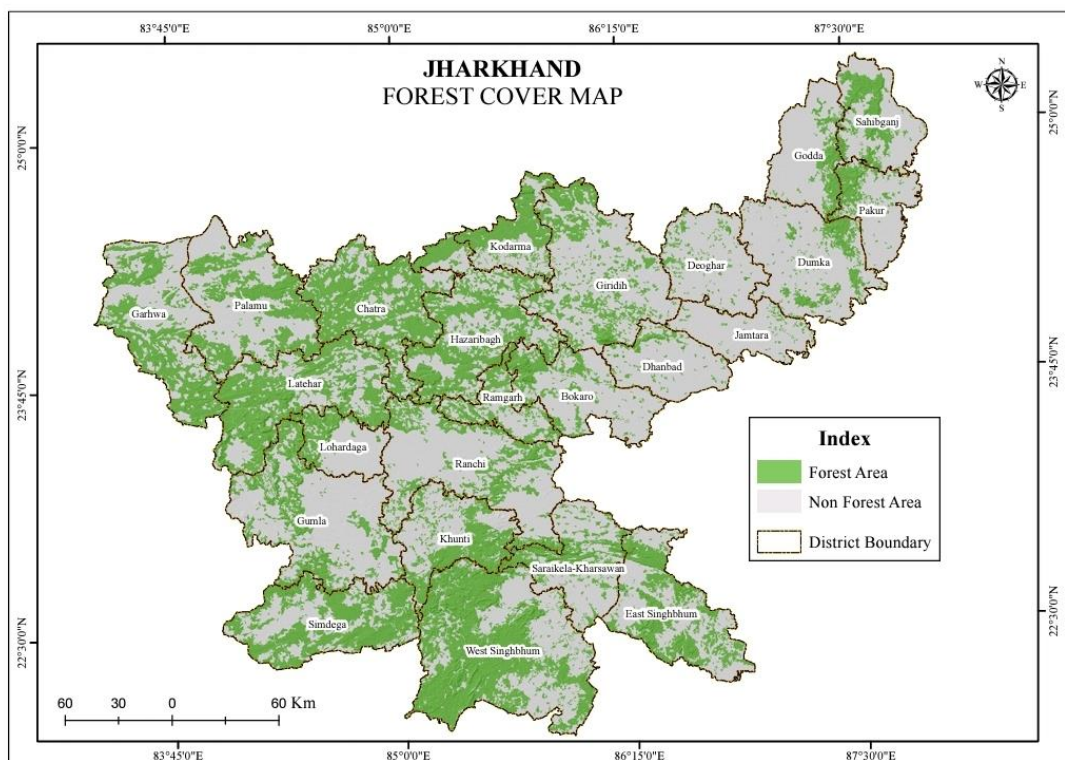
Through the above-mentioned festivals researcher analyzed the district-wise tribal population and forest cover area of Jharkhand. Table 1 exhibits the district-wise total geographical area, forest cover area and the tribal population of Jharkhand.

District	Geographical area (in sq. km)	Forest cover % of total geographical area	Tribal population in %(census of India 2001)
Bokaro	1929	29.39	12.3
Chatra	3732	47.70	3.8
Deoghar	2479	9.16	12.2
Dhanbad	2996	6.74	8.5
Dumka(inciudes Jamtara)	6212	10.83	38.2

Garhwa	4092	33.97	15.4
Giridih	4963	18.72	9.7
Godda	2110	19.34	23.6
Gumla(includes Simdega)	9077	29.28	68.7
Hazaribagh	5998	34.91	11.8
Kodarma	1435	41.67	0.8
Lohardaga	1491	33.47	55.7
Pakur	1571	18.33	44.6
Palamu(includes Latehar)	8657	41.42	27.1
Paschimi Singhbhum	9907	38.71	65.4
Purbi Singhbhum(includes Saraikela)	3533	31.56	31.8
Ranchi	7698	28.42	41.8
Sahibganj	1834	32.33	29.1
TOTAL	79714	29.45	26.3

Source: Forest and Environment department, Jharkhand and Census of India 2001

Through above mentioned table, the researcher analyzed that 29.45% is the forest cover area of Jharkhand. In Jharkhand, most of the tribal population especially in village areas is engaged in agriculture and forest-related activities. Therefore most of the area of Jharkhand is covered by agricultural practices and forest cover.



Environment and livelihood pattern of tribes in Jharkhand

Agriculture

Agriculture is the major subsistence occupation of the tribal population in Jharkhand. Most of the tribal people are categorized as cultivators and agricultural laborers. The cultivator’s percentage of tribes in Jharkhand is higher than the national average of 44.7% recorded by all STs in this category. This category is elaborated in Table 2

Percentage distribution of major tribal groups in four Economic Categories (2001)

Economic category	All STs	Santhal	Oraon	Munda	Ho	Kharwar	Lohra	Bhumij	Kharia
Cultivators	52.6	48.6	62.1	64.6	49.4	52.5	28.3	35.5	70.5
Agricultural laborers	31.0	38.4	21.0	21.2	34.1	39.7	33.5	47.3	20.5
HHI Workers	3.0	1.4	1.1	1.3	3.0	1.0	14.7	1.7	1.1
Other Workers	13.5	11.6	15.8	12.8	13.4	6.9	23.5	15.4	7.9

Source: Office of the Registrar General, India

Through the above-mentioned table, the researcher can analyze that most of the tribal people are engaged in agricultural activities. In modern times also they use their indigenous knowledge to do agricultural work. They use cow dung and decayed plants in the agricultural field to maintain the fertility of the soil. This method is also called organic farming in a scientific way. Farmers are also constructing bunds of locally available stone in sloppy lands. This method is very useful for soil and water conservation, especially in the rainy season. Therefore researcher has analyzed that the tribal people are avail the resources from the environment but without any degradation.

Forest-based livelihood

Forests are an important part of the state, catering to the demography and the economy. Most of the tribal population of Jharkhand is dependent on forest resources and lives in the forest area and uneven topography of Jharkhand. Forest provides Tribal people with many products for their livelihood (e.g. Firewood, food, fodder, medicines and many more). They also give protection to the forest area and do more plantations for the maintenance of biodiversity. Forests increase their economic growth in many ways.

Leaf plate making

Sal is the most important tree found in the forest of Jharkhand. Leaves of the Sal tree is used to make plate, dona and as a container to keep other things. So tribal people are making these useful things for occupational purposes. It is also used as a medicinal plant to cure some skin diseases.

Bamboo products

Bamboo trees are found in most of the part of Jharkhand. It is used to make baskets, soop, brooms and containers to keep some useful things. Bamboo karil is also an important food product of forests and is used to manufacture Achar and vegetables. So the tribal people of Jharkhand make this product for their economic enhancement.

Collection of fruit, flower and food items

Many valuable fruits like amla, imli, karanj, kendu fruit, kusum seed, mahua fruit etc are found in the forest of Jharkhand. Karanj seed, kusum seed and mahua seed are used to extract oil and it is used by tribal people for many domestic uses and also for commercial purposes. Many seasonal food items like rugra, mushrooms etc are collected from the forest. It is also used for commercial purposes.

Medicinal plant

Many medicinal plants are found in Jharkhand. Some important plants are Palash, Satawar, Kalmegh, Banpyaj, Sarp Gandha, Amla, Harre, Bahera and Musli. Different parts of these plants like flower, fruits, seeds, leaves, roots, stem etc are used to cure different diseases. Therefore tribal people apply their indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants for treatments of different diseases. This traditional type of method of treatment is passed on to the next generation in the tribal community.

Environment Conservation technique

Through the above-mentioned detailed researcher wants to point out some conservation techniques followed by the tribal people of Jharkhand through their indigenous knowledge. These techniques are specified by the following points:

- Use organic manure – To maintain the fertility of the soil
- Stone bunding – To conserve the water and soil
- Use herbal insecticide – To increase crop productivity
- Use biodegradable products for domestic uses – To balance our ecosystem
- Use traditional methods of treatment to cure different diseases
- Protective nature for plant and animal species – To maintain the biodiversity
- Community plantation – To increase the forest cover area

Conclusion

To conclude this paper it can be said that the tribal people of Jharkhand are very much aware of the environment. Their culture and rituals are towards an eco-friendly environment. So tribes are closely attached to their natural surroundings. We need to learn from them how to interact and encourage forest related livelihood patterns without damaging the environment. Therefore this culture and rituals should be preserved and promoted to a large extent. Then only we can go far with sustainability. Now these days many developmental projects are made for tribal regions. But the waves of development should not break the connections of tribal from the environment in the name of economic and regional development. They shouldn't be uprooted for developmental purposes. However, there should be a fair balance between environmental conditions and the implementation of developmental policies in Jharkhand tribal regions. These developmental projects should be based on the participatory method at the grassroots level. Social forestry is also an example of a participatory method for the conservation of forests. So we have to keep the environment in the first place in every socio, cultural and economic activity. We should enhance this tribal culture and rituals hence they will be more concerned and aware of different environmental issues. And also they can set an example for other people that how to imbibe with our surroundings. Then we can move forward to sustainable development.

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