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A Study on Economic Disparities between PESA and Non-PESA Villages in Junnar Tahsil, Maharashtra

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Abstract

Spatial inequality remains a major challenge to inclusive development in India, particularly in tribal-dominated regions characterized by geographical remoteness, limited infrastructure, and socio-economic marginalization. The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996 was enacted to strengthen local self-governance in tribal areas and promote equitable development through community participation in decision-making and resource management. This study examines the effectiveness of the PESA Act in reducing spatial economic inequality, with specific reference to Junnar Tahsil of Pune District, Maharashtra. The study adopts a comparative and analytical approach to assess economic disparities between PESA (tribal) and Non-PESA (non-tribal) regions. Twelve economic indicators related to agriculture, irrigation, financial infrastructure, and workforce structure were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Kendall ranking coefficient method to construct a regional development index. The findings reveal significant economic disparities between the two regions, with Non-PESA areas emerging as relatively more developed due to better irrigation facilities, higher net sown area, stronger financial infrastructure, and greater employment stability. In contrast, PESA regions remain less developed, marked by higher dependence on agriculture, limited access to credit institutions, and inadequate infrastructure. Although the PESA Act aims to empower tribal communities, the results indicate that its impact on reducing spatial economic inequality in Junnar Tahsil has been limited, largely due to implementation gaps and structural constraints. The study underscores the need for targeted, region-specific interventions, effective implementation of PESA provisions, and strengthened local governance mechanisms to achieve balanced and inclusive regional development.

Keywords: PESA Act, Economic Disparities

Introduction

Spatial inequality in India, particularly in tribal areas, remains one of the most significant challenges to inclusive development. Tribal communities, located mostly in remote, ecologically sensitive, and economically marginalized regions, face systemic challenges such as lack of basic infrastructure, limited access to healthcare and education, inadequate political representation, and vulnerability to land alienation and resource exploitation. In this context, the **Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA)**, 1996, was introduced with the aim of empowering tribal communities and addressing these disparities. The PESA Act seeks to extend the provisions of the Panchayati Raj system to tribal areas, ensuring greater participation of tribals in local governance, decision-making, and resource management. However, the effectiveness of the PESA Act in reducing spatial inequalities and improving the living conditions of tribal communities remains debated. This research aims to assess the effectiveness of the PESA Act in addressing spatial inequality.

Development requires a resource transfer in the backward regions through a number of subsidies and govt. assistance. The economic development is not declining over the time shows regional disparity. [1] Fostering strong community networks can lead to improved economic outcomes, especially in agrarian economies. [2] improving access to quality education, especially for women and marginalized communities, has long-term benefits for economic growth, reducing regional inequalities. [3] Balanced regional development requires participatory planning where local communities are involved in decision-making to ensure region-specific solutions. [4] Investment in physical infrastructure such as roads, irrigation, electricity, and digital connectivity helps backward regions integrate with markets and promotes balanced regional development. [5]

Significance of the Study

The significance of the present study lies in its focused examination of the role of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996 in addressing spatial economic inequality within a micro-level geographical unit, namely Junnar Tahsil of Pune District.

While several studies have discussed PESA at national or state levels, limited empirical research exists that systematically compares PESA and Non-PESA regions within the same tahsil using measurable economic indicators. This study helps bridge that gap.

The study enhances understanding of the practical outcomes of PESA implementation. Although the Act aims to promote self-governance and inclusive development in tribal areas, the findings reveal that structural constraints and implementation gaps continue to limit its effectiveness. By highlighting these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into why legislative intent does not always translate into equitable economic outcomes.

The study holds policy relevance by identifying critical areas where PESA regions lag behind, such as irrigation infrastructure, financial inclusion, and employment stability. The findings can assist policymakers, planners, and local administrators in designing targeted, region-specific interventions rather than adopting uniform development strategies.

The study is significant from a planning and governance perspective, as it emphasizes the importance of strengthening local institutions and participatory planning mechanisms in tribal areas. It reinforces the idea that decentralization alone is insufficient unless supported by adequate resources, institutional capacity, and effective implementation.

Finally, the study contributes to inclusive and sustainable development discourse by drawing attention to persistent spatial inequalities within a single tahsil. It underscores the need for balanced regional development to ensure that tribal communities are not left behind in the overall development process. In this way, the study serves as a useful reference for future research, development planning, and evaluation of governance reforms in Scheduled Areas.

Study Area:

Junnar Tahsil is located in the northern zone of the Pune district. It occurs in the section of steep isohyetal gradient having rainfall around 50 to 250 cm. The latitudinal extent of the Tahsil is 19° 00' to 19° 24' north and longitudinal extent is 73° 40' to 74° 18' east. The area of the Tahsil is 1474.77 Sq.km. Junnar is mainly rural in character as 183 villages are there, according to 2011 census. Junnar Tahsil has the human population as about 3, 99,302. The rural population is 93.66 %, while the urban population is 6.34 %. The Tahsil has 67 villages categorized as tribal villages in which the human resource development is on lower side. Further, spatial variations in regional development have been significant in the Junnar Tahsil. The Tahsil has mainly agriculture as the major source of income.

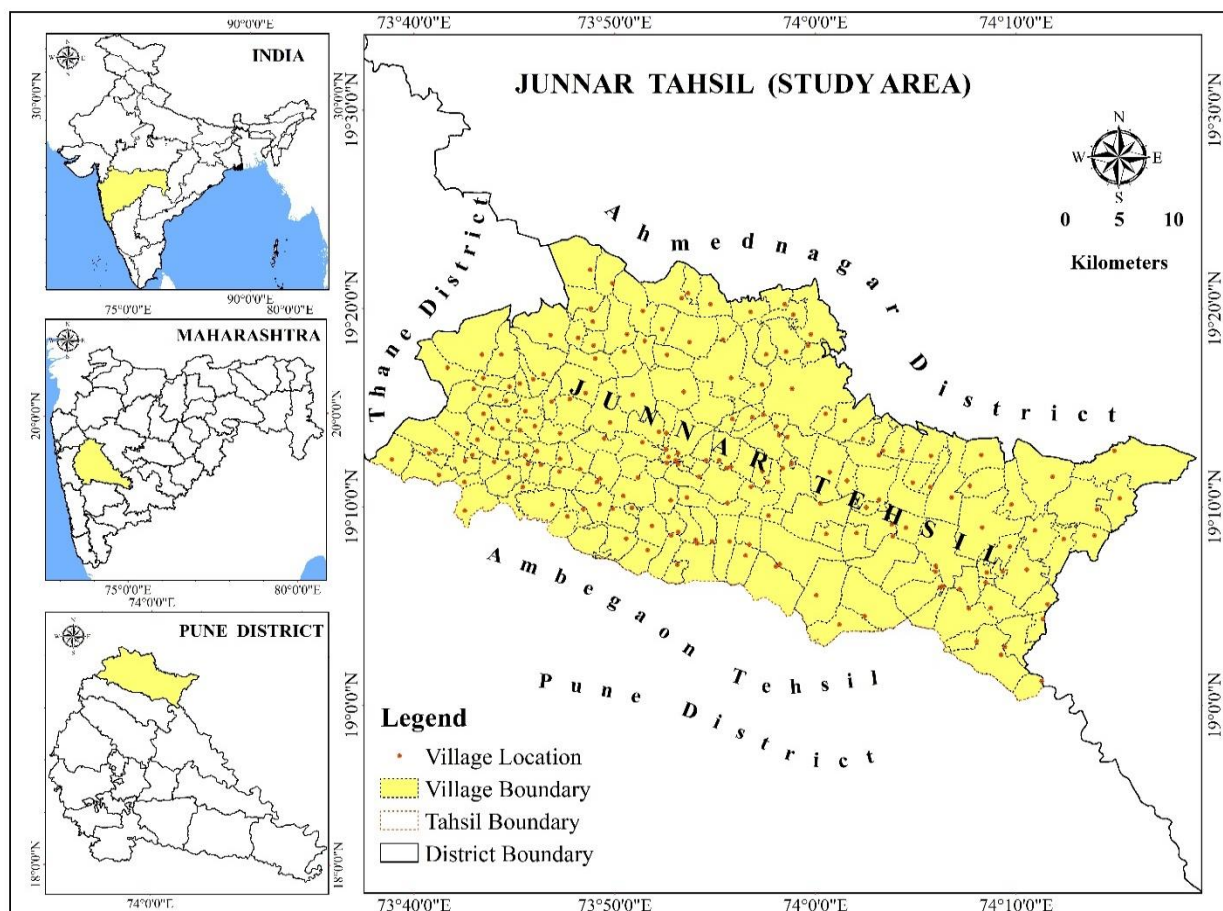


Fig. No. 1. Study Area Map

Research Questions:

The research will seek to answer the following questions:

Has the implementation of the PESA Act reduced spatial inequality in economic development between tribal and non-tribal regions?

Hypothesis:

PESA has the potential to improve access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and employment, the spatial inequality in these areas is lessened only when local governance mechanisms are strengthened and resources are effectively mobilized. The extent to which the PESA Act reduces spatial inequality is contingent on the quality of its implementation and the active participation of tribal communities in decision-making processes. The effective implementation of the PESA Act reduced Economic inequality between tribal and non-tribal regions.

Objectives:

The primary objectives of this study are to assess the effectiveness of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) in addressing spatial inequality in tribal areas, with a focus on understanding its impact on governance, economic development, and resource management. The specific objectives are:

- To assess the role of PESA in improving economic conditions in tribal areas.
- To compare the outcomes of PESA implementation with Non - PESA regions, identifying contextual factors that contribute to successful reduction of spatial inequality in economic development.

Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative and quantitative research approach to assess the effectiveness of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) in addressing spatial inequality in tribal areas. The methodology is designed to examine the impact of the Act on economic development, by secondary data analysis. The study will involve understanding of the PESA Act's outcomes in tribal regions of Junnar.

Research Design:

The study will be conducted through a comparative case study approach, focusing on tribal areas with non-tribal in Junnar in terms of successful and less successful implementation of the PESA Act. This will help highlight the factors influencing the Act's effectiveness in reducing spatial inequality.

Data Collection Methods:

Secondary Data:

Government Reports and Policy Documents: Data from official reports, policy briefs, and implementation guidelines on PESA will be analyzed to assess how effectively the Act has been incorporated into state and local governance structures.

Previous Studies and Literature: The study will review existing literature, including research papers, government studies, and evaluation reports, to understand the broader trends in the implementation of PESA across different tribal regions.

Census and Socio-Economic Data: Tahsil-level census data, along with socio-economic indicators will be used to compare the spatial inequalities in PESA areas with Non- PESA.

Sampling and Study Areas:

The 67 villages in tribal area categorized as PESA region and others 116 villages categorized as non-PESA region.

Data Analysis: -

Quantitative Analysis: The data will be analyzed using statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages). Data from secondary sources will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes related to governance, resource management, and the challenges of addressing spatial inequality.

Comparative Analysis: The study will compare the findings to assess the effectiveness of PESA in reducing spatial inequality. The Kendall ranking co-efficient method was used to investigate the spatial variation in economic development.

Analysis and discussion

The identification of backward or depressed regions holds the key to examining disparities and developing development plans. Economic inequality is linked to the concepts of equality, equality of outcome, and equality of opportunities. Based on the combined rank score of 12 indicators, the Junnar tahsil is divided into two regions: high developed and less developed. The patterns of spatial distribution of such development ranges also highlight the overall circle-wise disparities in economic development levels.

Regional disparities in the level of economic development:

The 2011 Pune district Handbook and census data has been tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted using tables. The collected numerical and non-numerical information has been analyzed using appropriate statistical of economic dimensions to present an overall scenario of region wise disparity in level of development. The Junnar tahsil is classified as high or less developed based on the combined rank score of 12 indicators. Tables 1.1 show the broad category of developmental disparities.

Table 1.: Regional disparities in the level of economic development: Economic Indicator

Sr. No.	Economic Development Indicator	PESA Region	Rank	Non – PESA Region	Rank
1	Percentage of Net Sown Area	48.63	2	69.19	1
2	Percentage of Villages under Command Area	2.99	2	43.1	1
3	Percentage of Canal Irrigation	47.76	2	49.14	1
4	Percentage of Wells/Tube Wells Irrigation	29.85	2	67.24	1

5	Percentage of Tank Irrigation	32.84	1	23.28	2
6	Number of Commercial Banks	0	2	14.66	1
7	Number of Cooperative Banks	1.49	2	18.97	1
8	Number of Agricultural Credit Societies	38.81	2	81.9	1
9	Percentage of Total Workers	58.05	1	48.9	2
10	Percentage of Main workers	85.46	2	95.21	1
11	Percentage of Agricultural Labour to Total Workers	28.66	1	26.37	2
12	Percentage of Cultivators to Total Workers	50.81	1	49.78	2
	Total rank		20		16
	Average Rank		1.66		1.33
	Rank		2		1

Source: Calculated by Author.

Table 1.1 reveals clear regional disparities in economic development between the PESA and Non-PESA regions, showing that the Non-PESA region is relatively more developed. The Non-PESA region ranks first in most indicators related to agricultural land use, irrigation facilities, and financial infrastructure, such as net sown area, villages under command area, canal and well irrigation, availability of commercial and cooperative banks, and agricultural credit societies. In contrast, the PESA region performs better mainly in traditional and labour-oriented indicators, ranking first in tank irrigation, percentage of total workers, agricultural labour, and cultivators, indicating a higher dependence on agriculture and manual labour. However, the lower presence of modern irrigation and institutional credit facilities in the PESA region reflects its weaker economic base. The overall ranking, based on total and average ranks, places the Non-PESA region in the first position and the PESA region in the second, highlighting the relatively higher level of economic development in Non-PESA areas.

Regional development Index of Junnar tahsil: Economic Indicator:

The composite index of all economic indicators depicts the developmental disparity at the region level. The composite index of all selected economic development indicators presents an overall scenario of region-wise disparities in economic development. To explain the existing region-wise economic disparities, the Junnar tahsil has been divided into two levels of disparities: highly developed and less developed.

Table 1.2: Regional development Index of Junnar tahsil: Economic Indicator

Sr. No.	Ranking Coefficient	Development Grade	Name of Region
1	Below 1.5	High	Non - PESA
2	Above 1.5	Less	PESA

Source: Compiled by Author.

Table 1.2 highlights the economic disparity between PESA and Non-PESA regions of Junnar Tahsil based on a ranking coefficient.

High developed region

Regions with a coefficient below 1.5 fall under the High Developed category and are represented by the non-PESA areas, indicating stronger economic performance. This suggests that non-PESA regions have better access to economic resources, infrastructure, and opportunities,

Less developed region

In contrast, regions with a coefficient above 1.5 are classified as "Less Developed", corresponding to the PESA areas, which reflect weaker economic conditions. PESA regions, often tribal and remote, lag in development and require focused policy attention to bridge the economic gap.

Conclusion

This indicates that the PESA region might benefit from economic diversification efforts, while the non-PESA region might already have a more balanced economic structure with multiple sources of employment. The economic development analysis of Junnar Tahsil, based on twelve key indicators, reveals clear disparities between the PESA and Non-PESA regions. The Non-PESA region demonstrates a higher level of economic development overall, ranking more favorably in most indicators. It has a significantly larger percentage of net sown area (69.19%) compared to the PESA region (48.63%), indicating better land utilization for agriculture. Similarly, the Non-PESA region benefits from superior irrigation infrastructure, with a greater percentage of villages under the command area (43.10%) and higher reliance on well/tube well irrigation (67.24%) compared to the PESA region (2.99% and 29.85%, respectively). Although both regions have comparable access to canal irrigation, the PESA region shows slightly higher tank irrigation usage, reflecting geographical adaptations. Financial infrastructure is another area where the non-PESA region has a clear advantage, with more commercial banks, cooperative banks, and agricultural credit societies, highlighting better access to credit and banking facilities. In contrast, the PESA region lags behind significantly in financial inclusion.

Interestingly, the PESA region shows higher labor participation (58.05% total workers) compared to the non-PESA region (48.90%), with a slightly greater share of cultivators (50.81%) and agricultural laborers (28.66%). This indicates a more agriculture-dependent and labor-intensive economy in the PESA region, where fewer alternative employment opportunities exist. However, the Non-PESA region has a higher proportion of main workers (95.21%), suggesting more stable and year-round employment. When rankings are aggregated, the non-PESA region scores better overall, with a total rank of 16 compared to the PESA region's 20, pointing to more advanced economic development. These findings underline the regional economic imbalance and the need for targeted interventions in the PESA areas to improve agricultural infrastructure, financial services, and employment diversification for balanced regional development.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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