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Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, MVP Samj's, K. T. H. M. College, Nashik, Maharashtra
Email: satishhandge1987@gmail.com

Address for correspondence:
Dr. Satish Balasaheb Handge
Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, MVP Samj's, K. T. H. M. College, Nashik, Maharashtra
Email:
satishhandge1987@gmail.com

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Socio-Economic Conditions of Tribal Communities in Selected Tehsils of Nashik District

Dr. Satish Balasaheb Handge

Abstract

The present study examines the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities in selected tehsils of Nashik District, namely Igatpuri, Dindori, Peint, Trimbakeshwar, Surgana, Kalwan and Baglan. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a field survey using a structured interview schedule to understand key indicators such as education, occupation, income, housing conditions, and access to basic amenities. The socio-economic status of households was assessed using the modified Kuppuswamy scale, which provides a composite measure based on education, occupation, and income. The findings reveal that out of the total surveyed households, only 4 households fall under the upper category and 34 under the upper middle category, while a large majority of 120 households belong to the lower middle group and 52 to the upper lower group. This clearly indicates that most tribal households are concentrated in the middle and lower socio-economic strata, reflecting limited economic progress and restricted access to resources. Tehsil-wise variations show that areas like Peint and Trimbakeshwar have relatively better representation in higher categories, whereas Surgana, Kalwan and Igatpuri show greater concentration in lower groups. The study highlights that geographical isolation, dependence on rain-fed agriculture, low literacy levels, and limited employment opportunities are the major factors influencing these conditions. It concludes that focused development efforts, improved infrastructure, and effective implementation of welfare schemes are essential for improving the socio-economic status of tribal communities.

Keywords: *Socio-Economic Status, Tribal Communities, Nashik District, Regional Disparities, Rural Development, Kuppuswamy Scale.*

Introduction

The socio-economic conditions of tribal communities have long been a matter of concern in India's development planning. Scheduled Tribes constitute one of the most disadvantaged sections of society due to their historical isolation, dependence on natural resources, and limited access to education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Despite various governmental efforts, a significant gap still exists between tribal and non-tribal populations in terms of socio-economic development [1 & 2].

In Nashik District, the tehsils of Igatpuri, Dindori, Peint, Trimbakeshwar, Surgana, Kalwan, and Baglan represent a prominent tribal belt characterised by hilly terrain, forest cover, and scattered rural settlements. These geographical conditions play a crucial role in shaping the socio-economic life of tribal communities. The difficult terrain and remoteness restrict connectivity and access to basic amenities, thereby affecting overall development [3].

The tribal population in these tehsils is primarily composed of communities such as Bhil, Kokna, Warli, and Mahadev Koli, whose livelihoods are closely linked with agriculture and forest resources. However, agricultural practices are largely traditional and rain-dependent, resulting in low productivity and unstable income. According to Census of India (2011), tribal-dominated regions in Nashik district exhibit lower literacy rates, especially among women, compared to district averages. This reflects persistent educational backwardness and gender disparity in these areas [4].

Furthermore, studies by Planning Commission (2013) and NITI Aayog (2018) highlight that tribal regions across India, including those in Nashik, face challenges such as poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, and inadequate infrastructure [5 & 6]. In tehsils like Surgana and Peint, a significant proportion of the population depends on seasonal migration to nearby urban centres for livelihood, indicating limited local employment opportunities [7 & 8].

Healthcare accessibility is another critical issue. Due to poor road connectivity and lack of medical facilities, tribal populations often face difficulties in accessing timely healthcare services. Research studies have pointed out higher incidences of malnutrition and communicable diseases in tribal regions, which further affect their socio-economic well-being [9 & 10]. In contrast, some tehsils such as Baglan show relatively better development indicators due to improved connectivity and agricultural advancements.

However, the overall pattern across the district reflects significant spatial disparities in socio-economic development [11 & 12]. This uneven development underlines the need for targeted, region-specific planning interventions.

Government schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP), and various welfare programmes have attempted to improve the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities. While these initiatives have shown some positive impacts, their implementation and effectiveness vary across regions [13 & 14].

Therefore, the present study focuses on analysing the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities in selected tehsils of Nashik district namely; Igatpuri, Dindori, Peint, Trimbakeshwar, Surgana, Kalwan, and Baglan. The study aims to examine key indicators such as literacy, occupation, income, housing, and access to basic amenities, while also identifying regional disparities. Such an analysis is essential for understanding the ground realities and for suggesting effective measures towards inclusive and sustainable tribal development.

Study Area

Nashik District is recognised as one of the districts having a substantial concentration of tribal population in the state of Maharashtra. Owing to this significant presence of Scheduled Tribes, the district has been selected as the study area for the present research. The tribal population in the district is largely concentrated in the hilly and forested tehsils situated in the western and north-western parts, namely Igatpuri, Trimbakeshwar, Peint, Surgana, Dindori, Kalwan and Baglan. These tehsils are characterised by difficult terrain, scattered settlements and limited infrastructural development, which distinctly influence the socio-economic conditions of the tribal communities residing there [15 & 16].

For the purpose of detailed field investigation, seven tribal-dominated tehsils have been selected. Within these tehsils, villages having a predominantly tribal population (in some cases nearly 100 per cent) have been identified to ensure that the study reflects the true socio-economic conditions of tribal communities without significant external influence. Accordingly, villages such as Palashi Bk., Murmuti, Waghyachibari, Joranpada, Shiwarpada, Devalipada, Vanjulpada, Mohapada, Hatti Bk., Daregaon, Kumsadi, Dhanoli, Bhavnagar, Gandhinagar, Vathode, Dharnoli, Shenvad Kh., Lahamagewadi, Divyachapada, Ghodhadyachapada and Jategaon Kh. have been selected for sample study.

The selection of these villages is based on their high tribal population, geographical remoteness, and representation of different physical and socio-economic conditions within the study region. Such a sampling approach helps in obtaining reliable and regionally representative data regarding literacy, occupation, income levels, housing conditions, and access to basic amenities among tribal households. Moreover, focusing on villages with predominantly tribal population allows for a more accurate understanding of the challenges and development issues faced by these communities [17 & 18].

The study area under the investigation is influenced by economically backward and tribal populated area as compared to rest of the tehsils of the Nashik district and has not been so far studied deeply from this point of view, therefore, it is considered by the researcher. The study area lies in north west direction of the Nashik district. The tribal area covers an area of 6807 Km^2 which accounting 44 % of the district.

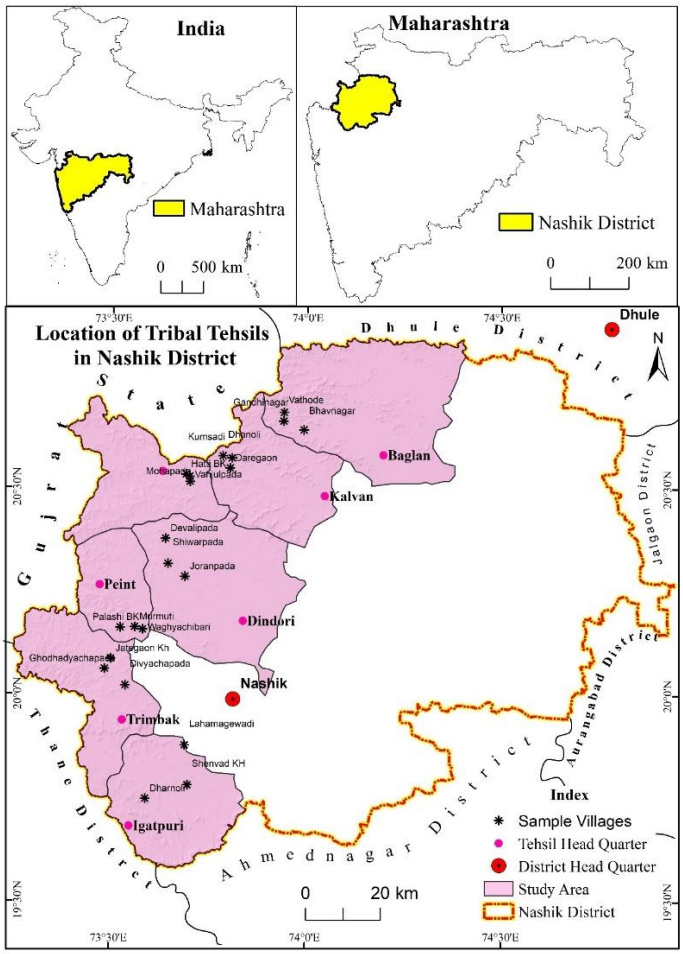

Figure 1: Location Map of Study Area

The study area extends from 190 34' to 21023' north latitude and 730 14' to 740 24' east longitudes. The study area has a length of about 122.42 kilometres from west to east and 142.92 kilometers from north to south. The population of the study area is 16,16,096 (26.46 %) in 2011 census.

Thus, the chosen study area and sample villages provide a suitable framework for analysing the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities in Nashik district and for identifying regional disparities as well as development needs.

Review of Literature

Deshpande (2019) studied migration patterns among tribal communities in Maharashtra and observed that seasonal migration is a common survival strategy due to limited local employment opportunities. The study highlighted that tribal households often migrate to nearby urban and agricultural regions in search of wage labour, which affects children's education and overall social stability [19].

Sharma (2018) analysed spatial inequalities in socio-economic development across rural regions of India. The study pointed out that tribal-dominated areas generally lag behind in terms of literacy, healthcare access, and infrastructure. It also emphasised that geographical isolation and poor connectivity are major barriers to development in such regions [20].

Jadhav (2020) focused on regional disparities in Maharashtra and found that districts with a higher tribal population, including Nashik, exhibit uneven development patterns. According to the study, tehsils located in hilly and forested regions show lower levels of income, education, and basic amenities compared to plain areas [21].

Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2014) examined the overall development status of tribal communities in India. The report revealed that tribal populations face multiple challenges such as malnutrition, lack of healthcare facilities, and low literacy rates. It also stressed the need for focused policy interventions and better implementation of welfare schemes [22].

NITI Aayog (2018) report on development strategy highlighted that tribal regions continue to suffer from poverty and underdevelopment despite various government programmes. The report suggested improving infrastructure, education, and livelihood opportunities as key strategies for inclusive growth [23].

Patil and Shinde (2021) conducted a study on health conditions among tribal communities in Maharashtra. The study found that poor nutrition, lack of awareness, and inadequate healthcare facilities contribute to a high prevalence of diseases in tribal areas. It also noted that accessibility to primary health centres remains a serious issue in remote villages [24].

Pawar (2017) on tribal livelihoods in Nashik district indicated that agriculture and forest-based activities are the primary sources of income. However, due to dependence on rainfall and traditional methods of farming, income levels remain low and

uncertain. The study also pointed out that many tribal households depend on government schemes for supplementary income [25].

Census of India (2011) provides comprehensive data on literacy, work participation, and demographic characteristics of tribal populations. The data clearly shows that tribal communities have lower literacy rates, particularly among women, and higher dependence on primary sector activities compared to the general population [26].

Overall, the review of literature indicates that tribal communities in Maharashtra, including Nashik district, face multiple socio-economic challenges such as poverty, low literacy, poor health conditions, and limited livelihood opportunities. Although several studies have addressed these issues, there is a need for micro-level analysis focusing on specific tehsils and villages. The present study attempts to fill this gap by examining the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities in selected tehsils of Nashik district.

Objective of the Study

1. To examine the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities in selected tehsils of Nashik District.

Data and Methodology

1. **Data Sources**

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a structured household survey conducted in selected tribal villages of Nashik District. A pre-tested interview schedule was used to obtain information on demographic characteristics, education, occupation, income, housing conditions, and access to basic amenities. Field visits were carried out in villages across the selected tehsils; namely Igatpuri, Trimbakeshwar, Peint, Surgana, Dindori, Kalwan and Baglan to ensure first-hand and reliable data collection. Wherever necessary, informal discussions with village elders and local officials were also undertaken to understand the ground realities.

Secondary data were collected from published and official sources such as Census of India (2011), District Socio-Economic Review reports, and documents of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. Relevant books, research articles, and government reports were also referred to for conceptual understanding and background information.

2. **Method of Analysis**

The collected data were classified, tabulated, and analysed using simple statistical techniques such as percentages, averages, and comparative analysis. Tables and charts were used to present the data in a clear and systematic manner. The analysis focused on key socio-economic indicators including literacy levels, occupational structure, income distribution, housing conditions, and availability of basic services.

Measurement of Socio-Economic Status

In order to assess the socio-economic status of tribal households in a systematic and standardised manner, the Kuppuswamy Socioeconomic Status Scale was adopted with suitable modifications. The original Kuppuswamy scale, developed by Kuppuswamy (1976), is widely used in India to classify socio-economic status based on three key variables: education of the head of the family, occupation of the head of the family, and monthly family income [27].

For the present study, the scale was modified to suit rural and tribal conditions. Necessary adjustments were made in the income categories to reflect current price levels and rural economic conditions. Scores were assigned to each of the three components; education, occupation, and income. Also the total score was used to classify households into different socio-economic categories such as upper, middle, and lower classes [28 & 29].

This method provides a comprehensive understanding of socio-economic status by combining educational attainment, occupational pattern, and income level. It is particularly useful in comparative studies and helps in identifying disparities among different households and regions.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

1. Socio-economic Status

Socio-economic status (SES) is a key concept used in social sciences to understand the position of individuals or households within a society. It generally refers to a combined measure of a person's economic and social standing, which is commonly assessed through indicators such as income, education, and occupation. These indicators together reflect not only the material well-being of a household but also its access to opportunities, resources, and social mobility [30].

In the Indian context, socio-economic status plays an important role in shaping patterns of development and inequality. Differences in SES are closely associated with variations in literacy levels, employment opportunities, health conditions, and quality of life. Households with higher socio-economic status tend to have better access to education, healthcare facilities, and stable sources of income, whereas those belonging to lower socio-economic groups often face multiple deprivations such as poverty, illiteracy, and inadequate living conditions [30].

Socio-economic status is not determined by a single factor; rather, it is a composite outcome of several interrelated variables. Education influences the type of occupation an individual can access, while occupation determines income level, which in turn affects living standards and access to services. Thus, these components are closely linked and collectively define the overall socio-economic position of a household [32]. For this reason, many researchers and planners use composite indices or scales to measure SES in a systematic manner.

In rural and tribal areas, the concept of socio-economic status assumes even greater significance. These regions often experience limited infrastructural development, geographical isolation, and restricted access to institutional support. As a result, the socio-economic conditions of people living in such areas are influenced not only by income and occupation but also by factors like land ownership, dependency on natural resources, seasonal migration, and access to government welfare schemes [33].

In districts like Nashik District, where a considerable proportion of the population belongs to Scheduled Tribes, the assessment of socio-economic status becomes essential for understanding regional disparities and planning development

interventions. Tribal communities in such regions often face challenges such as low literacy, limited employment opportunities, and poor access to basic amenities, which directly affect their socio-economic status [34].

Therefore, the study of socio-economic status provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the living conditions of people, identifying inequalities, and formulating policies aimed at inclusive and sustainable development. It helps researchers and policymakers to understand not only the economic position of a population but also its social progress and overall well-being.

Table 1: Socio-economic Status

Sr. No.	Tehsil	Upper (I)	Upper Middle (II)	Lower Middle (III)	Upper Lower (IV)
1	Igatpuri	0	1	19	10
2	Dindori	0	5	20	5
3	Peint	1	14	13	2
4	Trimbakeshwar	2	5	16	7
5	Surgana	1	4	20	5
6	Kalwan	0	4	18	8
7	Baglan	0	1	14	15
Total		**4**	**34**	**120**	**52**

Source: Field Survey Data Compiled by Researcher, 2025.

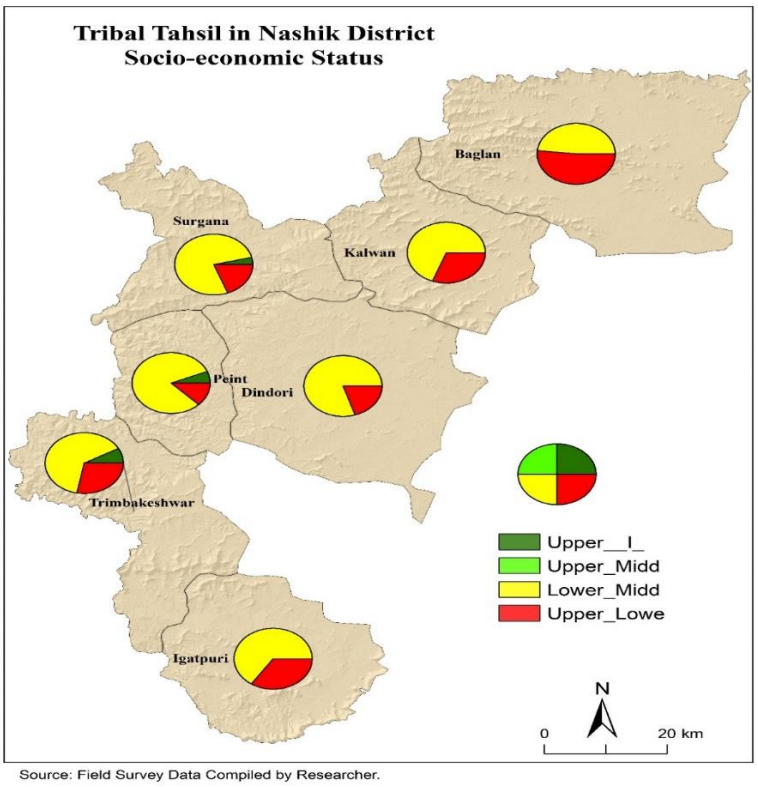

Figure 2: Socio-economic Status

The distribution of socio-economic status across the selected tehsils of Nashik District reveals a clear pattern of predominance of lower and middle categories among tribal households. The data indicate that out of the total surveyed households, only a very small proportion falls under the upper and upper middle categories, whereas a significant majority is concentrated in the lower middle and upper lower groups. This reflects the overall modest socio-economic position of tribal communities in the study area.

At the aggregate level, only 4 households are classified under the upper category and 34 under the upper middle category, while as many as 120 households belong to the lower middle group and 52 to the upper lower group. This clearly shows that most tribal households are positioned in the middle-to-lower strata of the socio-economic hierarchy. Such a pattern is consistent with broader findings that tribal populations in India generally experience limited access to stable income, quality education, and secure employment opportunities.

A tehsil-wise analysis further highlights regional variations. In Igatpuri, there are no households in the upper category and only one in the upper middle group, while the majority are concentrated in the lower middle (19) and upper lower (10) categories. This suggests that despite its relative proximity to urban centres, a large section of the tribal population continues to face economic constraints. Similarly, Dindori shows a slightly better distribution in the upper middle category (5

households), yet a dominant share remains within the lower middle group (20 households), indicating limited upward mobility.

Peint presents a relatively improved scenario compared to other tehsils, with 1 household in the upper category and a comparatively higher number (14) in the upper middle group. However, even here, a considerable number of households fall within the lower middle (13) category, showing that economic advancement is still restricted to a small segment. Trimbakeshwar also reflects a similar pattern, with 2 households in the upper category and 5 in the upper middle category, but the majority (16 households) are still in the lower middle group, followed by 7 in the upper lower category.

In Surgana and Kalwan, the concentration of households in the lower middle and upper lower categories is even more pronounced. Surgana has only 1 household in the upper category and 4 in the upper middle category, whereas 20 households fall under lower middle and 5 under upper lower. Kalwan shows no households in the upper category and only 4 in upper middle, with a large majority in lower middle (18) and upper lower (8). These figures indicate that economic conditions in these tehsils are relatively weaker, likely due to geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, and dependence on subsistence agriculture.

Baglan presents a slightly different pattern, where a higher number of households (15) fall under the upper lower category compared to the lower middle category (14). The presence of only 1 household in the upper middle category and none in the upper category suggests that although some households have slightly better stability, overall socio-economic advancement remains limited.

The dominance of the lower middle category across almost all tehsils suggests that while basic survival needs may be met, there is limited scope for economic growth and improved living standards. Factors such as low educational attainment, dependence on rain-fed agriculture, lack of diversified employment opportunities, and seasonal migration contribute to this situation. Moreover, the very small number of households in the upper category indicates that socio-economic advancement among tribal communities is slow and uneven.

Overall, the table clearly highlights that tribal communities in the selected tehsils of Nashik district largely belong to economically vulnerable sections. The findings underline the need for targeted development interventions focusing on education, skill development, employment generation, and infrastructure improvement to uplift their socio-economic status. Similar patterns of concentration in lower socio-economic categories have been observed in various studies on tribal regions in India, which emphasise the persistence of structural inequalities and regional disparities.

Conclusion and Discussion

The present study on the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities in selected tehsils of Nashik District clearly indicates that a large proportion of households are concentrated in the lower middle and upper lower socio-economic categories. The very small number of households in the upper and upper middle groups suggests that overall economic advancement among tribal communities is limited and uneven. This pattern reflects the continued marginal position of tribal populations in terms of access to education, stable income, and basic amenities.

The tehsil-wise analysis shows that although minor variations exist, the general trend remains similar across Igatpuri, Dindori, Peint, Trimbakeshwar, Surgana, Kalwan, and Baglan. Tehsils such as Peint and Trimbakeshwar show slightly better representation in the upper categories, whereas Surgana, Kalwan, and Igatpuri have a higher concentration of households in the lower strata. This uneven distribution highlights the presence of intra-district disparities, which are influenced by geographical conditions, connectivity, and availability of development facilities. Hilly terrain, forest cover, and scattered settlements in many of these tehsils continue to act as barriers to socio-economic progress.

The findings of the study are consistent with broader national and regional trends, where tribal communities are often characterised by low literacy levels, dependence on primary activities such as agriculture and forest-based livelihoods, and limited access to infrastructure. As reported by Census of India (2011), tribal populations generally show lower educational attainment and higher economic vulnerability compared to other social groups. Similarly, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2014) has highlighted issues such as poverty, malnutrition, and inadequate healthcare facilities in tribal regions.

The dominance of the lower middle category in the study area suggests that while many households are able to meet their basic needs, they lack opportunities for upward mobility. Factors such as irregular employment, seasonal migration, limited skill development, and low awareness about government schemes contribute to this situation. In addition, gender disparities in education and employment further restrict the socio-economic advancement of tribal households. These issues are also emphasised in development reports by NITI Aayog (2018), which underline the need for inclusive and region-specific planning.

From a discussion perspective, it is evident that improving socio-economic conditions in tribal areas requires a multi-dimensional approach. Enhancing access to quality education, strengthening healthcare infrastructure, promoting skill-based employment, and improving connectivity are essential steps. At the same time, effective implementation of government schemes such as MGNREGA, Tribal Sub-Plan, and rural development programmes is necessary to ensure that benefits reach the intended population. Special attention should also be given to women's education and livelihood opportunities, as this can have a positive impact on the overall development of tribal households.

In conclusion, the study highlights that despite some progress, tribal communities in the selected tehsils of Nashik district continue to face significant socio-economic challenges. The persistence of lower socio-economic status among a majority of households indicates the need for targeted interventions and sustained policy efforts. A balanced approach that combines economic development with social empowerment is essential to bring about meaningful and long-term improvement in the living conditions of tribal populations.

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Declaration of Competing Interest
The author affirm that there are no financial or personal relationships that could have influenced the findings or interpretation of the research presented in this paper.

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