

The Economic Status of Jharkhand Tribal Folk Artists: A Contemporary Analysis



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Abstract

This paper delves into the economic conditions of tribal folk artists in Jharkhand, a state known for its rich cultural tapestry woven by diverse tribal communities. Tribal folk art, such as Sohrai, Paitkar, and Jadopatia, holds immense cultural value but is at risk due to the precarious economic conditions of the artists. This study investigates the sources of income, market dynamics, government support, and socio-economic factors impacting the livelihoods of these artists. Data was collected through surveys and interviews with artists from different districts, including Ranchi, Dumka, Singhbhum, and Hazaribagh. The findings reveal that despite their significant cultural contributions, these artists face economic challenges, with irregular income and limited market access being major concerns. Government interventions, though present, are often insufficient due to lack of awareness and bureaucratic hurdles. The study also examines the impact of globalization and modernization, which have both positive and negative effects on these traditional art forms. While some artists have managed to access broader markets, many are still marginalized, struggling to preserve their cultural identity amidst modern pressures. This paper concludes by proposing policy recommendations and community-driven solutions aimed at enhancing the economic status of these artists, ensuring the sustainability of their art forms while improving their quality of life. With a focus on location-specific challenges, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the economic struggles and opportunities for Jharkhand's tribal folk artists, contributing to broader discussions on cultural preservation and economic development in tribal regions.

Keywords: *Economic Status, Income Sources, Market Access, Traditional Art, Financial Literacy*

Introduction

Jharkhand, a state rich in natural resources and cultural heritage, is home to over 32 tribal communities, each with distinct cultural expressions. The state's tribal folk art is a vital part of its cultural identity, encompassing a variety of visual and performing arts such as Sohrai wall painting, Paitkar scroll painting, Jadopatia scrolls, and wooden carvings. These art forms have been preserved through generations and are deeply rooted in the social and religious practices of these communities.

However, despite the cultural significance of their work, the tribal folk artists of Jharkhand often find themselves economically marginalized. The commercialization of art and the impact of globalization have introduced new challenges, while also presenting opportunities that these artists are not fully equipped to exploit. This paper seeks to explore the economic status of Jharkhand's tribal folk artists, with a focus on understanding the various factors that contribute to their economic hardship, as well as the opportunities that could be harnessed to improve their livelihoods.

The study is structured around key questions: What are the primary sources of income for these artists? How do market dynamics and access influence their economic status? What role do government schemes and policies play in supporting these artists? Additionally, how does the artists' geographical location within Jharkhand impact their economic conditions? By addressing these questions, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities faced by tribal folk artists in Jharkhand.

Materials and Methods

To achieve the objectives of this study, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The primary data was collected through structured surveys and in-depth interviews with 80 tribal folk artists across various districts of Jharkhand, including Ranchi, Dumka, East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum, Hazaribagh, and Latehar. These districts were selected due to their significant tribal populations and their association with traditional tribal art forms.

Survey and Interview Methodology

The survey included questions designed to gather data on the demographic profiles of the artists, their primary and secondary sources of income, market access, awareness and utilization of government schemes, challenges faced, and their perspectives on the future of their art forms. The survey also collected data on the geographical location of the artists to understand how location-specific factors influence their economic status. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 artists from each district, focusing on their personal experiences, struggles, and aspirations. These interviews provided qualitative insights into the socio-economic factors affecting their livelihoods and the specific challenges they face in their respective locations.

Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data was gathered from government reports, academic journals, and publications from NGOs working in the field of tribal development. This data provided a broader context for under-

standing the economic challenges faced by the artists and the effectiveness of existing policy interventions.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data. The findings were then compared with existing literature to identify trends, disparities, and potential areas for intervention.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of Tribal Folk Artists

The demographic profile of the artists surveyed reflects the diverse tribal population of Jharkhand. The artists ranged in age from 25 to 65 years, with a near-equal representation of men and women. Most of the artists belonged to the Santhal, Munda, and Oraon tribes, which are the largest tribal groups in the state. The majority had received little formal education, with many having completed only primary school. This lack of education is a significant barrier to economic advancement, limiting their ability to engage with modern markets and financial systems.

Income Sources and Economic Challenges

The primary source of income for most tribal folk artists in Jharkhand is the sale of their art at local markets and festivals. However, this income is highly irregular and seasonal, often coinciding with religious festivals and local fairs. For example, artists in Ranchi reported higher sales during the Karma festival, a significant event for the tribal communities. In contrast, artists in Dumka and Hazaribagh reported lower income, as their local markets attract fewer buyers.

On average, artists in Ranchi and East Singhbhum reported monthly earnings between ₹5,000 to ₹8,000, while those in Dumka, West Singhbhum, and Hazaribagh earned between ₹3,000 to ₹6,000. Artists in more remote areas like Latehar reported even lower earnings, often relying on secondary occupations such as agriculture and wage labor to supplement their income. These secondary occupations, however, are also unstable and provide minimal financial security.

The lack of financial literacy and access to credit is a common challenge across all districts. Few artists have bank accounts, and even fewer have access to formal credit facilities, making it difficult for them to invest in materials or expand their production. This financial exclusion is particularly pronounced in remote districts like Latehar and West Singhbhum, where access to banking services is limited.

Location-wise Economic Disparities

Geographical location plays a significant role in determining the economic status of tribal folk artists in Jharkhand. Artists in districts with better access to urban centers, such as Ranchi and East Singhbhum, generally have better income prospects due to higher market demand and easier access to government support. These artists are more likely to participate in government-organized exhibitions and craft fairs, which provide additional income opportunities.

In contrast, artists in remote districts like West Singhbhum and Latehar face greater economic challenges due to their isolation from major markets and limited access to government schemes. For example, artists in Latehar reported that they often have to travel long distances to reach the nearest market, which increases their costs and reduces their profit margins. Moreover, the lack of organized platforms for selling their art, such as cooperatives or online marketplaces, further exacerbates these disparities.

Market Access and the Commercialization of Tribal Art

Market access remains one of the most significant challenges for tribal folk artists in Jharkhand. While there is growing interest in tribal art among urban consumers, particularly in metropolitan cities like Delhi and Mumbai, the artists themselves often have limited access to these markets. The majority of sales occur through middlemen, who take a significant share of the profits, leaving the artists with minimal earnings despite the high prices their art can fetch in urban markets.

The commercialization of tribal art has also led to the commodification of cultural expressions, with many artists feeling pressured to produce works that cater to the tastes of urban buyers rather than staying true to traditional forms and themes. This shift not only dilutes the cultural significance of the art but also contributes to the economic marginalization of the artists, who are often underpaid for their work.

For instance, artists in Ranchi and East Singhbhum, who have better access to urban markets, reported a higher incidence of commercialization, with buyers often requesting specific designs that align with contemporary trends. In contrast, artists in Dumka and Hazaribagh, where market access is more limited, reported that they continue to produce traditional designs but struggle to find buyers willing to pay fair prices.

Government Support and Policy Interventions

Government schemes aimed at promoting tribal art and improving the economic conditions of tribal artists exist, but their impact has been limited. The study found that awareness of these schemes among the artists is low, with many artists unaware of the support available to them. Even when artists are aware of these schemes, the bureaucratic hurdles involved in accessing support often deter them from applying.

For instance, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs runs several programs to promote tribal art, including grants for individual artists and funding for craft fairs. However, the application process for these programs is complex, requiring extensive documentation and interactions with government officials. Artists in Ranchi and East Singhbhum, where government offices are more accessible, reported slightly better success in accessing these schemes compared to those in more remote districts like Latehar and West Singhbhum.

Impact of Globalization and Modernization

Globalization and modernization have had a mixed impact on the economic status of tribal folk artists in Jharkhand. On one hand, increased exposure to global markets has opened up new opportunities for artists to sell their work and reach a wider audience. On the other hand, the

influx of cheap, mass-produced goods has led to increased competition and a decline in demand for traditional art forms.

The study found that artists in districts with better access to urban centers, such as Ranchi and East Singhbhum, have been more successful in tapping into global markets. These artists reported participating in international exhibitions and receiving commissions from buyers abroad. However, the majority of artists, particularly those in remote districts like Latehar and West Singhbhum, have been unable to benefit from these opportunities due to their isolation and lack of resources.

Suggestions to Improve the Economic Conditions of Tribal Folk Artists

Based on the findings from districts such as Ranchi, Dumka, East Singhbhum, and Latehar, the following suggestions are aimed at improving the economic conditions of tribal folk artists in Jharkhand. The suggestions take into account the specific challenges faced by artists in both urban and remote areas.

Enhancing Market Access: Data from Ranchi and East Singhbhum shows that artists in these districts earn significantly more than their counterparts in remote areas like Latehar. This disparity is largely due to better market access. In Ranchi, artists reported earning up to ₹8,000 per month during peak festival seasons like Karma, whereas in Latehar, earnings rarely exceeded ₹3,000 due to limited local demand.

Solution

Organized Cooperatives: Establish cooperatives in remote districts such as Dumka and Latehar. These cooperatives would facilitate the pooling of resources, allowing artists to negotiate better prices for their art and reduce dependency on middlemen. *Example:* The Amul cooperative model for dairy farmers could be replicated in Jharkhand, allowing artists to collectively sell their work and share profits equally.

E-commerce Integration: Government and NGOs can collaborate to set up online platforms

for selling tribal art. Training sessions can be organized in districts with low internet penetration, such as Latehar and Dumka, to educate artists on using these platforms. This will give them direct access to national and international buyers, increasing their earnings significantly.

Financial Literacy and Access to Credit: Financial exclusion is a major hurdle for artists in Jharkhand, particularly in rural areas. Only 20% of the artists surveyed in Latehar and Dumka had bank accounts, and fewer had access to formal credit facilities. This lack of financial literacy limits their ability to invest in their craft or expand their businesses.

Solution

Financial Literacy Programs: NGOs and government bodies like the *Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS)* can organize financial literacy workshops tailored to tribal artists. These workshops should cover basic banking, digital payments, micro-financing, and loan application processes.

Example: In Ranchi, a pilot financial literacy program increased banking participation by 30% among local artists, allowing them to secure small loans for expanding their craft production.

Micro-Financing Initiatives: Micro-loans specifically tailored for artists should be introduced in collaboration with banks and micro-financing institutions. The success of micro-finance in increasing economic participation among rural women in Jharkhand can be replicated for tribal artists.

Improving Awareness and Access to Government Schemes: The data revealed that only 15% of the artists interviewed in Dumka and Latehar were aware of government schemes aimed at promoting tribal art. Moreover, bureaucratic hurdles prevent many artists from accessing financial grants and resources under these programs.

Solution

Awareness Campaigns: Local government offices, in partnership with community leaders, can conduct outreach programs in remote villages to

inform artists about available schemes. Dedicated help desks should be established in district offices like those in East Singhbhum and Hazaribagh to assist artists with the application process.

Example: In West Singhbhum, an awareness drive led to a 25% increase in applications for the *Tribal Craft Promotion Scheme* within a year.

Streamlining Application Processes: Simplifying the application process and reducing the documentation requirements will encourage more artists to apply for government support. For artists in remote areas like Latehar, mobile units can be set up to process applications directly in villages, reducing the need for travel to district offices.

Public-Private Partnerships and Sponsorship: The private sector has shown increasing interest in promoting tribal art. Public-private partnerships (PPP) can be leveraged to create sustainable income opportunities for tribal folk artists. For instance, private companies sponsoring exhibitions or art fairs can ensure more visibility for artists from remote areas.

Solution

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives: Companies can include tribal art promotion in their CSR activities. In districts like Ranchi, where corporate presence is stronger due to mining and industrial activity, collaborations with tribal artists can lead to sponsored exhibitions, both locally and internationally.

Example: TATA Steel, which operates in East Singhbhum, has already initiated such programs, leading to the participation of local artists in national exhibitions, thereby increasing their earnings by 40%.

Sponsorship for Craft Fairs: Sponsorships by private entities can fund annual or bi-annual tribal craft fairs in Jharkhand, providing artists a platform to showcase their work. This is particularly beneficial for artists in isolated districts like Dumka and Latehar, where opportunities for market exposure are scarce.

Preserving Cultural Identity through Education: One of the challenges identified in both ur-

ban and rural districts is the loss of traditional techniques as younger generations move away from tribal art. In Dumka and Hazaribagh, 60% of the artists expressed concern that their children were no longer interested in learning traditional art forms.

Solution

Art Schools and Workshops: Establish tribal art schools in districts like Dumka and Latehar, where the youth can learn traditional techniques from elder artists. This will help preserve the authenticity of Jharkhand's art forms while also creating a pipeline for future generations of artists.

Example: The *Bhartiya Lok Kalyan Sansthan, Ranchi* and *Jharkhand Kala Mandir* in Ranchi has been successful in attracting young students to learn traditional tribal art forms, ensuring that the craft is passed on to future generations.

Incentivizing Cultural Preservation: Government scholarships can be introduced for young artists in rural areas who want to pursue traditional tribal art as a career. These scholarships should cover training, materials, and marketing support to ensure that traditional art forms are not lost to modernization.

Conclusion

The economic status of Jharkhand's tribal folk artists is shaped by various challenges, including limited market access, low financial literacy, and insufficient government support. Despite the cultural significance of their work, many artists remain economically vulnerable, particularly those in remote areas like Latehar and Dumka. The disparity between artists in urbanized districts, such as Ranchi and East Singhbhum, and those in more isolated regions highlights the need for targeted interventions.

Key findings from the study reveal that while government schemes exist, their impact is minimal due to bureaucratic hurdles and lack of awareness among artists. Additionally, the commercialization of tribal art, driven by urban and global market demands, is causing a shift away from traditional designs, which threatens the cultural identity of these art forms.

The study concludes that improving the economic conditions of Jharkhand's tribal folk artists requires a multi-pronged approach, including better market access, increased financial literacy, more effective government support, and efforts to preserve the cultural integrity of tribal art. Addressing these challenges holistically will empower artists to achieve economic stability while ensuring the sustainability of their cultural heritage.

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