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Profile characteristics of tribal youth and their attitude towards the agriculture

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Abstract

Youth represents a dynamic stage of life characterized by enthusiasm, energy, and the capacity to contribute significantly to national development. According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (1985), individuals aged 15-35 years are classified as youth in India. Tribal youth refers to young people within this age group who belong to tribal communities sharing common cultural traits, language, traditions, geographical territories, and social customs.

As one of the most productive and innovative segments of tribal society, tribal youth possess immense potential to contribute to agricultural development. Their active participation in agriculture can improve labour efficiency, enhance income generation, and promote better living standards. Additionally, young tribal entrepreneurs play a vital role in strengthening the tribal economy. Despite being regarded as a valuable yet underutilized resource in remote and underdeveloped regions, tribal youth often face challenges such as unemployment. To address this issue, many are increasingly engaging in agricultural and allied enterprises as viable livelihood options.

The present study aimed to examine the socio-personal characteristics of tribal youth and assess their attitudes toward agriculture. Attitude is a critical factor influencing an individual's engagement with agricultural activities, as a positive outlook often leads to better participation and outcomes. Previous studies have indicated that tribal youth generally hold favorable perceptions of agriculture as a source of livelihood, making the sector particularly attractive to them.

With this objective, a study entitled "*Profile Characteristics of Tribal Youth and Their Attitude Towards Agriculture*" was conducted in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra. The research was carried out in Dhanora and Etapalli tehsils, selected purposively due to their high concentration of tribal populations. A total of 120 tribal youth were selected randomly, comprising 60 respondents from each tehsil. Data were collected using a structured and pre-tested interview schedule and analyzed through appropriate statistical methods.

The findings revealed that 32.50 percent of the respondents belonged to the age group of 26-30 years. Nearly 42.50 percent had completed higher secondary education, while 71.66 percent belonged to medium-sized families. Male respondents constituted 71.66 percent of the sample, and 65.00 percent were unmarried. About 49.17 percent demonstrated a moderate level of social participation. A majority (77.50 percent) were engaged in farming, off-farm activities, and wage labor. Furthermore, 46.67 percent reported moderate exposure to mass media, and 50.00 percent exhibited a medium level of decision-making ability. Overall, 61.67 percent of the tribal youth displayed a favorable attitude toward agriculture.

Keywords: Tribal communities, tribal youth, agriculture, attitude, socio-personal characteristics, livelihood, challenges

Introduction

Agriculture forms the foundation of the Indian economy and plays a central role in food security, employment generation, and rural development. A substantial proportion of India's population depends directly or indirectly on agriculture for sustenance. The youth population, comprising individuals aged 15-35 years, accounts for approximately 35.56 percent of the country's total population. However, youth unemployment remains a significant concern, with the unemployment rate estimated

at 10.6 percent (National Youth Policy, 2014).

Tribal youth constitute a significant and potentially productive segment of society. Sharing common cultural practices, language, traditions, and territorial identity, they traditionally depend on hunting, fishing, and agriculture for their livelihood. According to Narayan (1986) ^[10], tribal youth belong to relatively egalitarian communities characterized by traditional lifestyles and minimal urban influence.

Many tribal youth continue to reside in remote villages and forest regions where access to communication and transportation facilities remains limited. Consequently, they are often among the most neglected sections of the youth population. At the same time, they serve as custodians of indigenous knowledge related to agriculture and allied sectors. This knowledge, transmitted across generations, provides valuable insights into local farming systems, cultural practices, and resource management. Sharland (1991) ^[13] emphasized the importance of indigenous knowledge in designing effective agricultural extension services.

Despite their significant role in preserving traditional agricultural wisdom, development policies have largely focused on rural youth in general, with comparatively less attention given to tribal youth. Since agriculture remains central to India's economy, the active involvement of tribal youth is essential for ensuring its sustainability and growth.

Vyas and Mann (1980) ^[15] highlighted the cultural significance of tribal communities despite their relatively small population share. Tribal agricultural systems are closely aligned with environmental sustainability and nutritional needs. Similarly, Mishra (2007) ^[9] observed that tribal communities have developed extensive indigenous knowledge systems through their close interaction with nature. Research by Gadgil and Berkes (1991) ^[4] further demonstrated that tribal societies possess effective mechanisms for conserving biological resources. Steven (1997) ^[14] noted that indigenous knowledge, conservation values, and environmentally sensitive resource management practices have enabled tribal communities to coexist sustainably with nature for centuries.

However, tribal agriculture remains predominantly traditional due to limited access to modern technologies, financial resources, and institutional support. Inadequate capital and insufficient government assistance often compel tribal farmers to rely on age-old agricultural practices. According to Purkayastha (2016) ^[11], tribal economies largely depend on hunting, gathering, fishing, and shifting cultivation. Consequently, traditional agricultural practices alone are often insufficient to overcome poverty and unemployment.

There is an urgent need to transform perceptions of agriculture from a subsistence activity into a profitable enterprise capable of generating sustainable livelihoods. Tribal youth, who represent a substantial portion of the tribal population, possess immense potential to contribute to agricultural development. However, limited opportunities, inadequate guidance, and lack of organized support often hinder their participation in productive activities. Since tribal regions are naturally endowed with agricultural resources, the sector offers significant employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for youth.

Recognizing tribal youth as future entrepreneurs, innovators, responsible citizens, and leaders, there is growing global awareness of their role in agricultural development. Studies consistently indicate that youth are more energetic, resourceful, and enthusiastic than other population groups, making them valuable contributors to agricultural transformation.

Scenario of Tribal Population and Tribal Youth

According to the 2011 Census, India's tribal population stood at 104.3 million, representing 8.6 percent of the national population. The tribal sex ratio was 990 females per 1,000 males, significantly higher than the national average of 943. The decadal growth rate of tribal communities between 2001 and 2011 was 23.7 percent. The majority of Scheduled Tribe populations reside in rural areas, with only a small proportion living in urban regions.

Approximately 550 tribal groups are distributed across India, with major concentrations in Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, northeastern states, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Maharashtra contributes around 10.1 percent of the country's tribal population, with tribal communities accounting for 9.4 percent of the state's total population. A significant proportion of tribal youth, constituting over one-third of the tribal population, faces challenges related to unemployment and economic insecurity.

In Gadchiroli district, Scheduled Tribes accounted for 38.71 percent of the total population according to the 2011 Census. The tribal population was predominantly rural, highlighting the importance of agriculture and allied activities as primary livelihood sources.

Problems and Prospects of Tribal Youth in Agriculture

One of the major challenges faced by tribal communities is land insecurity. Bardhan (1976) ^[2] identified indebtedness, bonded labor, and land alienation as key factors contributing to tribal poverty. Limited land ownership, inadequate access to credit, and exploitation by moneylenders further aggravate their economic vulnerability.

The adoption of agricultural innovations often varies across social groups, and tribal farmers frequently encounter barriers such as low literacy levels, lack of awareness, insufficient resources, and insecure land tenure. Consequently, many continue to practice traditional agriculture primarily for subsistence purposes. Due to low productivity and limited income, some tribal farmers are compelled to migrate seasonally to urban areas in search of employment.

Moreover, inadequate incentives, poor access to agricultural inputs, and weak institutional support reduce the attractiveness of agriculture as a career option. Simultaneously, economic and political pressures have led to the displacement of many tribal communities from resource-rich lands, further undermining their livelihood security (Roy Burman, 1993) ^[12].

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) ^[3] argued that understanding individuals' beliefs and attitudes toward agriculture is essential for predicting their intentions and behavior. A favorable attitude can enhance participation and productivity in agricultural activities. Several studies (Bahamann *et al.*, 2010; D'Silva *et al.*, 2010; Bhanu, 2006) ^[1] have reported that tribal youth generally view agriculture positively as a source of livelihood, suggesting considerable potential for youth engagement in the sector.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Dhanora and Etapalli tehsils of Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra, selected purposively due to their high tribal population. Villages selected for the study

included Chatgaon, Pandharsada, Chatgaon (Tola), and Katezari from Dhanora tehsil, and Geda, Jivangatta, Chandanveli, and Etapalli (Tola) from Etapalli tehsil.

A total sample of 120 tribal youth was selected through random sampling, with 60 respondents drawn from each tehsil. Data collection was carried out using a structured and pre-tested interview schedule. The information gathered was tabulated, processed, and statistically analyzed.

Research design

For present study the Ex-post facto research design was adopted.

Attitude of tribal youth towards Agriculture

The attitude of tribal youth towards agriculture was assessed using the attitude scale developed by Mathew and Reddy (1989) [8]. The instrument comprised 12 statements, with responses measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging

from strongly agree to strongly disagree. For positive statements, scores were assigned from 5 for "strongly agree" to 1 for "strongly disagree." Conversely, for negative statements, the scoring pattern was reversed, with 1 assigned to "strongly agree" and 5 to "strongly disagree." The total attitude score for each respondent was calculated, and based on the mean and standard deviation values, respondents were categorized into three groups: low, medium, and high levels of attitude towards agriculture.

Sr. no.	Category	Range
1.	Less favourable Attitude	(<Mean - 1S.D.)
2.	Favourable Attitude	(Mean $\pm$ 1S. D.)
3.	More favourable Attitude	(>Mean + 1S.D.)

Results and Discussion

1. Profile characteristics of Tribal youth

Table 1: Distribution of tribal youth according to their Profile Characteristics

Sr. No.	Category	Farmers (N = 120)	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.1 Age			
1.	15 years to 20 years	27	22.50
2.	21 years to 25 years	32	26.67
3.	26 years to 30 years	39	32.50
4.	31 years to 35 years	22	18.33
1.2 Education			
1.	Illiterate	1	0.83
2.	Primary Education (1 st to 4 th)	4	3.34
3.	Middle school (5th to 7th)	5	4.16
4.	Secondary school (8th to 10th)	37	30.84
5.	Higher secondary (11th to 12th)	51	42.50
6.	Graduation and above	22	18.33
1.3 Gender			
1.	Male	86	71.67
2.	Female	34	28.33
1.4 Family Size			
1.	Small (up to 3 members)	17	14.16
2.	Medium (4 to 6 members)	86	71.68
3.	Large (7 members and above)	17	14.16
1.5 Marital status			
1.	Unmarried	78	65.00
2.	Married	42	35.00
1.6 Social Participation			
1.	Low (Up to 3)	37	30.83
2.	Medium (4 to 6)	59	49.17
3.	High (7 and above)	24	20.00
1.7 Occupation			
1.	Only Farming	4	3.34
2.	Farming + off farm activities	14	11.66
3.	Farming + off farm Activities + labour	93	77.50
4.	Farming +Business	8	6.67
5.	Farming + Service	1	0.83
1.8 Mass media Exposure			
1.	Low (up to 4)	41	34.17
2.	Medium (5 to 7)	56	46.67
3.	High (8 and above)	23	19.16
1.9 Decision Making Ability			
1.	Low (Up to 12)	36	30.00
2.	Medium (13 to 15)	60	50.00
3.	High (16 and above)	24	20.00

2. Attitude of Tribal Youth Towards Agriculture

The data related to attitude of tribal youth towards agriculture is presented in Table 2. It was observed that majority of the respondents (61.67%) had a favourable attitude towards agriculture followed by less favourable (20.00%) and 18.33% of respondents had more favourable attitude towards agriculture.

Table 2: Distribution of the Tribal youth according to their attitude towards agriculture

Sr. no.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Less favourable (Upto 41)	24	20.00
2	Favourable (42 to 50)	74	61.67
3	More Favourable (51 and above)	22	18.33
Total		120	100

Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that the tribal youth respondents belonged to the age group of 15-35 years, with the majority falling within the 26-30 years category. Most respondents had attained education up to the higher secondary level, belonged to medium-sized families, and exhibited a moderate level of social participation. A large proportion of the tribal youth were engaged in farming, off-farm activities, and wage labor as their primary occupations. The majority were male, unmarried, and possessed medium levels of mass media exposure and decision-making ability. The study further indicated that most tribal youth exhibited a favorable to moderately favorable attitude towards agriculture. Tribal youth actively participated in agricultural and allied enterprises, demonstrating strong involvement in farming activities. Since agriculture has traditionally been the foundation of the tribal economy, the youth showed a positive outlook towards its development and modernization, recognizing its importance for their livelihood and overall socio-economic progress.

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