

Tribal Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Opportunities Among Scheduled Tribes in India

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ABSTRACT

India is home to 10.45 crore Scheduled Tribe (ST) individuals, comprising 8.6 percent of the total population, representing a vast and diverse tribal heritage. These traditionally marginalized and excluded tribal communities have begun slowly venturing into business activities, bringing indigenous knowledge and skills into the market. By transitioning from traditional subsistence activities to value-added commercial ventures, they can monetize their unique skills on national and global stages. To achieve this, several targeted government initiatives, financial assistance programs, and skill development frameworks have been launched to support indigenous entrepreneurs. Against this backdrop, this paper highlights entrepreneurship development and livelihood opportunities in tribal communities, focusing on empowering indigenous groups through sustainable, forest-based, and skill-oriented enterprises. These initiatives leverage traditional knowledge such as handicrafts, organic agriculture, and eco-tourism to generate income while preserving cultural heritage and avoiding rural to urban migration

Keywords: Tribal entrepreneurship, Skill development, Livelihood, Economic empowerment, Handicrafts and Textiles, Minor Forest Produce, TRIFED

INTRODUCTION

Tribal Entrepreneurship and Development

Entrepreneurship has been widely recognized as a dynamic process that drives economic growth and social inclusion by identifying and acting upon economic opportunities through the creation of new products, services, and ventures that generate value and employment in society. In India, entrepreneurship has undergone a significant transformation following the economic liberalization and post-1991 reforms, expanding beyond traditional business sectors to create opportunities for rural and marginalized communities. The marginalisation of communities, particularly Scheduled Tribes (STs), who make up more than 8.6% of the entire population, is crucial in the reduction of structural inequality and the enhancement of inclusive growth. Tribal entrepreneurship and mainstream entrepreneurship vary on a number of dimensions. Compared with general entrepreneurship, which often highlights innovation and scalability, tribal entrepreneurship is also often based on traditional knowledge, resource-based operations, cultural operations, and community collaboration. It includes small and micro-enterprises that deal in handicrafts, agro-products, processing forest produce, ecotourism, handicraft networks, and cooperative enterprises. In academic definitions, tribal entrepreneurship refers to the innovative and sustainable use of locally available natural resources and indigenous cultural assets by tribal communities to generate income, create employment, and create long-term livelihood opportunities. Tribal entrepreneurship, in turn, is found to be both a development necessity and a prism through which socio-economic change in historically marginalized tribal communities is viewed. In the past centuries, the Indian tribes have been

dependent on the native knowledge systems, forest-based livelihoods, and subsistence agriculture to earn their livelihoods. These subsistence cultures are deeply rooted in the rich cultural tradition and has, often not entered the formal markets because of geographic isolation, low educational levels and structural exclusion. However, tribes were traditionally active in making artisan crafts, performing traditional food processing, honey and spices, and textile weaving, along with other value-added processes that have been transmitted to the next generations. In recent decades, as these societies have become more and more connected to the larger economies, there has been a shift in modes of existence to entrepreneurship. Such post-liberalization policy regimes in India have attempted to identify and support such tribal entrepreneurship in terms of socio-economic empowerment.

Major Areas of Tribal Entrepreneurship

Tribal populations across various parts of India engage in numerous entrepreneurial endeavors, including forest-based enterprises, handicrafts, handlooms, agriculture, eco-tourism, food processing, value addition to herbal products, and livestock-based activities. Tribal entrepreneurship in India is also becoming a major route to sustainable livelihoods and the maintenance of culture. In recent years, however, these conventional practices have been transformed into entrepreneurial activities with the support of several government interventions and institutional supports. Tribal entrepreneurship in India is characterized by regional diversity, shaped by local resources, cultural activities, and traditional knowledge systems. For example, the Gond tribe, which has traditionally practiced handicraft-based businesses selling traditional paintings, the Warli tribe, which has practiced Warli art, and the Toda tribe of Tamil Nadu, which has practiced embroidery, are among the entrepreneurial activities based on traditional knowledge. The tribes that practice forest-based entrepreneurship include the Irula, Kattunayakan, and Baiga Tribes, which collect honey, harvest medicinal plants, and collect minor forest produce. The Bodo Tribe, the Naga Tribes, the Mizo Tribe, and the Todas are mostly involved in handloom and textile-based entrepreneurship, mostly engaged in the production of traditional shawls and garments. The Santhal, the Khasi, and the Garo Tribe are agricultural-based entrepreneurs who specialize in millet farming, organic farming, and the production of spices. The remaining tribes in other regions of India, engaged in eco-tourism and cultural tourism, are engaged in entrepreneurial ventures. These localized forms of cultural activity and livelihood demonstrate the diversity of tribal knowledge systems and traditional practices across India, which emerge as a new concept of entrepreneurship for economic development amongst the tribal community. Tribal entrepreneurship not only enhances the economic prospects of tribal communities but also fosters sustainable resource use, maintains indigenous culture, and improves community-based development.

Institutional Support and Initiatives

The growth and sustainability of tribal entrepreneurship depend not only on the entrepreneurial capabilities of tribal communities but also on an enabling institutional and policy environment that helps bridge structural barriers to strengthen the community's entrepreneurial abilities. In India, both the central and state governments introduced a range of policies, schemes, and institutional mechanisms to promote this ability through various measures.

A significant initiative in this direction was the introduction of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for the Minor Forest Produce (MFP) scheme by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, during the financial year 2013-14. The scheme was launched to ensure remunerative prices for tribal gatherers and collectors of MFPs, thereby protecting them from market exploitation and encouraging higher investment in collection, processing, and sustainable utilization of forest resources. Initially covering 10 MFPs in nine states, the scheme was subsequently expanded to 24 MFPs across all states, considerably strengthening livelihood opportunities for tribal communities. Programs like Van Dhan Yojana, Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs), and similar programs are also meant to formalize and add value to the tribal products, especially Minor Forest Produce, by providing the tribal gatherers with the opportunity for processing, value addition, branding, and marketing it through ventures and retail stores. The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED) is at the forefront of establishing market linkages, branding tribal products, and developing retail platforms for tribal artisans. India has various schemes proposed by central and state governments to help tribal entrepreneurship. Key initiatives include the Tribal Entrepreneurship Development Program (TEDP) - a national training and skill development program to enhance product design, financial literacy, and market entry of tribal artisans and entrepreneurs. Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) and credit policies are revolutionizing rural

entrepreneurship. By formally integrating informal financing with bank credit, these policies empower tribal entrepreneurs and rural startups to scale their business, thereby driving local economic growth. Also, retail programs such as TRIFED retail stores and exhibitions display tribal products on a national scale, and state-based programs such as youth micro-entrepreneur programmes have been targeted at developing entrepreneurship in younger tribal populations. These administrative systems demonstrate a shift in administration towards policies that are more welfare-based and market-based, and decentralized. More recently, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has broadened the tribal entrepreneurial ecosystem through Dharti Aaba TribePreneurs 2025, launched under the Janjatiya Gaurav Varsh celebrations to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Bhagwan Birsa Munda. Organized as part of Startup Mahakumbh 2025, the initiative provided Scheduled Tribe entrepreneurs with opportunities for product exhibition, investor networking, mentorship, incubation, and market expansion. Supported by collaborations with premier institutions and the Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Tribes, the program aims to strengthen innovation, startup development, employment generation, and sustainable tribal enterprises by integrating tribal entrepreneurs into India's evolving startup ecosystem. It has also started programs called Promote Tribal Enterprises to help tribal businesses with marketing, logistics, and low-interest loans through the National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC) and the State Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (STFDC). A Centre of Excellence was set up with (ASSOCHAM) Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India to encourage tribal entrepreneurship and skill development. The Tribal Entrepreneurship Development Program (TEDP) chooses artisans from all over the country and trains them based on their skills and what the market needs. The program also teaches people how to make new products, manage their money, and market their businesses online, such as through e-commerce sites. In general, TEDP's goals are to improve tribal livelihoods, give them more access to markets, and encourage self-reliance. All these initiatives were launched with more focus being placed on entrepreneurship as a source of empowerment, but not just a source of employment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present review organizes the literature into three major dimensions of tribal entrepreneurship: forest based entrepreneurship which focuses on the utilization and value addition of Non-Timber Forest Produces (NTFPs), handicrafts-based entrepreneurship which highlights the commercialization of traditional tribal artworks and crafts and handloom based entrepreneurship which explores the traditional way of weaving and textiles enterprises rooted in indigenous knowledge and cultural practices. Entrepreneurship pathways in India's tribal and periophelial regions rely on secondary data and those were primarily from government socioeconomic surveys institutional policies reports, and census databases. These sources show how traditional occupations have gradually evolved into sustainable livelihoods. Entrepreneurship is recognized as the key driver of economic growth and development and it involves the process of identifying opportunities, organizing and utilizing available resources, and creating value through the production of goods or services. Entrepreneurs are an essential part of innovation by creating new ideas, and employability by indulging skills abilities and knowledge to offer this society and its own community (Gouvea et al., 2022) further mentioned in their study that integrating entrepreneurs into community planning can enhance local self-reliance, collective decision making and long term sustainability. (Koster & Rai, 2008; Mehta, 2013) shares the view that entrepreneurs introduce new products and production processes in an economy. In the context of tribal entrepreneurship, it has a revitalising effect on economies and is established on the idea that new businesses are founded based on perceived business opportunities that are not pursued by established firms. Indigenous entrepreneurship and grassroots innovations are increasingly recognized as powerful yet underexplored pathways for community resilience. The changing socio economic landscape driven by evolving market dynamics has created new opportunities for tribal communities to diversify their traditional economic activities through entrepreneurship, value addition, and improved market access (Lakum, 2025). Various research studies on tribal entrepreneurship development have been conducted in various regions of our country, with the goal of examining its contribution to livelihood enhancement, socio-economic development, indigenous resource utilisation, and the economic empowerment of tribal communities (Maravi, 2025). Tribal entrepreneurship provides ample opportunities that drive socio-economic development, preserve cultural heritage and boost the self-efficacy of tribal communities. One of these opportunities is the emergence of enterprises based on traditional knowledge, such as eco-tourism, sustainable agriculture, and the manufacture of cultural arts and crafts. Other opportunities include herbal products, handicrafts and non-timber forest products which results in cultural protection, economic growth and community

innovation (sharma & kumari, 2024). The tribal economy is mainly concentrated around gathering and refining minor forest products, farming primarily for domestic consumption, rearing domestic livestock, and weaving textiles and handicrafts by using accessible raw materials to create crafts and other local items using traditional skills and cultural knowledge (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2023). The Non-Timber Forest Produce and the Minor Forest Produce are used interchangeably to describe goods obtained from the forest other than timbers. The Non timber forest produce is a global term MFPs is a specific term primarily used regionally. The non timber forest produces acts as a critical buffer during agricultural shortfalls or times of distress to the rural and tribal community depends more on forest resources. It helps the community and provide a reliable subsistence and cash income when standard wage labour is unavailable. Non timber forest produce are used by the human beings from the time immemorial. In many tribal community women play a disproportionately high role in the collection, processing and direct selling of these goods making the MFPs economy essential for household for security. Depending upon the region, these forest-based materials are broadly sorted into several functional groups. Edibles; like fruits, nuts, berries, mushrooms, honey, roots and tubers. Medicinal plants; like herbs, barks, leaves, roots which are utilized in traditional and modern medicines. Industrial and craft materials; plant-based materials used for manufacturing such as bamboo, cane, ratan and grasses e.g. mats and baskets, exudates; gums, resins such as turpentine and waxes, leaves and dyes; materials collected for commercial or domestic use like tendu leaves used for rolling bidis and sal leaves used for plates, animal origin products; insects, tussar, cocoons and lac. Unlike commercial logging of trees and destroying woodland canopies the NTFPs can be sustainably gathered without harming the host plants. These are more vital to the rural and tribal economy and entrepreneurship. The key economic drivers in MFPs are tendu leaves, bamboo lac, mahua flowers and palash. The study by (Sarkar, 2023) details, that bamboo and cane-based products play significant role in the livelihoods of tribal communities in the North-Eastern region of India. Bamboo-based tribal businesses are supported by the availability of raw materials and traditional skills which supports household income through regional economic activity. (Pal, 1999)The literature on the North-Eastern region of India highlights that Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) constitute a vital livelihood resource for tribal communities, providing food, medicine, fibre, and other basic necessities while generating household income through their collection, processing, and marketing. The sustainable utilisation of indigenous knowledge and locally available forest resources has enhanced livelihood opportunities and contributed to the economic empowerment of tribal households. Among the various NTFPs, bamboo and bamboo-based products have emerged as the most commercially valuable resources due to their extensive use in household, agricultural, fishing, and construction activities, demonstrating significant potential for tribal entrepreneurship and rural economic development. (Tudu et al., 2025)in their study on Indigenous Entrepreneurship among Tribal Women in Mayurbhanj District reveals that tribal women are actively engaged in various entrepreneurial ventures, particularly in non-timber forest products, tailoring, and small-scale trading, played a pivotal role in enhancing their socio-economic independence. Findings indicate a significant positive relationship between indigenous entrepreneurship and improved economic status. (Nayyar & Yadav, 2026) in their study on the Pahadi Korwa, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), highlights the continued dependence of the community on forest-based livelihoods and the entrepreneurial potential of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Community members collect and market products such as mahua flowers, tendu leaves, medicinal plants, bamboo, and other minor forest produce in nearby local markets, providing an important source of household income. In addition, bamboo and wood-based handicrafts, including baskets, mats, and agricultural implements, reflect the utilisation of indigenous skills and locally available resources for livelihood generation. This study demonstrates that promoting sustainable forest-based enterprises and value addition can strengthen tribal entrepreneurship while supporting environmental conservation and preserving traditional ecological knowledge. (Gamango & Mohapatra, 2025) observed in the Dimoria development block of Assam, where tribal households have diversified their livelihoods through enterprises such as rubber cultivation, bamboo-based products, broomstick manufacturing and the cultivation of intercrops including banana, pineapple and black pepper. It shows that rather than relying on a single source of income, these integrated livelihood enterprise allow tribal communities to generate multiple revenue streams while making efficient use of available natural resources mainly the minor forest produce. The present study in Goregaon cluster of the Gondia district in Maharashtra revealed that the forest has a diverse set of minor forest produce, which are helpful for people's basic needs. The level of dependence of the villagers on various minor forest products was observed to be very high in such villages. Several minor forest produces are being used by aboriginals for their day to- day needs and many of them are their income generative sources. The production and use of these were observed in the area and found to be used in several activities such as baskets, plate making,

broom making, extraction of gum, extraction of oil, beedi making, agarbatti making etc. and medicinal uses. Better opportunity for the development of the NTFP's in the district due to abundance of these species and their potential to be used in the market in the forests. They thus have potential to alleviate the conditions of poverty. (Maske et al., 2011). A study conducted among the Karbi tribe in Karbi Anglong, Assam, demonstrates how tribal communities transform locally available natural resources into diverse livelihood and entrepreneurial opportunities. The study found that forest produce, agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, and bamboo- and cane-based handicrafts constitute the primary economic activities, with women playing a significant role in producing and marketing household crafts and traditional garments.

Products such as bamboo baskets, mats, shawls, and traditional clothing are sold in local markets, generating supplementary household income and strengthening economic self-reliance. The findings highlight that the effective utilisation of locally available resources, coupled with market participation, enables tribal communities to diversify their livelihoods and promote sustainable entrepreneurship (Bhattacharjee, 2021). (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2022) Through scientific and marketing initiatives, the Kannadippaya bamboo mat initiative in Kerala's Idukki region strengthened traditional tribal craftsmanship. By converting traditional weaving techniques into market-oriented businesses for the Urali, Malayaraya, Mannan, Muthuvan, and Ulladan populations, the project encouraged their indigenous skill into tribal entrepreneurship. Additionally, the craft was recognised as a Geographical Indication (GI), which increased its market value. Through women-led involvement and digital marketing, this initiative empowered indigenous businesses and produced sustainable livelihoods. (Panda et al., 2026) defines milletpreneurship as individuals who intend to engaged in the food or culinary industry using millet as their primary ingredient. The milletpreneurship is critical not only for economic development but also for the tribal women aiming to enhance their standard of living in rural landscapes.

This revival offers a significant opportunity for entrepreneurship in millet processing and value addition, especially for enterprising individuals living in millet-producing regions. These initiatives help in the form of value addition, training, and financial literacy in Odisha. (Naik & Panda, 2023) highlights how innovation-driven entrepreneurship supports sustainable development among tribal communities such as the Dongria Kondh, Kutia Kondh, and Soura in Rayagada district, Odisha. The study emphasizes government initiatives like the Millet Mission and Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), which promote sustainable livelihoods, and market linkages for tribal producers. The government organization plays a pivotal role in identifying tribal talent, mainly available as traditional knowledge in art, crafts, agricultural practices, etc.

The community development programs, participation of non-governmental organizations, and programs that support self-employment have triggered the opportunity for financial sustainability among tribal and indigenous communities. The entrepreneurial success among the tribal and indigenous people is an important factor that comes through the networking between the social groups (Ram et al., 2026). (Tudu et al., 2025) in their study on Indigenous Entrepreneurship among Tribal Women in Mayurbhanj District reveals that tribal women are actively engaged in various entrepreneurial ventures, particularly in non-timber forest products, tailoring, and small-scale trading, played a pivotal role in enhancing their socio-economic independence. Findings indicate a significant positive relationship between indigenous entrepreneurship and improved economic status. The tribal handlooms and textile enterprises play a vital role in preserving indigenous heritage while building sustainable livelihoods. Traditional weaving patterns and practices characterized by the distinctive motifs and designs that reflect the culture, identity, and lifestyle of tribal communities, have been passed down through generations. The use of locally available natural fibres and ecofriendly dyes derived from plants roots, barks and leaves and other natural resources further enhances the environmental sustainability of these enterprises.

Combined with distinctive traditional weaving patterns and indigenous craftsmanship, these products possess a unique cultural and ecological value that has strengthened their market appeal and expanded their reach in global markets, where increasing consumer demand for sustainable, handcrafted textiles has created new opportunities for tribal handloom entrepreneurship. According to the study by (Prosperu Daimari, 2022) the Bodo tribe in Assam has increasingly transformed traditional livelihood activities, such as handloom weaving and Eri silk production, into entrepreneurial ventures in response to changing occupations and rising economic needs. These traditional crafts have provided sustainable livelihood opportunities by generating household income, creating self-employment, and reducing dependence on seasonal agricultural work. The commercialization of handloom and Eri silk products has enabled artisans to access wider markets, preserve indigenous skills, and add value to

their traditional knowledge. Thus, the promotion of these traditional art forms not only strengthens the economic resilience of Bodo households but also contributes to the preservation of their rich cultural heritage. The study by (Hazarika & Goswami, 2018) demonstrates how the traditional weaving skills of tribal communities in Assam have evolved into viable entrepreneurial and livelihood opportunities. Handloom weaving, which was historically a household and cultural practice, has increasingly been commercialised through women-led micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and handloom cooperative societies, enabling tribal women to participate in production, marketing, and enterprise development. This transition has generated income, strengthened women's economic participation, and contributed to household livelihoods, illustrating how indigenous skills can be transformed into sustainable entrepreneurial ventures through institutional and market support. The Toda embroidery, locally known as "Pukhoor," is a traditional handicraft practiced exclusively by Toda women of the pastoral Toda community in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu. It is a Geographical Indication (GI)-tagged product protected under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 of the Government of India. Toda embroidery is renowned for its unique blend of traditional and contemporary designs, representing an aesthetic form of expression with universal appeal. Toda women traditionally embroider shawls as part of a community income-generation activity and now also produce bags, bed covers, and other items for the commercial market. Several NGOs and government agencies have actively promoted this distinctive embroidery tradition to mainstream markets (Nair et al., 2022). By integrating indigenous knowledge with market opportunities, these enterprises create distinctive products and services while preserving cultural heritage.

Such entrepreneurial activities not only generate sustainable livelihood opportunities and improve economic well-being but also strengthen social cohesion, reinforce cultural values, and promote environmental stewardship within indigenous communities (Mishra et al., 2025). India's handloom and handicrafts is deeply intertwined with diverse indigenous tribes and localized regional communities. The handloom industry is one of India's oldest traditional industries and the second-largest source of employment after agriculture, supporting about 27.83 lakh handloom households, mainly in rural areas. The North-Eastern region accounts for over 65% of the country's handlooms, with Assam having the highest concentration. The sector contributes to inclusive growth by providing livelihood opportunities for marginalized communities, particularly Scheduled Tribes (STs). A study of the Thenzawl handloom cluster in Mizoram found that it has become a pool of entrepreneurship for under-privileged tribal women, who established commercial enterprises with the motivation of earning a livelihood, generating income, and achieving independence. The study further highlights that the women's traditional weaving skills directly influenced their entrepreneurial activities and encouraged their entry into the handloom industry (Ramswamy, 2012). (Hemant & Pawar, 2019) in their study highlights tribal crafts such as Dhokra, wrought iron, terracotta, wooden, and sisal art as important reflections of traditional culture with strong employment potential after agriculture.

The authors also emphasize that tribal artisans contribute significantly to eco-friendly production and rural livelihoods. The handicrafts sector represents India's rich cultural heritage and traditional craftsmanship, evolving through the intergenerational transmission of indigenous skills and serving as an important source of rural non-farm employment, income generation, and exports. India's North-Eastern region possesses nearly two-thirds of the country's bamboo resources, making bamboo-based handicrafts a significant contributor to the regional economy. Mizoram, in particular, has emerged as a promising hub for bamboo enterprises, where the absence of large-scale industries has strengthened the role of handicrafts in supporting livelihoods through products such as bamboo hats, baskets, trays, and containers. However, the sector remains largely informal and dispersed, resulting in weak value chains and marketing constraints. The study further found that traditional handicraft products have substantial export potential if supported through systematic promotion and market development (Ramnundanga & Ramswamy, 2017). The entrepreneurial mobilization of India's tribal communities is not merely an economic phenomenon it is a deeply political and cultural process shaped by historical dispossession, institutional exclusion, and evolving policy landscapes. Against this backdrop, tribal entrepreneurship has emerged through diverse entrepreneurial activities that utilise locally available resources, traditional skills, and community-based enterprises, offering new opportunities for livelihood enhancement and socio-economic development. (Shirsath & Kumare, 2025).

The majority of entrepreneurs also contribute positively to their communities and benefit their health by creating eco-friendly products as well as providing services to neglected regions. It implies that instead of believing that

the government must drive economic growth, tribal people view entrepreneurship as a means for rebuilding families and communities and engaging in the nation's economic recovery. The tribal entrepreneurial system is a good base for innovation and development of consumer market. The entrepreneurial performance often is achieved through a shared skill and opportunity with other friends who have a similar passion. (Ram et al., 2026).

Challenges Of Tribal Entrepreneurship

Lack of Entrepreneurial Awareness

Many tribal communities have limited access and awareness of entrepreneurship as a viable option due to inadequate awareness and exposure to government schemes and programs. This often results in low participation in entrepreneurial activities

Technological and Skill Constraints

The digital gap and limited access to modern technology restricts the ability and chances of tribal entrepreneurship to improve productivity and enterprise growth

Digital Exclusion and Information Gaps

Inadequate digital infrastructure and assistance, and a low level of digital literacy prevent skilled entrepreneurs from accessing market information, government services, and online business platforms.

Geographical isolation

A number of the tribes live in remote, inaccessible areas that lack suitable transportation and infrastructure, and as a result, access to markets, financial institutions and support services. This results in restricted business opportunity and also boosts operating cost.

Poor market linkage

Tribal entrepreneurs may need to rely on intermediation, have limited marketing networks, and weak supply chains that hinder their ability to establish direct links to wider market segments. As a result, profits from their produce are less, and they are not able to maintain their profitable ventures.

Socio-cultural barriers

Conventional social norms, lack of educational opportunities and gender disparities may deter entrepreneurial involvement, especially tribal women's involvement. Socio-cultural factors may create a lack of confidence, mobility and economic opportunities.

Limited financial resources and access to credit

Limited educational opportunities, the traditional social norms and gender inequalities can discourage entrepreneurial participation especially tribal women. Such socio-cultural issues may diminish the confidence, mobility and opportunities for economic engagement.

Ways Forward

Promoting Technology Adoption and Digital Inclusion

It is essential to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of tribal enterprises by promoting technology adoption and digital inclusion. Strengthening digital infrastructure, internet connectivity and access to digital tools can empower tribal entrepreneurs to participate in e-commerce platforms, digital payment systems and online marketing networks. In addition, digital literacy and technology-based entrepreneurship training can improve business management, improve access to market information, and help expand market participation thereby broadening livelihood opportunities.

Strengthening Institutional Coordination

Coordination between government agencies, financial institutions, local governance bodies, research organisations and civil society organisations needs to be strengthened for an enabling entrepreneurial ecosystem. Further institutional convergence can enhance the provision of financial assistance, entrepreneurship training, market support and capacity building programmes and reduce duplication of efforts. Such collaborative approaches may help ensure that entrepreneurial support is available to tribal communities in more holistic and effective ways.

Regional Market Access and Value Chain Integration

Improving regional market access and strengthening value chain integration are critical for enhancing the economic viability of tribal enterprises. Developing producer organisations, cooperative networks, branding initiatives, processing facilities, and market linkages can enable tribal entrepreneurs to obtain better prices for their products while reducing dependence on intermediaries. Integrating tribal products into regional, national, and digital markets can further enhance enterprise sustainability and livelihood security.

Strengthening Entrepreneurial Capacity and Skill Development

To build entrepreneurial capacity, continuous investment in entrepreneurship education, technical training, financial literacy, business management and digital competencies is essential. Capacity building programmes should go beyond vocational training and impart knowledge and skills to tribal entrepreneurs to set up, run and grow sustainable enterprises. Mentoring, incubation support and exposure to successful entrepreneurial models can further enhance entrepreneurial confidence and long term business sustainability.

Promoting Innovation and Value Addition

Encouraging value addition, product diversification, innovative product design, sustainable packaging, and geographical branding can significantly improve the market competitiveness of tribal products. Innovation should build upon indigenous knowledge while responding to changing consumer preferences and emerging market demands. Such initiatives can increase profitability, create new entrepreneurial opportunities, and strengthen the long-term sustainability of tribal enterprises.

CONCLUSION

The present review indicates that tribal entrepreneurship has emerged as a significant pathway for improving livelihood opportunities and inclusive socio-economic development among the tribal communities in India. The literature consistently shows that entrepreneurial development has enabled tribal households to diversify their sources of income, strengthen self-employment, generate local employment and improve economic resilience through gradual reduction in dependence on subsistence based livelihoods. The increasing importance of entrepreneurship in creating sustainable economic opportunities in forest-based enterprises, handicrafts, agro-processing, eco-tourism and other community-based ventures is further reflected in the transition from traditional livelihood practices to market-oriented enterprises. The review further points out that for tribal entrepreneurship to be successful in the long run, there is a need to develop an enabling entrepreneurial ecosystem that helps in enterprise growth through market integration, value addition, capacity building, technological advancement, financial inclusion, and effective institutional support. There is evidence that entrepreneurship is not just a source of income, but also a broader development strategy for economic participation, development of the local economy, improved well-being of tribal households, and inclusive and sustainable development. In summary, tribal entrepreneurship is an important opportunity to convert local resources and community capabilities into sustainable livelihood outcomes. Therefore, future efforts should be focused on creating enabling entrepreneurial ecosystems to nurture innovation, enhance enterprise competitiveness and create market opportunities, while being sensitive to the diverse socio-economic contexts of tribal communities across India. This approach can make a meaningful contribution to strengthening tribal livelihoods and advancing equitable and sustainable development.

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