

# "Uncovering the Realities of Forest-Dwelling Communities in Kanha-Kisli Protected Area of Madhya Pradesh: An Examination of Livelihood and Socio-Economic Challenges"

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## **Introduction:**

Forests are essential ecosystems that support biodiversity, regulate climate, and provide critical resources for local communities. However, forest-dwelling communities face numerous challenges, including poverty, lack of access to education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure, and conflict with wildlife conservation. The Kanha-Kisli Protected Area (KKPA) in Madhya Pradesh, India, is one such forest landscape where tribal communities have been living for generations. Despite efforts to integrate forest conservation and community development, forest dwellers in KKPA continue to struggle with various issues.

According to a study by Chandrashekhar Pandey et al. (2020), forest dwellers in KKPA face multiple challenges related to livelihoods, social and cultural identity, and environmental degradation. The study highlights that the implementation of forest conservation policies and the creation of protected areas have resulted in the displacement of local communities from their traditional lands, leading to a loss of livelihoods and cultural heritage. Additionally, forest dwellers face threats from wildlife, such as tiger attacks, and conflicts with forest officials over resource use.

From various studies it was found that forest dwellers in KKPA have limited access to basic services, such as healthcare and education, which further exacerbates their poverty and marginalization. Environmental degradation, such as deforestation and soil erosion, has also impacted their livelihoods, reducing the availability of forest resources and increasing dependence on agriculture.

Furthermore, forest dwellers in KKPA have a unique cultural identity that is closely linked to their relationship with the forest. However, their cultural practices and traditional knowledge are under threat due to the imposition of external conservation policies and regulations that restrict their access to forest resources. The study emphasizes the need to engage forest communities in conservation efforts, recognize their rights and cultural practices, and provide them with opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

The challenges faced by forest dwellers in KKPA are not unique to this region, as similar issues are faced by forest communities in other parts of India and the world. Therefore, it is essential to find a balance between forest conservation and community development by promoting

inclusive and participatory approaches to conservation that recognize and respect the rights and needs of forest dwellers.

The Kanha-Kisli Protected Area (KKPA) in Madhya Pradesh, India, is a vital ecosystem that supports a diverse range of flora and fauna. However, the protection of this area has resulted in challenges and issues for the forest dwelling communities who depend on the forest for their livelihoods and cultural identity. A study conducted by Pandey, Arya, and Joshi (2020) examined the life issues and challenges faced by forest dwellers in KKPA, including limited access to basic services, environmental degradation, and the threat to their cultural practices and traditional knowledge.

Overall, understanding the life issues and challenges faced by forest dwelling communities in protected areas, such as KKPA, is crucial for designing effective conservation and development strategies that promote the well-being of both people and the environment.

The study highlights the need for conservation policies and regulations that recognize and respect the rights and cultural practices of forest dwellers, as well as their participation in conservation efforts. It emphasizes the importance of finding a balance between forest conservation and community development by promoting inclusive and participatory approaches to conservation. Understanding the challenges faced by forest dwelling communities in protected areas such as KKPA is crucial in developing effective conservation and development strategies that promote the well-being of both people and the environment. This issue is not unique to KKPA, as similar challenges are faced by forest communities in other parts of India and the world. Therefore, the study's findings have implications for designing conservation and development policies that are sensitive to the needs and rights of forest dwellers. This paper is the bi-product of research project sponsored by TRI, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi.

### **The Kanha-Kisli Tiger Reserve and Displacement:**

Kanha Kisli Tiger Reserve is located in the Maikal Hills of the Satpura mountain range in Madhya Pradesh, India. It was established in 1973 under the Project Tiger initiative to protect the habitat of Bengal tigers and other wildlife species. The reserve covers an area of 1,949 square kilometers and is divided into two sanctuaries, Kanha National Park and Kisli Bandhavgarh Sanctuary.

The Kanha Kisli Tiger Reserve has a long and impressive history of conservation efforts aimed at protecting its diverse flora and fauna. Originally established as a sanctuary in 1933, the area has since undergone several expansions and renamings, eventually becoming the Kanha Kisli Tiger Reserve in 2006. Throughout this history, the reserve has remained focused on conservation efforts, particularly those aimed at protecting the tiger population. Under the Project Tiger initiative, which began in 1973, the Kanha National Park and Tiger Reserve became a flagship site for tiger conservation efforts in India. Thanks to these efforts, the reserve has been successful in increasing its tiger population in recent years. The reserve has also

become a leader in community-based conservation initiatives, promoting eco-tourism and involving local communities in conservation efforts Sharma, S. (2021). Today, the Kanha Kisli Tiger Reserve is recognized as one of the most successful tiger reserves in India and is an important destination for wildlife enthusiasts and conservationists alike. Its history of conservation efforts and success in protecting its unique biodiversity makes it a model for other protected areas around the world. citation and reference.

The Kanha-Kisli Tiger Reserve, which encompasses the KKPA, has a history of displacement of forest dwellers. The process of declaring the area a protected reserve in the 1970s resulted in the displacement of over 2,000 families from the area (Pathak, 2015). The displacement of forest dwellers has been a contentious issue in conservation efforts, as it often results in the loss of livelihoods and cultural identity for these communities. The establishment and expansion of the Kanha Kisli Tiger Reserve has also led to the displacement of local communities, particularly the Baiga and Gond tribes, who have historically lived in and around the forest. The displacement was carried out in the name of conservation and to protect the habitat of tigers and other wildlife. However, it has had severe impacts on the livelihoods and cultural identity of the affected communities.

According to a study by the Wildlife Protection Society of India, around 1,200 families were displaced from the Kanha National Park in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these families were resettled in nearby villages, where they faced numerous challenges in adapting to a new way of life and accessing basic services like healthcare and education. The study also highlights the loss of traditional knowledge and cultural practices as a result of the displacement.

While displacement was initially justified as a necessary measure for conservation, it has since been recognized as a violation of the rights of forest dwellers. While displacement was initially justified as a necessary measure for conservation, it has since been recognized as a violation of the rights of forest dwellers. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 aims to recognize and vest forest rights and occupation in forest-dwelling communities, including Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers, and to provide a framework for protecting their rights. However, the implementation of this act has been slow and uneven, and forest dwellers continue to face challenges in securing their rights to the forest and its resources."

Efforts have been made to involve forest dwellers in conservation efforts and to provide them with alternative livelihoods. For example, ecotourism initiatives have been developed that involve forest dwellers in providing guided tours of the reserve. However, these initiatives have been criticized for being insufficient to compensate for the loss of livelihoods due to displacement and for further commodifying the forest and its resources (Pathak, 2015).

Overall, the displacement of forest dwellers in the process of creating protected areas, such as the Kanha-Kisli Tiger Reserve, remains a contentious issue. It is essential to recognize the rights and cultural practices of forest dwellers, involve them in conservation efforts, and

provide them with sustainable livelihood opportunities to ensure that conservation efforts are equitable and effective.

## **Review of Literature:**

The Kanha-Kisli Protected Area, located in the state of Madhya Pradesh in India, is home to several indigenous and forest-dwelling communities. These communities have traditionally relied on the forest for their livelihoods, but in recent years, they have faced numerous challenges due to the implementation of conservation policies and the encroachment of outsiders on their lands. This literature review seeks to examine the socio-economic challenges faced by forest-dwelling communities in the Kanha-Kisli Protected Area and to explore potential solutions to these challenges.

***Socio-Economic Challenges*** Several studies have identified common socio-economic challenges faced by forest-dwelling communities in protected areas, including restricted access to resources, limited economic opportunities, and inadequate infrastructure. A study conducted by Singh et al. (2016) found that forest-dwelling communities in the Kanha-Kisli Protected Area faced challenges such as reduced access to forest resources due to conservation policies, lack of alternative livelihood options, and limited access to healthcare and education. According to a study by Kujur et al. (2018), the poverty level among forest-dwelling communities in the area is high, with a significant proportion of households living below the poverty line. Illiteracy is also a significant challenge, with many community members lacking access to education and basic healthcare facilities (Mishra et al., 2019). These challenges have resulted in limited socio-economic opportunities for forest-dwelling communities, with few employment options outside of the forest sector and low levels of social and economic mobility (Jha et al., 2019). Similarly, a study by Mohapatra et al. (2019) found that forest-dwelling communities in the Kanha-Kisli Protected Area faced challenges such as low levels of literacy, lack of access to formal credit, and limited market access for their products. The study also found that these communities faced discrimination from non-tribal communities and government officials, which further exacerbated their socio-economic challenges

***Livelihood Challenges:*** Forest-dwelling communities in Kanha-Kisli Protected Area depend on forest resources for their livelihoods, including non-timber forest products (NTFPs), such as medicinal plants, fruits, and nuts. However, the overexploitation of these resources has led to a decline in their availability and quality, which has negatively impacted the livelihoods of these communities (Kumar et al., 2018). Additionally, the restrictions on traditional forest use imposed by the Forest Department have limited the access of these communities to forest resources, further reducing their livelihood options (Mishra et al., 2019). Moreover, the lack of alternative livelihood options and poor infrastructure in the region have exacerbated the challenges faced by forest-dwelling communities (Jha et al., 2019).

**Livelihood Strategies** Despite these challenges, forest-dwelling communities in the Kanha-Kisli Protected Area have developed a variety of livelihood strategies to cope with their

changing circumstances. A study by Ali et al. (2021) found that forest-dwelling communities in the Kanha-Kisli Protected Area relied on a combination of agriculture, livestock rearing, and collection of non-timber forest products to sustain their livelihoods. The study also found that these communities had developed informal networks to share resources and support each other during times of need.

Another study by Barik and Behera (2021) found that forest-dwelling communities in the Kanha-Kisli Protected Area had developed a strong tradition of community-based conservation, which had helped to sustain their livelihoods and protect the forest. The study found that these communities had developed their own rules and regulations for managing natural resources, which were often more effective than government policies.

Potential Solutions To address the socio-economic challenges faced by forest-dwelling communities in the Kanha-Kisli Protected Area, several studies have suggested potential solutions. For example, Singh et al. (2016) suggested that policies should be developed to promote alternative livelihoods for forest-dwelling communities, such as eco-tourism and agroforestry. The authors also suggested that conservation policies should be developed in consultation with local communities to ensure that their livelihoods are not adversely affected.

Similarly, Mohapatra et al. (2019) suggested that policies should be developed to improve the socio-economic status of forest-dwelling communities, such as improving access to education, healthcare, and credit. The authors also suggested that efforts should be made to reduce discrimination against these communities and to promote their participation in decision-making processes.

Conclusion In conclusion, the literature review highlights the socio-economic challenges faced by forest-dwelling communities in the Kanha-Kisli Protected Area and the potential solutions to address these challenges. The studies suggest that policies should be developed in consultation with local communities to ensure that their livelihoods are not adversely affected, and that efforts should be made to improve their life.

### **Research Methodology:**

This study aimed to gain an understanding of the life issues and challenges faced by forest-dwelling communities in the Kanha Kisli protected area. A mixed methodology approach was employed, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with members of the study villages from October to December 2021. Quantitative data was collected through household surveys using purposive sampling. Eligible respondents were required to be residents of the study villages. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to guide data collection, allowing contributors to share their experiences and challenges before and after the displacement and relocation process. A total of 1312 respondents were interviewed, and several focus group discussions were conducted in the villages.

The qualitative component of the study involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, which allowed the researchers to gather detailed information about the participants' experiences and challenges. The interviews and discussions were conducted with a total of 1312 respondents, selected based on their residence in the study villages. The researchers used an interview schedule that was designed to guide the conversation and ensure consistency across participants.

The quantitative component of the study involved a household survey that was conducted using purposive sampling. The survey aimed to collect data on a range of variables related to the participants' lives, including their socio-economic status, health status, access to resources, and experience of displacement and relocation. The survey was designed to be administered quickly and efficiently, while still collecting a wide range of data.

Overall, the mixed-methods approach allowed the researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the life issues and challenges faced by forest-dwelling communities in the Kanha Kisli protected area. By combining qualitative and quantitative data, the researchers were able to provide a detailed and nuanced picture of the experiences of these communities, which can be used to inform policies and programs aimed at improving their well-being.

### About the Area:

The area under study includes roughly 32 villages located in the core and buffer zones of the Kanha Kisli Tiger Reserve. Within this area, there is a cluster of 19 tolas known as Kisli Vilbani Villages situated in the core zone, while the other villages are located in the buffer zone. Those who were displaced from the core zone have mostly resettled around the buffer zone, with some relocated to other areas. This study encompasses six blocks spanning two districts, namely Balaghat and Mandla, both located in the state of Madhya Pradesh.

**Table 1.01: Socio-Demographic Features of the Participants:**

Displacement status	Displaced	839	63.95
	Non displaced	473	36.05
Age	18 -30 yrs.	322	24.55
	31. 45 yrs.	634	48.32
	46 – 60 yrs.	356	27.13
Gender	Male	1068	81.04
	Female	244	18.06
Religion	Adivasi	831	63.34

	Hindu	457	36.20
	Buddhist	06	00.46
Caste Category	ST	1271	96.88
	SC	41	03.12
Types of Family	Nuclear	1036	78.96
	Joints	259	19.74
	Extended	12	0.91

The table provides valuable insights into the socio-demographic features of the participants in the study, which can help to contextualize the findings and understand the broader social and economic dynamics of the region.

Firstly, the table highlights the displacement status of the participants, with the majority (63.95%) being displaced from their homes due to the creation of the protected area. This suggests that displacement is a significant issue that impacts the livelihoods and well-being of local communities. The remaining participants (36.05%) were non-displaced and may have different living conditions and experiences.

Secondly, the table presents the age distribution of the participants, which can provide insights into the potential impact of age on well-being and livelihoods. Nearly half of the participants (48.32%) were aged between 31 and 45 years, followed by 27.13% between 46 and 60 years and 24.55% between 18 and 30 years. The relatively higher proportion of middle-aged adults suggests that this group may face unique challenges related to employment, income, and health. The study may need to consider age-specific interventions to address these challenges.

Thirdly, the table highlights the gender distribution of the participants, with the majority (81.04%) being male and only 18.06% being female. This gender imbalance may have implications for the study findings, as gender-specific issues may affect the well-being and livelihoods of men and women differently. It is crucial to ensure that gender-based differences are appropriately addressed in the study to provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' lives.

Fourthly, the table provides information on the participants' religion, with the majority (63.34%) being Adivasi, followed by 36.20% Hindu and a small proportion (0.46%) Buddhist. This religious diversity is essential to consider when examining the cultural and social dynamics of the region. The study may need to examine how religion impacts the participants' well-being and livelihoods.

Fifthly, the table presents the caste category of the participants, with the majority (96.88%) being from the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category and only 3.12% from the Scheduled Caste (SC)

category. The ST community is traditionally marginalized and economically disadvantaged, and their higher representation in the study may provide insights into their unique challenges and needs.

Lastly, the table presents information on the types of family that the participants belong to, with the majority (78.96%) being from nuclear families, followed by 19.74% from joint families, and only 0.91% from extended families. This family structure may impact the participants' social and economic well-being, and the study may need to examine the role of family in the participants' lives.

In conclusion, the socio-demographic features of the participants in the study provide valuable insights into the broader social and economic dynamics of the region. The high proportion of displaced participants highlights the significant impact of displacement on local communities. Age, gender, religion, caste category, and family structure are other essential factors that can influence the participants' well-being and livelihoods. Understanding these factors is crucial to developing targeted interventions and policies that can improve the participants' lives and address their unique challenges and needs. Future studies may need to examine how these socio-demographic factors interact with each other and how they shape the participants' experiences and well-being over time.

#### **Socio-economic Impact of the displacement:**

Displacement has a profound impact on people's lives, safety, and overall well-being. It disrupts their socio-economic status, limiting their economic and livelihood opportunities, which can have a negative impact on their socio-economic progress, trapping them in a vicious cycle of poverty and underdevelopment. A review of various studies indicates both positive and negative trends associated with displacement.

Approximately 24.54% of the respondents reported owning encroached land before displacement, while 126 (9.06%) owned land with legal title (patta). After displacement, around 639 respondents claimed to have obtained legal ownership of land by purchasing it in other areas, while 4.34% of the respondents claimed ownership through displaced settlements. This suggests that displacement can have both positive and negative effects on land ownership.

Before displacement, a majority of the respondents did not possess significant assets. However, after displacement, a majority reported owning assets. Despite this, 32.85% of respondents were small-scale farmers before displacement, while only 30.26% claimed to be small-scale farmers after displacement. This indicates a shift in livelihoods away from farming. Before displacement, 28.43% of respondents were daily wage laborers, and after displacement, 28.35% were engaged in farm labor, with only a 3% increase in non-farm labor. This also points to an increasing trend of unemployment due to displacement.

Regarding the agriculture land holding of the respondents, the study found that 55.72% of the respondents claimed to have agriculture land before displacement. However, after displacement, only 53.12% of respondents reported having agriculture land. The analysis of



agriculture implements also indicated a decreasing trend in the ownership of these implements after displacement.

For the tribal community residing in the protected area, collection of minor forest produce is a crucial source of livelihood. However, the study revealed a significant decline in the number of respondents engaged in minor forest produce collection after displacement. Before displacement, 33.38% of respondents claimed to engage in minor forest produce collection, whereas after displacement, only 64 respondents reported that their family members were engaged in this activity. This suggests that displacement has severely affected the minor forest produce collection, which has significant implications for the livelihoods of the affected communities. The study also revealed significant challenges faced by the displaced communities in accessing forest resources for their livelihoods and survival. A majority of the respondents, approximately 60%, reported that they were restricted from accessing the protected area freely, which severely limits their ability to engage in activities such as minor forest produce collection.

In addition, the study found that a substantial number of respondents, approximately 53%, reported having their applications for land patta rejected repeatedly. This further exacerbates the economic dislocation caused by displacement, as ownership of land is critical for agriculture and other livelihood activities. These findings highlight the systemic challenges and barriers faced by the displaced communities in accessing resources and services that are essential for their well-being and survival.

In conclusion, the effects of displacement are complex and varied, with both positive and negative consequences on land ownership, livelihoods, and employment. It is crucial to assess these impacts before implementing any displacement policies and to provide adequate support to those affected to mitigate the negative effects of displacement. The study demonstrates that displacement has a far-reaching impact on the livelihoods of the affected communities, particularly in terms of agriculture land holding, ownership of agriculture implements, and minor forest produce collection. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive support systems to help the displaced communities rebuild their livelihoods and sustain themselves in the long run. It is critical to ensure that the voices and perspectives of the affected communities are taken into account in any policy or decision-making related to displacement, to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are met. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from policymakers, practitioners, and communities themselves to work towards solutions that are inclusive, equitable, and sustainable. Ensuring that the voices and perspectives of the affected communities are heard and taken into account is critical in this process.

### **Protected Areas, The Debate on Co-existence vs Conflict:**

The establishment of protected areas in India has been a controversial issue, as it has led to the displacement of thousands of families who have lived in these areas for generations. As per the National Tiger Conservation Authority, more than 56,247 families have been evicted from 751 villages in 50 Tiger Reserves since 1972, while only 12,327 families in 173 villages received

compensation and relocation packages. This has left around 44,000 families, comprising approximately 220,000 people, evicted without any compensation.

The division of opinion regarding the rehabilitation of these villages has led to a debate on whether tribal communities and tigers can coexist in these protected areas or if the critical areas of tigers should be vacated and the people rehabilitated elsewhere. Those in favor of coexistence argue that tribal communities have lived in harmony with tigers for generations and that their displacement would not only affect their livelihoods but also disrupt the ecological balance of the area. On the other hand, proponents of the latter view argue that with limited inviolate space available for tigers, it is important to vacate critical areas and rehabilitate the people in order to safeguard the interests of both tigers and people.

The issue of rights and challenges faced by tribal communities within protected areas is also a matter of concern. Although there is a constitutional directive on the state to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife under Article 48-A of the Constitution of India, the corresponding responsible duty of the citizens vested under Article 51-A (g) has been neglected. This has reflected in the bureaucratic guidelines and governance of protected areas in India, resulting in alienated feelings among tribes and their duty to protect and take care of their habitat.

Moreover, local communities within protected areas often have unclear or unregistered rights to natural resources and lands. They highlight the lack of facilities and argue that access to basic amenities, transport, health and education facilities, and land development does not reach villages located within protected areas. Consequently, local communities inside protected areas have varying access to natural resources for survival and livelihoods, and often live in a state of deprivation, poverty, and conflict with protected area managers, who usually perceive them as responsible for the loss of wildlife.

The recognition of tribal rights, also known as forest rights, is crucial for the survival and livelihoods of forest-dwelling scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers. The Forest Rights Act, 2006 provides the statutory recognition of these rights, which are the basic rights of forest dwellers over forest resources and their habitat. However, the implementation of the Forest Rights Act has been slow and marred by bureaucratic and legal hurdles.

While the establishment of protected areas is necessary for conservation efforts, it is essential to address the rights and challenges faced by tribal communities within these areas. There needs to be a balance between conservation efforts and the protection of human rights, and efforts must be made to ensure that local communities have a say in the decision-making process regarding the management of protected areas.

### **Rights, Issues and Challenges before Tribal in Protected Areas:**

The protection and improvement of the environment and the safeguarding of forests and wildlife are not only the responsibility of the state, but also the citizens of India as per Article 51-A (g) of the Constitution. However, the state machinery has treated it as an exclusive responsibility, neglecting the role of the citizens in conservation strategies and programmes.

This has resulted in a lack of inclusiveness and alienation of the tribal communities in Protected Areas (PAs) Mishra, P., & Singh, R. K. (2019).

Tribal communities residing in PAs often have unclear or unregistered rights to natural resources and lands. They face challenges in accessing basic amenities such as transportation, health, education facilities, and land development. The lack of access to resources often leads to deprivation, poverty and conflicts with PA managers. The managers usually perceive the local communities as responsible for the loss of wildlife.

Recognised as forest rights, the basic rights of forest dwellers over forest resources and their habitat are the tribal rights, also known as forest rights. These rights pertain to the individual or community rights of the forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers. In India, the Forest Rights Act, 2006, provides statutory recognition to these rights. However, the implementation of these rights has been met with challenges and criticisms.

While the state has the responsibility to protect the environment and wildlife, it is crucial to recognise the role of citizens in conservation efforts. The tribal communities living in PAs should have clear rights to natural resources and lands, along with access to basic amenities. The recognition and implementation of forest rights are essential for the wellbeing of these communities and the conservation of forests and wildlife.

### **Conclusion:**

The protection and improvement of the environment and the safeguarding of forests and wildlife are not only the responsibility of the state, but also the citizens of India as per Article 51-A (g) of the Constitution. However, the state machinery has treated it as an exclusive responsibility, neglecting the role of the citizens in conservation strategies and programmes. This has resulted in a lack of inclusiveness and alienation of the tribal communities in Protected Areas (PAs).

Tribal communities residing in PAs often have unclear or unregistered rights to natural resources and lands. They face challenges in accessing basic amenities such as transportation, health, education facilities, and land development. The lack of access to resources often leads to deprivation, poverty and conflicts with PA managers. The managers usually perceive the local communities as responsible for the loss of wildlife.

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In conclusion, while the state has the responsibility to protect the environment and wildlife, it is crucial to recognise the role of citizens in conservation efforts. The tribal communities living in PAs should have clear rights to natural resources and lands, along with access to basic

amenities. The recognition and implementation of forest rights are essential for the wellbeing of these communities and the conservation of forests and wildlife.

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