International Journal of Sociology and Political Science
www.sociologyjournal.in
Online ISSN: 2664-7745, Print ISSN: 2664-7737
Received: 13-05-2025, Accepted: 12-06-2025, Published: 28-06-2025
Volume 7, Issue 2, 2025, Page No. 69-72

Globalization and livelihood shifts among the Bhils of southern Rajasthan

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Abstract
The influence of globalization on the livelihood systems of the Bhils, a well-known tribal group in southern Rajasthan, is investigated in this study. It examines the historical background of Bhil subsistence traditions, including changing agricultural methods, forest-based economies, and community land usage, and critically evaluates the ways in which these patterns have been rearranged by forces of global economics. The study finds important change agents by examining the rise of extractive sectors, migration patterns, infrastructure expansion, and shifting ambitions influenced by media and education. According to the report, there has been a notable movement toward wage labor, particularly seasonal migration, along with a loss of traditional autonomy, a reconfiguring of gender and youth roles, and economic weaknesses. Local community case studies offer well-founded perspectives on the intricacy of these shifts. The article concludes with policy suggestions, arguing that in order to promote long-term resilience among Bhil communities, development models should be environmentally sustainable, culturally sensitive, and based on tribal agency.

Keywords: Bhils, globalization, livelihood transformation, migration, tribal development

Introduction
Indigenous communities across the world have been significantly impacted by globalization, a process characterized by growing economic, technological, and cultural interdependence. The introduction of global market pressures and development paradigms frequently results in marginalization, cultural commercialization, and relocation for populations who have historically relied on regional, subsistence-based livelihoods. By deregulating markets, reorganizing welfare services, and exposing the economy to international investment, the liberalization reforms of 1991 expedited these developments in India. While globalization has given some people access to services and opportunities for economic mobility, it has also made already-existing disparities worse for historically oppressed groups like Scheduled Tribes. According to Karl Polanyi (1944) [13], the growth of market society often upends subsistence economies and ingrained social relationships, endangering the cultural and financial independence of these groups. Arjun Appadurai (1996) [1] goes on to emphasize how identity and desire are reshaped by global cultural movements in ways that are frequently upsetting for traditional civilizations.

One of the biggest tribal communities in India, the Bhils of southern Rajasthan, are among those most impacted. The Bhils, who are mostly found in the districts of Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswara, and Pratapgarh, have traditionally made their living by a combination of hunting, small-scale animal husbandry, shifting cultivation, and forest collecting. Seasonal cycles, community collaboration, and a deep understanding of the forest ecology have all played a significant role in their economic activities. These ancient arrangements have been progressively upset by the introduction of modern infrastructure, commercialized markets, land privatization, and government involvement in forest administration. Additionally, the Bhils have been lured into wage work, cash crop farming, and migrant labor networks—often in dangerous or exploitative circumstances.

In southern Rajasthan, where indigenous ways of existence have traditionally been focused on subsistence farming, forest-based activities, and community-centered economic practices, this research intends to investigate how globalization has changed the lifestyle patterns of the Bhils. Bhil communities are seeing major changes in their everyday survival tactics as a result of the expanding impact of market economies, the construction of infrastructure, and shifting governmental regulations. Three interconnected questions serve as the basis for the investigation, which aims to clarify the nuances of this change. First, it looks into how the Bhils' conventional livelihood tactics have changed as a result of globalization, specifically with regard to labor, land usage, and economic reliance. Second, it looks at how these changes have affected social cohesiveness, gender roles, income patterns, and cultural identity, among other socioeconomic and cultural ramifications. Last but not least, the research looks at the several ways that Bhil society is adapting or resisting, including the resurgence of traditional knowledge, involvement in self-help organizations, and use of legislative tools like the Forest Rights Act. The research seeks to offer a grounded knowledge of the Bhils' daily experiences in the face of globalizing forces by posing these issues.

This study uses a qualitative methodological approach to answer these issues, based on ethnographic fieldwork, interviews with members of the Bhil community, and the examination of secondary data and policy documents. Selected villages in the districts of Banswara and Dungarpur are the focus of the fieldwork, where the effects of globalization are evident in shifting patterns of consumption, employment, and land use. Interviews with local activists, women, youth, and tribal elders aid in capturing a range of viewpoints on these changes. In order to place these changes within larger socioeconomic trends, NGO reports, census statistics, and state development goals are also examined. By providing a localized, community-specific account of the effects of globalization, this study

adds to the expanding body of research on globalization and indigenous peoples in India. It draws attention to how complicated livelihood changes are, reflecting a dynamic interplay of adaptation, negotiation, and loss rather than being reduced to straightforward tales of victimization or growth.

Traditional Bhil Livelihood Systems

The Bhils of southern Rajasthan made their living through a complex network of traditional vocations anchored in their natural environment and collective social structures before the forces of globalization started to transform rural economies. The Bhils relied mostly on shifting agriculture, or *walra* as it is known locally, where they used simple equipment and rain-fed methods to grow crops including urad, jowar, bajra, and maize. This type of farming, which was tailored to the mountainous and wooded terrain of areas like Banswara and Dungarpur, was a cultural manifestation of peace with the soil as well as a source of livelihood. The Bhil people relied heavily on forest collecting in addition to agriculture for their subsistence. In addition to providing food and additional revenue, the seasonal gathering of minor forest products like tendu leaves, mahua flowers, honey, and gum served as the foundation for traditional ecological knowledge that was passed down through the generations. This subsistence economy was supplemented by pastoralism and small-scale animal raising, which further broadened their sources of income (Gadgil and Guha 40–42).

The Bhils had a profoundly spiritual and cultural affinity with nature that went beyond simple utilitarianism. In indigenous belief systems, rivers, forests, and hills were regarded as holy places that were frequently represented by gods and ancestor spirits. Ecological stewardship was ingrained in their worldview, as demonstrated by rituals associated with planting and harvesting as well as the preservation of holy groves (dev van). According to Baviskar, tribal relationships with nature frequently reveal a profoundly moral bond that is molded by respect and reciprocity rather than dominance or exploitation (Baviskar 17). Likewise, Gadgil and Guha criticize the prevailing narrative on development for ignoring these ingrained ecological practices as 'primitive,' even if they have been sustainable for a long time (Gadgil and Guha 36).

Rather than being based on profit or market logic, the Bhils' economic life was organized on reciprocity, familial responsibilities, and seasonal cycles. Common techniques that strengthened communal cohesion and resource fairness included labor exchanges during agricultural seasons, group hunting, and the transfer of forest products. Customary practices and communal organizations like clan elders and unofficial village councils were used to manage land and forest resources. Although these indigenous economic systems functioned outside of official market institutions, Nathan *et al.* observe that they were successful in guaranteeing resilience and fair access (Nathan *et al.* 22–24). These structures were badly weakened by colonial forest policies and subsequent post-independence regulatory frameworks, which replaced them with commercialized land relations and discriminatory legal regimes.

However, it's crucial to avoid romanticizing these established structures. Internal disparities persisted; there were minimal material surpluses and gendered divides of work. However, they represented a livelihood paradigm that was ethically based, environmentally integrated, and comparatively self-sufficient, resisting the commercialization of work, life, and land. This balance has been upset by the intrusion of global capitalist forces, which include market penetration, infrastructural growth, and migrant wage labor. As Shah points out, by uprooting their place-based livelihoods and exposing them to precarious labor markets, these activities have further disadvantaged tribal groups (Shah 975–977). The breakdown of traditional Bhil livelihoods involves more than just an economic transition; it also involves a loss of communal sovereignty, a rupture in intergenerational memory, and the collapse of a knowledge system.

Agents and Processes of Globalization in Southern Rajasthan

Globalization's agents and processes have slowly but significantly impacted tribal areas in southern Rajasthan, especially the Bhil people. One of the most obvious and disruptive drivers is market penetration. The commercialization of labor, land, and forest products during the past three decades has drew local economies more and more into national and international markets. Bhil livelihoods have changed from self-sufficiency based on the forest to commercial agriculture and wage labor that is dependent on the market as a result of the commercialization of subsistence economies. The construction of rural infrastructure, such as roads, power plants, and communication systems, has expedited this transition even more. At the same time, it has made it easier to take resources and labor from tribal areas to supply urban and industrial centers (Shah 975–76). According to Berreman, the construction of roads and transportation infrastructure has traditionally acted as a means of governmental encroachment and cultural upheaval in tribal areas, frequently masquerading as 'development' (Berreman 141–42).

For many Bhil households, migration—both seasonal and permanent—has become a primary means of subsistence, especially in the aftermath of land dispossession and dwindling agricultural output. Males frequently leave behind broken homes and increasingly gendered rural economies to work as unskilled workers in the construction, textile, and diamond-cutting industries in Gujarat, Maharashtra, or metropolitan areas like Ahmedabad and Surat (Mosse *et al.* 61–62). In addition to being an economic need, migration causes cultural disruption by exposing tribal adolescents to exploitative work practices, caste-based metropolitan structures, and consumerism. The long-term cultural consequences of migrant reliance are highlighted by the decline of traditional skill sets and the rising indifference of younger generations in indigenous knowledge.

At the regional level, tourism, mining, and industry have become significant forces behind globalization. Tribal culture has been commercialized as a show for urban and international tourists in Udaipur and the neighboring regions due to the growth of eco- and heritage-tourism. This frequently leads to what MacCannell refers to as 'staged authenticity'—tribal customs and artifacts that have been stripped of their original significance and used for tourist consumption (MacCannell 589). At the same time, mining activities have resulted in environmental damage, relocation, and loss of access to shared resources in areas like Rajsamand and Dungarpur, especially for minerals like

marble and soapstone. State subsidies and legal exemptions favor these extractive enterprises, whereas Bhil communities—who lack official land rights and legal literacy—are marginalized on an ecological and economic level (Padel and Das 45–46). Under the pretense of modernization, structural inequality is further entrenched by the unequal power relations between corporate-industrial actors and indigenous landholders.

Significant changes in tribal goals and cultural orientations have been brought about by the proliferation of media, technology, and formal education in addition to material alterations. Tribal adolescents have been exposed to luxury products, metropolitan lives, and middle-class attitudes through social media, cellphones, and satellite television, which frequently causes them to lose touch with their tribal roots. The curriculum is still substantially disconnected from tribal reality and frequently replicates dominant-caste customs and languages, despite the fact that access to education has improved, particularly through government programs like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and residential schools for Scheduled Tribes (Kumar 120–21). Tribal students become estranged from their own environment as a result of what Paulo Freire refers to as a "banking model of education" (Freire 72), in which information is deposited rather than co-created. The desire to "escape" from rural life, adopt modernism, and pursue paid work is a reflection of the symbolic violence of globalization, which diminishes indigenous knowledge and portrays tribal identity as inadequate or unfinished.

Markets, infrastructure, tourism, mining, media, and education are all examples of globalization agents that are not only outside influences influencing obliging communities. Instead, their interactions with global capital, state policies, and local power structures reshape Bhil society's ecological, economic, and moral fabric. The speed and scope of these changes—often without substantial input or permission from tribal stakeholders—are especially worrisome. The outcome is a more profound rebuilding of cultural meanings, social relationships, and the Bhil world's sense of self rather than just a change in incomes.

Transformations in Livelihood Patterns

The Bhils of southern Rajasthan have seen profound and complex changes in their patterns of livelihood as a result of globalization. The transition from traditional subsistence-based vocations to wage work and migrant employment is among the most noticeable developments. In Gujarat and Maharashtra, many Bhil households are now forced to look for seasonal labor, frequently in construction, brick kilns, or informal industrial units, whereas in the past they relied mostly on shifting agriculture, gathering forest products, and pastoralism. Workers have been uprooted from their land, social networks, and ecological knowledge systems as a result of this change, which has also rendered tribal livelihoods more unstable and dependent on outside sources. According to David Mosse *et al*., migration has evolved into a structural need for survival in tribal families after being first adopted as a coping mechanism amid droughts and crop failure (Mosse *et al*. 65). However, because of the commercialization of labor, the Bhils are now subject to exploitative working circumstances, such as inadequate pay, subpar accommodation, and little legal protection, particularly for women and children who move as family members.

New jobs for women and young people are developing in this shifting economic environment, representing both opportunities and paradoxes. In the village and in migratory destinations, Bhil women, who have historically worked in agriculture and forest-based subsistence jobs, are increasingly engaging in wage labor. Despite its promise for empowerment, this economic involvement frequently takes place in an environment of double burden and informalization. Women often experience gendered vulnerabilities including pay discrimination and harassment at work, and they are expected to perform home duties and contribute to household revenues (Nathan and Kelkar 31). Aspirations among young people have been redefined by migration and exposure to metropolitan places, particularly among young males. Traditional value systems are broken by the urge to buy cell phones, dress in branded apparel, and live in cities. However, stable work and worthwhile educational possibilities are rarely able to match this aspirational mobility, which instead creates a culture of dissatisfaction and despair. In the context of Indian teenagers living in rural areas, Jeffrey *et al*. contend that globalization has created a "generation in waiting," caught between outdated institutions and the unattainable promises of modernity (Jeffrey *et al*. 951).

These changes have led to a major loss of autonomy for Bhil communities and have made already-existing economic vulnerabilities worse. Households who rely on cash incomes are more vulnerable to market fluctuations and debt, especially in areas where unofficial moneylenders take advantage of periodic shortages. Furthermore, the collective coping strategies that formerly offered resilience have been undermined by the disintegration of traditional land-use patterns and community sharing customs. Families are shifting their spending priorities and occasionally becoming more impoverished as a result of growing consumerist impulses that cause them to spend more money on non-essential items like televisions, booze, and motorcycles (Shah 977). This shifting consumption pattern is not only economic; it is also profoundly cultural, reflecting an acceptance of developmentalist values that, frequently at the expense of sustainable living, link success with material ownership.

Brief case studies from Bhil communities provide a more realistic perspective on these changes. Once engaged in shifting agriculture, a group of families in a hamlet near Sagwara in the district of Dungarpur now depend almost exclusively on seasonal migration to Ahmedabad, where they work in the textile industry. The production of food grains has drastically decreased, and the land is left fallow for the most of the year. During migratory seasons, school dropout rates are higher, especially for girls who are taken along for informal work or home duties, according to a local NGO. Another example comes from Banswara, where a self-help organization of Bhil women started growing kitchen gardens to guarantee food security after being established to get microcredit. Over time, they switched to growing vegetables for the neighborhood market. Small revenue streams were produced, but disputes over water usage and the breakdown of communal agricultural practices also resulted.

These micro-level accounts draw attention to the contradiction that exists between indigenous people' daily realities and the promises of globalization. Like many other tribal communities, the Bhils are negotiating a difficult

situation where they must choose between emerging forms of agency and institutional expropriation. Recognizing that economic development is a process that is intertwined with power, identity, and historical marginalization presents a difficulty. These changes run the danger of solidifying inequality under the guise of success in the absence of institutional support, culturally grounded education, and inclusive development strategies.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The way of life of the Bhils in southern Rajasthan has changed as a result of globalization, exposing a complicated interaction between structural marginalization, cultural displacement, and economic necessity. The Bhil community is going through a significant upheaval in both how it makes a livelihood and how it views itself as traditional vocations like shifting agriculture, pastoralism, and forest collecting lose way to wage work and seasonal migration. These changes are not the linear 'development' processes that are frequently depicted in policy discourse; rather, they are uneven and fragmented, creating both increased risks and new opportunities. Market pressures, extractive industries, and state-sponsored modernizing institutions have brought forth more integrated forms of life, but they are also far less independent, safe, and based on native values.

These changes have had significant cultural and economic repercussions over time. A breakdown of the cultural frameworks that supported Bhil civilization for many centuries is shown by the deterioration of traditional ecological knowledge systems and the deterioration of community resource-sharing practices. Concurrently, the growing dependence on migrant labor has weakened collective agency, broken up intergenerational knowledge transfer, and divided family structures. As a result, the community finds itself in a state of transition, both culturally and economically separated from its own traditional ways of life and economically bound to a labor market that is unstable and exploitative. Dominant development approaches that ignore the diversity and context-specific requirements of tribal groups serve to further perpetuate this liminality. What frequently happens is a strengthening of reliance—on markets, government subsidies, and outside standards of progress—instead than empowerment.

These results highlight the critical need to rethink development techniques in ways that are inclusive, culturally sensitive, and sustainable. In order to address the structural causes of tribal marginalization, such as resource exploitation, land dispossession, and the homogenizing impacts of formal education and media, policies must first go beyond simple income-generation initiatives. In addition to guaranteeing access to arable land, water, and other natural resources that serve as the biological basis of tribal livelihoods, state actions have to give top priority to the legal recognition of community forest rights under the Forest Rights Act (2006). In order to promote a feeling of dignity and cultural continuity, education systems must simultaneously be decolonized and localized, including tribal languages, knowledge systems, and histories into curricula.

Supporting community-based businesses, cooperatives, and agro-ecological methods that blend ecological sustainability with traditional knowledge are other ways to foster economic resilience from within. This includes funding for localized renewable energy systems, non-timber forest product (NTFP) value chains, and skill-building programs that honor regional settings rather than imposing uniform career patterns. Importantly, indigenous communities must actively participate in the planning and execution of such initiatives, not just as recipients but also as actors of their own destiny. Development can only shift from being a process of dispossession to one of empowerment through such participatory governance institutions.

Lastly, a rights-based strategy that prioritizes justice, autonomy, and dignity above assimilation must be implemented for tribal welfare. This means acknowledging the Bhils as carriers of alternative worldviews and sustainable lifestyles rather than as passive victims of globalization or as backward people in need of assimilation. Their voices, expertise, and goals must be at the core of any meaningful development paradigm. By doing this, it is feasible to establish avenues for advancement that are not only financially feasible but also socially just and environmentally sound. The problem lies not just in including the Bhils into the globalization narrative, but also in radically reimagining what that narrative means when narrated from the periphery.

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