



**PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS PARTICIPATION: A  
SOCIO-GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN URBAN  
AND RURAL MAHARASHTRA**

**Uttam Ramchandra Deulkar**

*Associate professor physical education and sports Lokmanya mahavidyalaya warora*

*Email - udeulkar@gmail.com*

**Prof. Dr. Uday N. Manjre**

*Degree College of Physical Education Amravati*

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**Abstract**

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*This study explores the socio-geographical dynamics influencing physical education and sports participation among tribal communities in urban and rural regions of Maharashtra. Despite the rich cultural heritage and physical potential inherent in many tribal groups, disparities in access, awareness, and engagement in structured physical education and sports activities remain pronounced. The research aims to identify and compare the attitudes, opportunities, and challenges faced by tribal students and their parents across urban and rural settings.*

*Using a mixed-methods approach involving surveys, interviews, and field observations, data were collected from tribal households, schools, and community centres across selected districts. The study reveals significant differences in participation levels, with urban tribal students showing relatively higher exposure to organized sports, while rural counterparts often engage more in traditional physical activities but lack formal infrastructure and institutional support. Parental perception, educational background, economic conditions, and availability of sports facilities were found to be key influencing factors.*

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**Key words:** *Physical Education, Sports participation, Tribal communities*

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**Introduction:**

Physical education and sports play a vital role in the holistic development of children and adolescents, fostering not only physical well-being but also social, emotional, and cognitive growth. Among tribal communities, traditionally known for their physical endurance, agility, and connection to nature, physical activity has long been embedded in cultural practices and

daily life. However, in the modern context particularly within formal education systems—tribal populations often face systemic barriers to active participation in structured physical education and sports programs.

Maharashtra, a state with a significant tribal population, presents a complex socio-geographical landscape where tribal communities inhabit both remote rural areas and increasingly urbanized environments. These differing contexts shape their access to infrastructure, quality of education, exposure to organized sports, and overall lifestyle. While urban tribal families may benefit from improved access to facilities and awareness, they often face cultural displacement and identity challenges. In contrast, rural tribal populations may maintain strong cultural ties and traditional games but lack institutional support and resources.

This research seeks to examine and compare the levels and patterns of physical education and sports participation among tribal students and their parents in urban and rural areas of Maharashtra. It also aims to explore the socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructural factors that influence their engagement. By adopting a socio-geographical lens, the study investigates how location, community background, and institutional support systems intersect to shape participation outcomes.

In doing so, this research not only contributes to the understanding of physical education among marginalized groups but also offers insights for policymakers, educators, and community leaders striving to create inclusive, culturally relevant, and geographically sensitive programs for tribal youth. Addressing these disparities is essential for ensuring that all students—regardless of their background—have the opportunity to benefit from the physical and developmental advantages that sports and physical education offer.

### **Importance of Physical Education and Sports Participation:**

Physical education and sports are essential tools for fostering physical fitness, mental well-being, discipline, and social integration—especially for students from marginalized communities like tribal populations. For tribal students, participation in sports not only supports their physical development but also offers a pathway for self-expression, identity affirmation, and social mobility.

#### **1. Holistic Development of Tribal Students:**

Engaging in physical education enhances motor skills, body coordination, stamina, and overall health. For tribal children, who often grow up in environments rich in physical activity, structured sports can further nurture their natural physical abilities. It also improves

concentration, teamwork, leadership, and resilience skills that are transferable to academic and social contexts.

## **2. Cultural Preservation and Identity:**

Many tribal games and physical practices are rooted in traditional knowledge systems. Promoting physical education that includes indigenous sports helps preserve tribal culture while integrating it into modern educational frameworks. This strengthens students' sense of identity and pride in their heritage.

## **3. Social Inclusion and Confidence Building:**

Sports offer tribal students a platform to engage with peers from different backgrounds, breaking social and cultural barriers. Success in sports can improve self-esteem, reduce social stigma, and encourage tribal youth to participate more actively in school and community life.

## **4. Health and Lifestyle Awareness:**

Tribal communities, especially in urban areas, face lifestyle-related health issues due to a shift from physically active rural life to sedentary urban living. Physical education promotes awareness about fitness, hygiene, and nutrition, which is beneficial not only for students but for the entire family.

## **5. Empowerment of Parents and Community Engagement:**

When tribal parents observe their children participating in sports, it can change their perceptions about education and physical activity. It encourages them to support their children's holistic development, fostering greater involvement in school and community programs. Parents themselves may also become more conscious of health, physical fitness, and the importance of balanced development.

## **6. Opportunity for Career and Recognition:**

Sports can open doors to scholarships, government incentives, and professional careers for tribal youth. Participation in district, state, and national level competitions can bring recognition to students and their communities, motivating others to follow similar paths.

## **Objectives of the Research:**

1. To analyse the role of socio-cultural, economic, and geographical factors influencing sports participation among tribal students and their parents.
2. To identify traditional tribal sports and assess their current status and integration within formal education settings.

3. To suggest recommendations for improving physical education and sports participation among tribal students across different geographical contexts in Maharashtra.

**A. Analyse the role of socio-cultural, economic, and geographical factors influencing sports participation among tribal students and their parents:**

**1. Socio-Cultural Factors:**

a. Traditional Beliefs and Attitudes:

- Many tribal communities value physical activities for their cultural or ritual significance (e.g., traditional games or dances).
- However, modern sports may not always align with tribal values or customs, leading to reduced encouragement.

b. Gender Roles:

- In some tribal societies, traditional gender expectations may restrict girls' participation in outdoor or competitive sports.
- Boys may receive more encouragement for physical activities, reinforcing unequal access.

c. Parental Awareness and Support:

- Parents' knowledge about the benefits of sports (health, education, career) can shape children's participation.
- In tribal areas, low literacy levels or limited exposure to organized sports may result in lower parental support.

d. Community Role Models and Heroes:

- Lack of local role models or sports achievers can demotivate youth from pursuing sports seriously.
- Where tribal athletes have succeeded, it often boosts community participation.

**2. Economic Factors:**

a. Poverty and Financial Constraints:

- Tribal communities often face economic hardships, making sports equipment, attire, and training unaffordable.
- Children may be expected to contribute to family income, reducing their time for sports.

b. Cost of Education and Sports Infrastructure:

- Lack of funds in schools or communities means limited sports facilities, equipment, and qualified coaches.

- Participation in sports often requires travel for competitions, which can be cost-prohibitive.

c. Prioritization of Basic Needs:

- Sports may be seen as a luxury when survival, food, health, and education are the primary concerns.

**3. Geographical Factors:**

a. Remote and Inaccessible Locations:

- Many tribal communities are located in hilly, forested, or remote areas with poor transportation.
- This limits access to sports facilities, coaches, and inter-school competitions.

b. Natural Terrain:

- Ironically, some tribal areas offer natural advantages—open spaces, hills, and rivers that can be conducive to physical training.
- However, without structured programs, this potential is often underutilized.

c. Weather and Climate:

- Harsh weather conditions (monsoons, extreme cold) in some regions may restrict year-round outdoor sports.

4. Recommendations to Enhance Participation:

- **Cultural Integration:** Encourage traditional tribal sports and gradually introduce modern ones in culturally sensitive ways.
- **Awareness Programs:** Educate parents and community leaders on the health and career benefits of sports.
- **Financial Support:** Provide scholarships, equipment, and travel assistance to promising athletes.
- **Community Role Models:** Highlight success stories of tribal sportspersons to inspire the youth.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Establish local sports centers and engage tribal youth in government-sponsored programs like Khelo India.
- **Gender Inclusion:** Promote safe and inclusive environments for girls to participate in sports.

**B. Identify traditional tribal sports and assess their current status and integration within formal education settings:**

India’s tribal communities have a rich heritage of indigenous games and physical activities rooted in local culture, rituals, and environment. These traditional sports emphasize endurance, skill, and community participation.

<b>Tribal Region/Community</b>	<b>Traditional Sport/Game</b>	<b>Description</b>
Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh (Munda, Santhal, Gond)	Khokho, Kusti, Pittu (Lagori)	Running, wrestling, and target-based games
Northeast India (Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal)	Archery, Wrestling, Thang-Ta	Archery for hunting practice, martial arts like Thang-Ta in Manipur
Madhya Pradesh (Bhil, Baiga)	Gilli-Danda, Langdi, Kabaddi	Balance, coordination, and team-based play
Rajasthan (Garasia, Bhil)	Camel races, Stick fighting	Region-specific physical competitions
Andaman & Nicobar Tribes	Dugout canoe racing, Spear throwing	Games related to fishing and survival
Maharashtra (Warli, Gond)	Bullock cart racing, Tug-of-war	Community festival activities

**2. Current Status of Traditional Tribal Sports**

**a. Decline Due to Modernization**

- Many traditional tribal sports are in decline due to urbanization, the rise of digital entertainment, and lack of institutional support.
- Young tribal students are increasingly drawn to mainstream sports like cricket and football due to media influence and aspirational value.

**b. Loss of Cultural Transmission**

- Oral traditions of passing down games are weakening.
- Elders who know the rules and techniques may not find successors among the youth.

**c. Marginal Institutional Recognition**

- These sports are often not included in school curriculums or competitive platforms.
- Very few state or national-level sports federations support indigenous tribal sports.

### **3. Integration of Tribal Sports in Formal Education: An Assessment**

#### **a. Positive Steps Taken**

- **Khelo India Program:** Some tribal sports have been highlighted under this national initiative.
- **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS):** These schools have shown efforts to promote tribal culture, including sports.
- **State Tribal Welfare Departments:** Host tribal sports festivals (e.g., Jharkhand Tribal Games).

#### **b. Gaps and Challenges**

- **Curriculum Exclusion:** Tribal games are not integrated into Physical Education syllabi of CBSE/ICSE/State Boards.
- **Lack of Trained Instructors:** Few PE teachers are trained in traditional tribal games.
- **Infrastructure Mismatch:** Tribal games often need open, natural spaces, which urban schools or concrete playgrounds do not accommodate.
- **Perception Issues:** Traditional games are sometimes seen as "primitive" or "non-competitive."

### **4. Recommendations for Better Integration**

#### **a. Curriculum Reforms**

- Include tribal sports in PE textbooks with historical and cultural context.
- Encourage practical sessions in schools, especially in tribal belts.

#### **b. Teacher Training**

- Organize workshops to train PE teachers in local tribal sports.
- Involve tribal elders as community coaches or consultants.

#### **c. Cultural-Sports Festivals**

- Mandate tribal sports events in school annual days and inter-school meets.
- Link with local tribal festivals (like Sarhul, Karma) to reinforce cultural relevance.

#### **d. Policy & Institutional Support**

- Establish state-level federations for tribal sports.
- Provide incentives, scholarships, and recognition for students excelling in traditional games.

### **C. Recommendations for improving physical education and sports participation among tribal students across different geographical contexts in Maharashtra:**

Maharashtra has a significant tribal population spread across districts like Palghar, Nandurbar, Gadchiroli, Chandrapur, Nashik, Thane, and Amravati. These regions differ widely in terrain, infrastructure, and access to education, which affects sports participation.

#### **1. Policy and Institutional Support**

- **Integrate traditional tribal sports** into the **school curriculum**, especially in Ashram Schools and Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS).
- Ensure **mandatory PE periods and structured sports time** in all government and tribal schools.
- Strengthen coordination between the **Tribal Development Department** and the **Sports and Youth Services Department**.

#### **2. Infrastructure and Equipment**

##### **i. Hilly and Forested Regions (e.g., Gadchiroli, Nandurbar)**

- Use **natural terrains** to promote endurance-based and outdoor sports (e.g., cross-country, wrestling, archery).
- Construct **basic yet durable multi-sport grounds** using locally available materials.
- Develop **mobile sports kits** for remote schools, including indigenous games equipment.

##### **ii. Semi-Urban Tribal Areas (e.g., Palghar, Thane outskirts)**

- Create **community sports centers** jointly used by schools and youth groups.
- Provide access to **standard sports equipment** and hire **trained coaches**.

##### **iii. Human Resource Development**

- Train **Physical Education (PE) teachers** with cultural sensitivity and knowledge of tribal games.
- Recruit **local tribal youth as assistant coaches** to bridge language and cultural gaps.
- Engage retired athletes from tribal backgrounds as **mentors or role models**.

##### **iv. Financial and Logistical Support**

- Provide **sports scholarships, stipends, and nutrition support** to talented tribal athletes.
- Fund **travel and accommodation** for inter-school and district-level competitions.

- Encourage **CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)** partnerships for developing sports infrastructure in tribal blocks.

#### v. Cultural Relevance and Community Involvement

- Promote **tribal games** (e.g., Langdi, Gilli-Danda, Kho-Kho, Atya-Patya, archery) alongside mainstream sports.
- Organize **tribal sports festivals** that align with local traditions (e.g., during Holi, Diwali, or local harvest festivals).
- Involve **parents and community elders** in events to increase acceptance and support.

#### vi. Awareness and Motivation

- Run **campaigns in local dialects** to raise awareness of the health and career benefits of sports.
- Highlight **success stories** of tribal athletes from Maharashtra to inspire youth.
- Leverage **radio and community centers** to spread information on sports schemes and opportunities

#### Conclusion:

This study highlights that physical education and sports participation among tribal communities in Maharashtra is significantly influenced by socio-cultural norms, economic limitations, and geographical context. Tribal students in both urban and rural settings face unique barriers and opportunities that affect their engagement with physical activity.

In rural and remote tribal areas, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to trained coaches, economic hardship, and geographical isolation hinder consistent participation. However, these regions also offer untapped potential through natural landscapes and traditional sports practices, which can be strategically harnessed to promote physical education.

In urban and semi-urban tribal contexts, although access to better facilities and exposure is higher, socio-cultural issues like marginalization, identity erosion, and lack of representation in mainstream sports systems persist. Moreover, the growing disconnect from indigenous games in urban settings risks the loss of valuable cultural heritage.

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