

Modernization of Tribal Communities through Accessibility to Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS): A Comparative Analysis of Santals of Odisha (Eastern Region) and Gaddis of Jammu (North Western Region)

Dr.Sipra Sagarika & Mrs Karishma Sahoo
Assistant Professor in Sociology (Stage-III)
& ICSSR Research Fellow in Sociology
Post Graduate Department of Social Science
Fakir Mohan University, Balasore, Odisha

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of modernization on tribal communities in India with specific focus on the Santals of Odisha and the Gaddis of Jammu, analyzing their accessibility to the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The ICDS, launched in 1975, is a flagship program aimed at improving the nutritional and developmental status of children under six years, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. Despite its wide outreach, tribal communities continue to face obstacles related to geography, culture, and institutional inclusion. This comparative study explores how modernization and social transformation affect ICDS accessibility in two distinct tribal contexts the Santals of Eastern India and the Gaddis of North Western India. Drawing upon secondary data, field-based literature, and theoretical frameworks of modernization and cultural ecology, the paper highlights how differential access to ICDS mirrors broader inequalities in tribal development. Findings suggest that while modernization has enhanced awareness and service reach among Santals, cultural isolation and institutional neglect continue to hinder the Gaddis' engagement with ICDS. Policy implications emphasize localized planning, cultural sensitivity, and participatory governance in tribal welfare delivery.

Introduction

Modernization in India has been a complex and uneven process, particularly among tribal communities who have historically been isolated from mainstream socio-economic developments. The post-independence state has attempted to promote inclusive growth through targeted welfare schemes, one of the most prominent being the **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** scheme, launched in 1975. The ICDS is one of the world's largest community-based outreach programs aimed at improving the nutritional and educational status of children under six years of age, as well as supporting pregnant and lactating mothers through supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-ups, and pre-school education (Akhter & Wani, 2019).

However, despite nearly five decades of implementation, access to ICDS services continues to vary widely across different social groups and regions, particularly among Scheduled Tribes (STs). The structural disadvantages of remoteness, inadequate infrastructure, cultural barriers, and limited awareness restrict the effective reach of ICDS among tribal populations (Arfat, 2023). This article examines the intersection of **modernization and accessibility** to ICDS among two distinct tribal groups, the **Santals of Odisha** in eastern India and the **Gaddis of Jammu** in North Western India. The comparative analysis helps highlight the varied trajectories of modernization and the differing challenges of ICDS delivery and utilization across geographical and cultural contexts.

Modernization, Tribal Communities, and Service Accessibility

The concept of modernization, in sociological terms, denotes the transformation of traditional societies into industrial and urban systems characterized by rationality, secularism, mobility, and technological advancement. For tribal communities, modernization is often a **double-edged**

process, it offers exposure to education, health, and state welfare, but simultaneously disrupts traditional occupations, belief systems, and community autonomy (Tudu & Singh, 2025).

Modernization has redefined tribal life in terms of economic diversification, migration, urban exposure, and political assertion. However, its outcomes are contingent on **state infrastructure, geographical accessibility, and cultural sensitivity** in implementing development programs.

ICDS, as a key welfare program, symbolizes the state's attempt to modernize the early childhood care system, but tribal communities' ability to access and benefit from it depends on their degree of integration into the modern institutional framework.

Studies reveal that even though the ICDS network has expanded to cover most rural and tribal areas, the **quality of service delivery** and **regularity of operation** remain inconsistent (Dhingra & Sharma, 2019). Factors such as poor infrastructure, shortage of trained Anganwadi Workers, inadequate monitoring, and lack of community participation continue to plague its efficiency. For instance, in Odisha's tribal-dominated regions, over 70 percent of Anganwadi Centres lack drinking water facilities and over 80 percent lack functional toilets (Gram Vikas, 2021). Similarly, in Jammu, remote and hilly terrain limits the operational capacity of Anganwadi Centres, leading to irregular delivery of pre-school education and nutrition (Arfat, 2023).

Thus, modernization cannot be measured solely by the presence of welfare programs; it must also be understood through the **effective accessibility** and **cultural adaptability** of such schemes.

Review of Literature

Several studies have highlighted that **ICDS** serves as a crucial instrument for child welfare and nutrition across India, particularly in rural and tribal regions (Akhter & Wani, 2019). Despite its nationwide implementation, the ICDS's effectiveness depends heavily on socio-cultural and geographical factors influencing tribal communities' accessibility (Arfat, 2023).

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In Odisha, tribal-dominated districts such as Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, and Keonjhar have long suffered from malnutrition and poor maternal health indicators (The New Indian Express, 2012). The **Santals**, one of the largest tribal groups in India, represent a community in transition. Hembram and Mohapatra (2021) emphasized that modernization has gradually transformed Santal education and social aspirations but that access to welfare programs remains uneven. Similarly, research by the **State Tribal Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI, 2022)** revealed that factors such as caste distance, mobility constraints, and inadequate Anganwadi infrastructure limit the reach of ICDS in tribal pockets of Odisha.

In contrast, studies from Jammu shows that **Gaddi tribes**, largely pastoral in lifestyle, experience unique challenges in accessing ICDS due to seasonal migration and geographic isolation (Dhingra & Sharma, 2011). A study by Bashir et al. (2014) in Bandipora district found significant deficiencies in service delivery and lack of awareness about ICDS objectives. Moreover, cultural beliefs about childcare and traditional dietary practices further limit ICDS participation (Akhter & Wani, 2019).

From a national perspective, the **National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD, 2018)** and other evaluative studies have reiterated that ICDS outcomes in tribal areas depend not only on administrative capacity but also on cultural acceptance and modernization levels. Modernization, through literacy, exposure, and media contact, has proven to be a vital factor enhancing awareness and demand for welfare services (Kumar, 2020).

Collectively, these studies suggest that modernization acts both as an enabler and a disruptor—it facilitates awareness and participation, yet challenges traditional belief systems and gender norms that shape child-rearing practices among tribes (Hansda, 2022).

Key Concepts

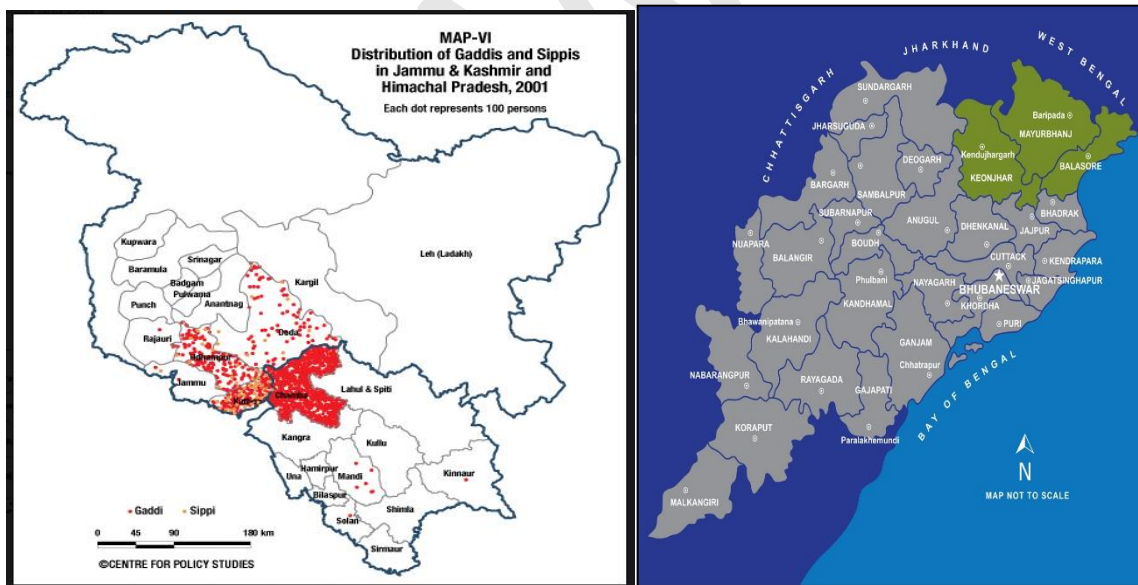
1. **Modernization** : Modernization refers to a multidimensional process involving social, economic, technological, and cultural transformation that moves societies toward a more industrial and rational framework (Lerner, 1958). In tribal contexts, modernization encompasses exposure to education, market integration, and welfare schemes that alter traditional practices.
2. **Tribal Communities** : Tribal communities, constitutionally recognized as *Scheduled Tribes* in India, possess distinct cultural, linguistic, and ecological identities (Sahu, 2018). The Santals of Odisha and Gaddis of Jammu represent contrasting cases, agrarian versus pastoral providing insight into regional variations in tribal modernization. The heterogeneous and varied characteristics of tribal communities provide a plot for comparison of both tribes from Odisha and Jammu. However the common accessibility to ICDS by these two varied tribal communities shapes the statement of problem to be discussed in this paper.
3. **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** : Initiated in 1975, ICDS aims to improve the health, nutrition, and early education of children under six years and women of reproductive age (Government of India, 2020). It functions through Anganwadi Centers delivering six core services i.e. nutrition, health check-ups, immunization, referral, health education, and preschool education (NIPCCD, 2018).
4. **Accessibility** : Accessibility here denotes the physical, cultural, informational, and institutional ease with which beneficiaries can avail ICDS services. It includes accessibility to supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check ups, referral services, pre school and non formal education, nutrition and health education for women.

It is shaped by geographical terrain, awareness levels, cultural norms, and administrative responsiveness (Gram Vikas, 2021).

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of accessibility and utilization of ICDS services among both tribal communities i.e. Santals in Odisha and Gaddis in Jammu.
2. To analyze the role of modernization in influencing awareness and participation in ICDS for Santals in Odisha and Gaddis in Jammu.
3. To analyze patterns of differential livelihood among Santals of Odisha and Gaddis of Jammu due to functionality of ICDS scheme.

Mapping Gaddis of Jammu & Santals of Odisha



Source: (Census 2011) Gaddi Tribes are residing on the red marked area i.e Doda,Udampur, Chamba, Ramban and Kathua etc at Jammu & Santals are residing in the Green marked area i.e Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Balasore at Odisha

Theoretical Orientation

This study is guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks:

1. **Modernization Theory:**

Rooted in the works of Lerner (1958) and Rostow (1960), modernization theory explains how traditional societies transition toward modernity through education, media exposure, and industrialization. Applied to tribal contexts, it examines how exposure to welfare programs like ICDS stimulates socio-cultural transformation. For the Santals, modernization manifests in rising literacy and increased participation in state programs (Hembram & Mohapatra, 2021). Among the Gaddis, however, modernization remains partial due to migration patterns and topographic isolation (Arfat, 2023).

2. **Cultural Ecology Theory:**

Developed by Julian Steward (1955), this theory emphasizes the relationship between culture and environment. It helps explain how ecological settings forest for Santals, highlands for Gaddis shape their access to welfare services. The Gaddis' nomadic lifestyle influences service delivery logistics, whereas Santals' sedentary agriculture fosters greater institutional contact (Hansda, 2022).

3. **Dependency and Participatory Development Perspectives:**

Complementing these, dependency theory (Frank, 1967) and participatory development (Chambers, 1997) perspectives are relevant to understand why top-down welfare programs often fail without community participation. ICDS implementation among tribals must thus be participatory and culturally grounded (SCSTRTI, 2022).

The Santals of Odisha: Socio-Cultural Background and Modernization

The **Santals** are among the largest tribal communities in India, primarily residing in Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Odisha. In Odisha alone, their population exceeds 894,000, making them one of the most populous tribes in the state (SCSTRTI, 2022). Concentrated mainly in **Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, and Balasore** districts, the Santals historically practiced shifting cultivation, forest-based livelihood, and subsistence agriculture. Over time, modernization, land reforms, and education have transformed their socio-economic structure (Sahu, 2021).

The Santal community has witnessed gradual improvement in literacy and access to state services. The literacy rate among Santals in Odisha is approximately 55.6 percent, which is higher than several other tribal groups in the state (Tudu & Singh, 2025). Culturally, Santals have retained strong indigenous traditions including their language **Santali**, written in **Oi Chiki script**, and their rich art, music, and religious rituals (Hansda, 2020). Despite modernization, they maintain a dual identity, balancing traditional customs with modern aspirations. Santals have been largely affected by cultural Globalization as well. Since they are the most progressive tribal group in Odisha, therefore their alterations pass through the canvas space of both modernization and cultural Globalization as well. (Sagarika & Pattnayk, 2023)

Economically, Santals have diversified from purely agrarian livelihoods to include labor migration, self-employment, and engagement in small-scale enterprises. The **societal modernization process** has enhanced their exposure to education and welfare institutions, but disparities persist between rural and semi-urban Santals. Government efforts, such as the **Odisha PVTG Nutrition Improvement Programme** and **POSHAN Abhiyaan**, have attempted to improve nutrition and maternal health in tribal areas, often overlapping with ICDS delivery systems (Department of Women & Child Development, 2022).

Accessibility to ICDS among the Santals

Despite progressive indicators, the **Santals' access to ICDS services remains uneven**. Mayurbhanj district, where Santals form the majority, has a substantial network of Anganwadi Centres. However, infrastructural quality and staff shortages hinder effectiveness. A statewide survey in 2023 found that nearly one in five tribal villages lacked a functioning Anganwadi Centre, and in many villages, food supplements were irregularly supplied (Gram Vikas, 2021).

Moreover, **language barriers and cultural norms** influence utilization. Health and nutrition messages are often delivered in Odia or Hindi, which may not resonate with Santali-speaking populations (Tudu & Singh, 2025). Language plays a very vital role in connecting to hearts of Santali children and mothers. Though there has been a lot of transformation in terms of usages of these Santali language, but still its value stands as a distinctive and strong cultural root. (Pattnayak & Sagarika, 2022). Cultural taboos around pregnancy and child-rearing also deter women from regular visits to ICDS centres. Studies indicate that when Anganwadi Workers belong to the same tribe and communicate in the local language, participation rates significantly increase (Dhingra & Sharma, 2019).

The **supplementary nutrition component** of ICDS has shown some success in reducing malnutrition among Santal children, but its sustainability depends on consistent supply and monitoring. Meanwhile, **pre-school education**, another core component, faces challenges such as poor infrastructure and lack of teaching materials. In many tribal villages, children still prefer informal play over structured learning, reflecting the need for culturally adapted pedagogy (Akhter & Wani, 2019). Overall, modernization has expanded the Santals' awareness of ICDS, but **socio-cultural barriers, infrastructural deficiencies, and administrative gaps** continue to restrict full accessibility.

The Gaddis of Jammu: Cultural Background and Modernization

The **Gaddis** are a semi-nomadic pastoral tribe predominantly found in the **Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir**, as well as in parts of Himachal Pradesh. Traditionally, they are **shepherds** who migrate seasonally with their flocks between the plains and the high-altitude pastures of the Dhauladhar and Pir Panjal ranges (Kumar, 2018). The Gaddis' lifestyle is deeply intertwined with their ecology and religious beliefs, especially devotion to Lord Shiva. Over the years, modernization has altered their economic and social organization.

The **transition from nomadism to partial settlement** has been slow but noticeable. Many Gaddi families now own land or engage in agriculture and wage labor, while others continue pastoral migrations. Education levels have improved, yet remain lower than the state average. Geographic isolation, climatic extremes, and inadequate road connectivity continue to impede access to welfare programs (Arfat, 2023).

Modernization among Gaddis is uneven while some have embraced schooling and government jobs, others remain on the margins of formal systems. The **ICDS program** operates under challenging conditions in the Jammu hills. Limited mobility of health staff, absence of permanent Anganwadi buildings, and poor attendance of children during migration seasons reduce its impact (Dhingra & Sharma, 2019).

Accessibility to ICDS among the Gaddis

The **ICDS services in the Jammu region** face multi-dimensional barriers. The Anganwadi Centres are often located far from Gaddi hamlets, and the nomadic nature of the community makes it difficult for mothers and children to attend regularly (Akhter & Wani, 2019). In many cases, the centres function only seasonally, when the community is settled at lower altitudes.

A study conducted in Jammu district found that pre-school education components under ICDS were underperforming due to inadequate infrastructure, shortage of teaching aids, and absence of trained workers (Dhingra & Sharma, 2019). Similarly, health check-up camps were irregular, and supplementary nutrition was inconsistent due to logistic challenges during migration cycles (Arfat, 2023).

While modernization has led some Gaddi families to adopt settled livelihoods and send their children to school, many still remain dependent on mobile pastoralism. The **standard ICDS model**, designed for sedentary rural communities, thus proves ill-suited for the Gaddis' lifestyle. Unless the program integrates **mobile Anganwadi units** or **seasonal outreach strategies**, accessibility will remain limited.

In cultural terms, Gaddis have high regard for traditional healers and local religious practices, which sometimes conflict with institutional health advice. Women often rely on indigenous methods for childbirth and infant care, leading to underutilization of modern health facilities (Kumar, 2018). Therefore, modernization must be viewed as a **process of negotiated adaptation**, not mere adoption.

Comparative Analysis: Santals and Gaddis

1. Modernization Patterns

The **Santals** of Odisha and the **Gaddis** of Jammu represent two different trajectories of modernization. The Santals, living in plains and semi-urban settings, have greater exposure to education, markets, and state programs. Their integration into agrarian and wage economies has facilitated greater awareness of ICDS services (Sahu, 2021). The Gaddis, however, continue to experience limited modernization due to geographic isolation and nomadic traditions (Kumar, 2018).

2. Infrastructure and Geography

Santals benefit from relatively better infrastructure, though many villages still lack essential facilities. In contrast, Gaddi settlements are located in mountainous regions, where transportation and communication barriers directly affect ICDS outreach (Dhingra & Sharma, 2019). Consequently, while the ICDS model is theoretically universal, its functionality differs across terrain.

3. Cultural Sensitivity and Language

Among the Santals, linguistic mismatch between service providers and beneficiaries remains a major barrier. Culturally appropriate communication in the Santali language enhances participation (Tudu & Singh, 2025). For the Gaddis, mobility and distinct pastoral identity require flexible program design. Cultural sensitivity in both cases determines effective service access.

4. Gender and Community Participation

In both communities, women's participation in ICDS is shaped by patriarchal norms and workload. Santal women are relatively more visible in Anganwadi activities than Gaddi women, who face stricter gender segregation (Sahu, 2021). Employing local women as Anganwadi Workers from within the tribe has proven effective in bridging trust gaps.

5. Outcome Indicators

Though both groups benefit from ICDS to some extent, Santals show better nutritional and educational outcomes due to settled habitation and higher literacy. Gaddis, however, continue to face undernourishment and low pre-school attendance rates due to mobility and isolation (Arfat, 2023).

6.Livelihood Patterns

Santals of Odisha are progressing from their traditional patterns of livelihood to more modernized patterns of occupation. They are linked to market and commercial places. In some Santali family proper preparation for getting their services from Government of Odisha and securing the future engagements are also marked. (Sagarika & Pattnayak 2023). Further, in case of Gaddi tribes the nature livelihood largely spreads across hunting and gathering in the hilly terrain areas of Jammu, however off late due to wider exposer and up gradation of tribal communities through Government welfare schemes, they are also preparing for Government Jobs and getting salaried jobs in different department of Jammu Government. However, this is an interesting fact that places where ICDS operational mechanisms are stronger , modernization is also faster and employability options are better and livelihood patterns keep changing faster as well. (Sagarika & Pattnayk 2023)

Policy Implications

The comparative study underscores the need for **context-sensitive implementation** of ICDS in tribal regions:

1. **Mobile Anganwadi Centres:** For semi-nomadic tribes like the Gaddis, mobile or seasonal centres should be introduced to ensure continuity of services during migration cycles.
2. **Infrastructure Development:** Immediate investments are required to upgrade buildings, sanitation, water, and kitchen facilities in tribal-dominated ICDS centres (Gram Vikas, 2021).

3. **Tribal-Language Integration:** Educational and health materials must be translated into local languages such as Santali, and community members should be trained as workers (Tudu & Singh, 2025).
4. **Community Ownership:** ICDS must promote local women's participation and decision-making in the functioning of centres to enhance trust and efficiency (Sahu, 2021).
5. **Monitoring and Accountability:** Tribal blocks should have specialized monitoring units for ICDS to reduce corruption, ensure food supply regularity, and assess outcomes.
6. **Convergence with Other Programs:** ICDS should be linked with broader modernization programs like **POSHAN Abhiyaan**, **OPELIP**, and **Odisha PVTG Nutrition Improvement Programme** to strengthen nutritional outcomes among tribal mothers and children (Department of Women & Child Development, 2022).

Conclusion

The analysis of the Santals and Gaddis reveals that **modernization and accessibility to ICDS are mutually dependent but contextually distinct**. The Santals, with higher literacy and settlement stability, show relatively better access, though infrastructure and cultural barriers persist. The Gaddis, limited by geographic isolation and pastoral mobility, require innovative models of service delivery.

Modernization cannot be imposed uniformly; it must evolve through localized participation and cultural negotiation. The success of ICDS among tribal populations ultimately depends on the **flexibility of the state apparatus** to adapt to diverse tribal contexts. By ensuring infrastructural adequacy, cultural sensitivity, and participatory governance, ICDS can truly become an instrument of equitable modernization and social justice among India's tribal communities.

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