

A Study of the Hakki-Pikki Tribal Community in Shivamogga and Davanagere Districts, Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

The Hakki-Pikki are a semi-nomadic tribal community primarily concentrated in Shivamogga, Davanagere, and Mysuru districts of Karnataka, historically known for bird-catching, hunting, and forest-based subsistence. This study examines the contemporary socio-economic conditions, cultural practices, and livelihood transformations of the Hakki-Pikki community in Shivamogga and Davanagere districts. Using mixed methods including household surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary data analysis, the research documents persistent marginalization characterized by poverty, low educational attainment, inadequate housing, and health challenges. The study reveals that legal restrictions under the Wildlife Protection Act and forest conservation policies have fundamentally disrupted traditional livelihoods while alternative economic opportunities remain limited. Despite these challenges, the community retains substantial ethnobotanical knowledge and has begun adapting through small-scale entrepreneurship, particularly in herbal product sales. The Vaagri language faces endangerment as younger generations increasingly adopt Kannada. Findings suggest that sustainable development interventions must prioritize community-led livelihood diversification, formal recognition of indigenous knowledge systems, language preservation initiatives, and participatory policy frameworks that respect cultural identity while addressing economic vulnerabilities.

Keywords: Hakki-Pikki, Vaagri, Shivamogga, Davanagere, tribal livelihoods, ethnobotany, socio-economic status, indigenous knowledge, livelihood transformation

1. INTRODUCTION

Karnataka is home to numerous indigenous communities, each with distinct cultural practices, languages, and livelihood systems shaped by their ecological contexts. Among these, the Hakki-Pikki tribe represents a particularly interesting case of a community undergoing rapid socio-economic transformation. The name "Hakki-Pikki" derives from Kannada words meaning "bird catchers," reflecting their historical occupation of trapping and selling birds, alongside gathering forest products and small-scale hunting [1].

The Hakki-Pikki population concentrates primarily in the Malnad and transitional zones of Karnataka, with significant settlements in Shivamogga, Davanagere, Mysuru, and Mandya districts. Estimates suggest approximately 15,000 to 20,000 individuals belong to this community across Karnataka, though precise enumeration remains challenging due to their historically semi-nomadic lifestyle [2]. They speak Vaagri, a language belonging to the Indo-Aryan family with influences from Gujarati, Marwari, and Kannada, which distinguishes them linguistically from surrounding Dravidian-speaking populations.

Historically, the Hakki-Pikki lived in forest peripheries, maintaining intimate knowledge of local ecosystems. Their traditional economy centered on capturing birds for sale in local markets, collecting honey, gathering medicinal plants, and small-scale cultivation. This lifestyle required detailed understanding of bird behavior, forest ecology, seasonal patterns, and plant properties accumulated over generations. Women played crucial roles in gathering forest products and processing materials, while men primarily engaged in hunting and market transactions.

However, the past four decades have witnessed dramatic changes in Hakki-Pikki livelihoods and settlement patterns. The enactment of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, which criminalized bird catching and hunting, fundamentally undermined their traditional economic base. Simultaneously, forest conservation policies restricted access to forest resources that sustained their gathering economy. Land use changes, including agricultural expansion and urbanization, further reduced available forest areas and wildlife populations [3].

These legal and environmental changes forced the community toward sedentarization and livelihood diversification. Many Hakki-Pikki settlements transitioned from temporary forest camps to permanent villages, though often on marginal lands with poor infrastructure. Community members sought alternative income through agricultural labor, collection and sale of herbal products, small trade, and increasingly, migration for work. Some families developed small businesses selling traditional herbal medicines and cosmetics, leveraging their ethnobotanical knowledge in new commercial contexts.

Despite these adaptations, the Hakki-Pikki face persistent marginalization. Poverty rates remain high, educational attainment lags behind district and state averages, health outcomes are poor, and housing conditions are inadequate. Their indigenous knowledge, while valuable, receives little formal recognition. The Vaagri language faces endangerment as younger generations shift toward Kannada for education and employment. Cultural practices are eroding as traditional livelihoods become untenable and community members integrate into mainstream economic systems.

This study examines the contemporary situation of the Hakki-Pikki community specifically in Shivamogga and Davanagere districts, which contain substantial populations. The research documents current socio-economic conditions, assesses the retention and application of traditional knowledge, analyzes livelihood transformation strategies, and identifies development challenges and opportunities. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing interventions that respect cultural identity while addressing genuine economic and social vulnerabilities.

The significance of this research extends beyond documenting one community's circumstances. The Hakki-Pikki experience illustrates broader tensions between conservation policies and indigenous livelihoods, between cultural preservation and economic development, and between traditional knowledge systems and modern markets. Their story offers insights relevant to numerous tribal communities facing similar transitions across India and globally.

2. OBJECTIVES

This research pursues several interconnected objectives:

- **Primary Objective:** To comprehensively document the current socio-economic conditions of the Hakki-Pikki tribal community in Shivamogga and Davanagere districts, including demographic characteristics, livelihood patterns, educational status, health conditions, and housing situations.
- **Objective 2:** To assess the retention and application of traditional ethnobotanical knowledge within the community, particularly regarding medicinal plants, edible forest products, and their contemporary uses.
- **Objective 3:** To analyze how legal restrictions on traditional practices and changing environmental conditions have impacted Hakki-Pikki livelihoods and cultural practices.
- **Objective 4:** To examine current livelihood diversification and adaptation strategies, including entrepreneurial initiatives and market engagement.
- **Objective 5:** To evaluate the status of the Vaagri language and document ongoing cultural practices and traditions.
- **Objective 6:** To identify key development challenges facing the community and formulate culturally appropriate intervention recommendations.

3. SCOPE OF STUDY

The research scope encompasses:

- **Geographic Scope:** Hakki-Pikki settlements in Shivamogga and Davanagere districts, Karnataka. Major study sites include settlements in Soraba, Sagar, and Shikaripura taluks of Shivamogga district, and Harihara, Channagiri, and Honnali taluks of Davanagere district.
- **Temporal Scope:** Current conditions as of 2023-2024, with retrospective analysis of changes over the past two decades based on community narratives and secondary sources.
- **Exclusions:** The study does not cover Hakki-Pikki populations in Mysuru, Mandya, or other districts outside the specified geographic scope. Detailed linguistic analysis of Vaagri grammar and phonology is beyond this research's scope, though basic documentation of language status is included.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Historical and Anthropological Documentation

Early anthropological documentation of the Hakki-Pikki remains limited compared to larger tribal groups. Colonial ethnographies briefly mentioned them as wandering bird catchers without detailed cultural analysis. Post-independence ethnographic work began documenting their distinct identity, language, and traditional practices more systematically [4]

More recent anthropological research has focused on their origin narratives, which suggest migration from northern India, possibly Rajasthan or Gujarat, several centuries ago. Linguistic evidence supporting this includes Vaagri's Indo-Aryan structure and vocabulary similarities with Gujarati and Marwari. This northern origin distinguishes them from Dravidian tribal groups in Karnataka. Their traditional social organization featured clan divisions and endogamous marriage practices that maintained community boundaries.

Contemporary ethnographic work documents rapid cultural change. Traditional festivals, rituals, and social structures persist but face pressures from sedentarization, economic change, and integration into mainstream society. Younger generations increasingly participate in Kannada cultural practices while maintaining selective connections to Hakki-Pikki identity (Naik, 2020).

4.2 Ethnobotanical Knowledge Systems

Women traditionally held primary responsibility for gathering medicinal plants and preparing remedies. This gendered knowledge transmission meant mothers taught daughters plant identification, collection seasons, preparation methods, and dosage considerations. However, younger women increasingly lack opportunities to acquire this knowledge as forest access diminishes and modern healthcare becomes more available, though not always accessible.

Recent research has validated several Hakki-Pikki medicinal plant uses through phytochemical analysis. Plants they use for antimicrobial purposes often contain compounds with demonstrated antibacterial properties. Their skincare preparations frequently incorporate plants with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory compounds. This validation has increased interest in their knowledge for potential pharmaceutical and cosmetic applications, though community members rarely benefit from such commercialization [6].

4.3 Impact of Conservation Policies

The Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 marked a watershed moment for communities like the Hakki-Pikki whose traditional livelihoods involved wildlife use. While the Act served important conservation goals, it criminalized practices central to tribal identities and economies without providing adequate alternatives. Enforcement varied regionally, but the Hakki-Pikki faced prosecution for bird catching that had sustained them for generations [7].

Forest conservation policies compounded these impacts. Restrictions on forest access for gathering, grazing, and resource extraction protected ecosystems but constrained tribal livelihoods. The Hakki-Pikki, lacking formal land rights in most areas, found themselves excluded from forests they historically used. These policies reflected conservation models that separated humans from nature rather than recognizing sustainable indigenous resource use patterns.

Recent scholarship has increasingly critiqued conservation approaches that ignore indigenous rights and knowledge. Alternative frameworks emphasizing community-based conservation and co-management have emerged, though implementation remains limited. For the Hakki-Pikki, policy shifts came too late to prevent major livelihood disruption, though some recent initiatives attempt to involve them in forest protection while permitting limited traditional gathering [8].

4.4 Livelihood Transitions and Economic Adaptation

Forced livelihood change has produced diverse adaptation strategies among the Hakki-Pikki. Many community members work as agricultural laborers, though irregular employment and low wages maintain poverty. Some families cultivate small plots, typically marginal land producing limited yields. The community's lack of significant land ownership constrains agricultural development as a viable livelihood alternative [9].

An important adaptation involves commercializing traditional knowledge through herbal product sales. Some Hakki-Pikki families collect medicinal plants and prepare traditional remedies for sale in urban markets. Women often lead these enterprises, leveraging their ethnobotanical knowledge in commercial contexts. Products include herbal powders, oils, soaps, and cosmetics marketed as natural and traditional. However, this adaptation faces challenges including limited capital for expansion, competition from larger companies, and inadequate market linkages [10].

Migration has become increasingly common, particularly among younger men. Destinations include urban centers like Bengaluru, Mysuru, and cities in other states where they work in construction, domestic service, and informal sectors. Migration provides crucial income but strains family structures and accelerates cultural change as migrants adopt urban lifestyles and languages.

4.5 Education and Social Development

Educational attainment among the Hakki-Pikki remains significantly below district and state averages. Multiple factors contribute to low educational achievement including poverty requiring child labor, inadequate school infrastructure in remote settlements, language barriers as instruction occurs in Kannada, cultural unfamiliarity with formal education, and limited perceived returns given employment discrimination [11]. Government initiatives including residential schools for tribal students, scholarships, and special recruitment quotas aim to improve tribal education. However, these programs often fail to adequately address cultural and economic barriers. Residential schools can alienate children from their communities and languages. Scholarships reach relatively few students. Special recruitment provides limited benefit when educational foundations are weak.

Health indicators similarly lag. The community experiences high rates of malnutrition, infectious diseases, maternal mortality, and child mortality. Contributing factors include poverty limiting food security and healthcare access, inadequate sanitation and clean water in settlements, limited health infrastructure in rural areas where they live, and partial traditional medicine use when modern care would be more appropriate. Government health programs have expanded coverage but often fail to fully reach marginalized communities like the Hakki-Pikki [12].

4.6 Research Gaps

Existing research on the Hakki-Pikki remains limited compared to larger tribal groups. Significant gaps include comprehensive contemporary socio-economic assessments, detailed documentation of current livelihood portfolios, systematic ethnobotanical knowledge recording before generational loss, linguistic documentation of Vaagri, analysis

of their experiences with development programs, and community perspectives on their own development priorities. This study addresses several of these gaps through primary fieldwork in Shivamogga and Davanagere districts.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative household surveys with qualitative methods including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. This methodological pluralism provides both breadth through survey data and depth through qualitative insights into lived experiences and community perspectives.

5.2 Study Sites and Sample Selection

Fieldwork occurred across six settlements in Shivamogga and Davanagere districts selected to represent diverse contexts including forest-edge settlements, rural villages, and peri-urban locations. From an estimated population of 1,200 households in these districts, 180 households were selected using stratified random sampling, ensuring representation across settlements, economic strata, and household structures.

5.3 Data Collection Methods

Household Survey: A structured questionnaire administered to heads of 180 households collected demographic data, livelihood information, income and expenditure details, education and health status, asset ownership, and access to government schemes.

Semi-Structured Interviews: In-depth interviews with 45 community members including elders, women, youth, traditional healers, and community leaders explored livelihood changes, cultural practices, challenges, and aspirations. These interviews allowed exploration of topics emerging during fieldwork.

Focus Group Discussions: Six focus groups (three with women, three with men) facilitated collective discussion of community issues, traditional knowledge, and development priorities. Gender-segregated groups encouraged frank discussion of gender-specific concerns.

Ethnobotanical Documentation: Walks with knowledgeable community members to identify medicinal and edible plants, document uses, and understand collection and preparation practices. This documentation involved 12 key informants recognized for plant knowledge.

Participant Observation: Spending time in settlements, observing daily activities, attending community events, and building rapport provided contextual understanding beyond formal data collection.

5.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to characterize socio-economic conditions. Qualitative interview and focus group transcripts underwent thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes related to livelihood change, cultural transformation, knowledge systems, and development needs. Ethnobotanical data was organized into a database documenting plant species, uses, and preparation methods.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

Research procedures received approval from the institutional ethics committee. Community leaders were consulted before fieldwork commenced, and their consent obtained. Individual participants provided informed consent after

explanation of research purposes and procedures. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing data. Compensation was provided for time spent in interviews and ethnobotanical documentation activities.

6. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

6.1 Livelihood Patterns and Economic Status

Contemporary Hakki-Pikki livelihoods reflect dramatic transformation from traditional forest-based subsistence. The survey revealed highly diversified livelihood portfolios with most households pursuing multiple income sources. Agricultural labor constitutes the primary livelihood for 54% of households, though work is seasonal and poorly paid. Daily wages average Rs. 200-250 for men and Rs. 150-180 for women, providing insufficient income for household needs.

Collection and sale of forest products continues for 38% of households, though legal restrictions limit this activity and returns are modest. Products include soapnut, tamarind, honey, medicinal plants, and various seeds. Women dominate forest product collection, contributing significantly to household income through this activity.

Small-scale herbal product businesses have emerged as an innovative adaptation, with 22% of surveyed households involved. These enterprises collect medicinal plants and prepare traditional remedies for sale. Products include herbal hair oils, skincare preparations, digestive powders, and pain relief balms. Marketing occurs through direct sales in towns, supply to small shops, and increasingly through social media. However, limited capital constrains expansion, and competition from established companies limits market share.

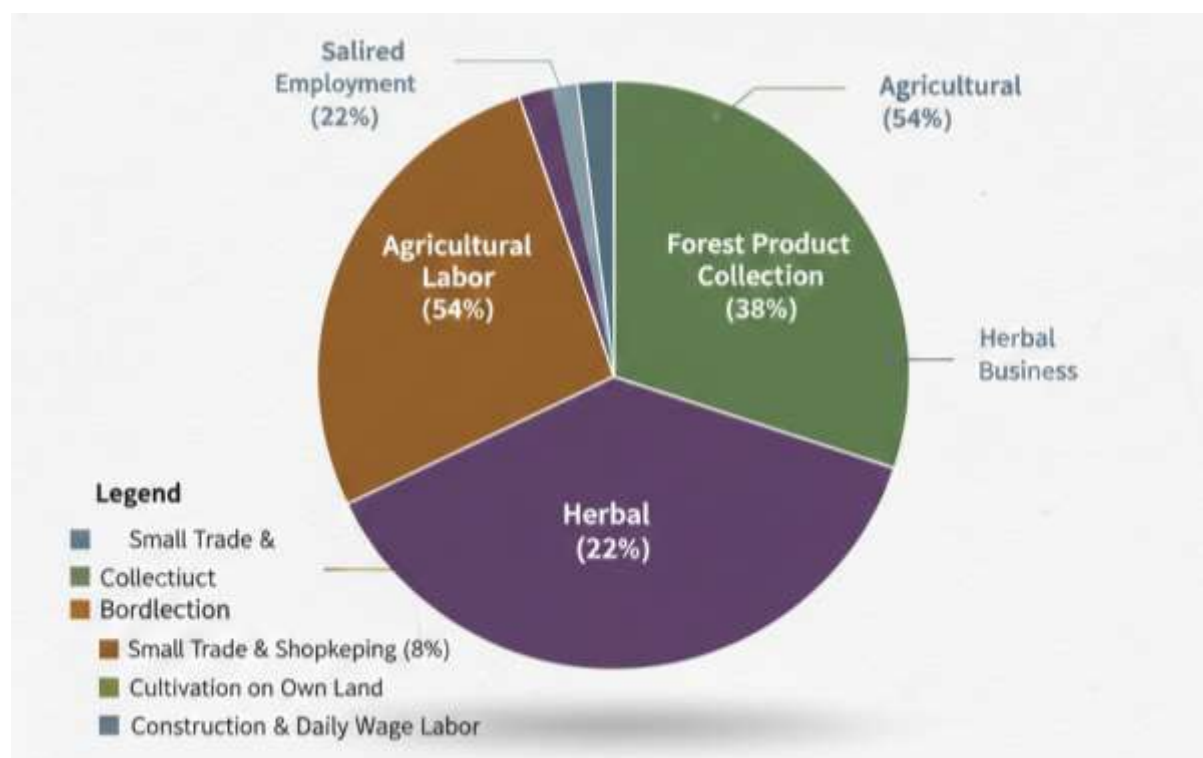


Figure 1: Livelihood Distribution Among Sample Households

6.2 Housing and Living Conditions

Housing conditions reveal persistent poverty and marginalization. Only 62% of households own their homes, with others renting or occupying land informally. Home ownership provides security but doesn't guarantee quality—many owned homes are simple structures with mud walls and tile or thatch roofs. Just 34% of households have toilet facilities, forcing

open defecation that creates health risks. Access to piped water reaches only 23%, with most households relying on wells or public taps often distant from homes.

6.3 Health and Nutrition Status

Health indicators demonstrate significant challenges. Child malnutrition affects an estimated 48% of children under five based on visual assessment and parental reporting, though clinical measurement was not feasible in this study. Common health problems reported include respiratory infections, gastrointestinal diseases, skin conditions, and anemia, particularly among women and children.

Healthcare access remains problematic despite government health schemes. The nearest health facility averages 8 kilometers from settlements, requiring time and expense that poor families struggle to afford. Community members report experiencing discrimination at government health facilities, discouraging utilization. Many continue relying partially on traditional medicine, which effectively treats some conditions but proves inadequate for serious illnesses.

Maternal and child health outcomes are concerning. Home births attended by untrained attendants remain common due to distance from facilities and cultural preferences. Infant and maternal mortality rates likely exceed district averages, though precise data is unavailable.

6.4 Ethnobotanical Knowledge and Practices

Despite livelihood changes, substantial ethnobotanical knowledge persists, particularly among older generations and women involved in herbal businesses. Documentation activities identified 87 plant species used for medicinal purposes, 23 species used for food, and 15 species used for other purposes including soap making, pest control, and rituals.

Table 2: Categories of Ethnobotanical Knowledge

| Knowledge Category | Number of Species | Primary Holders | Transmission Status |
|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Medicinal Plants | 87 | Elder women, traditional healers | Eroding among youth |
| Edible Forest Products | 23 | Women, gatherers | Partially retained |
| Ritual and Cultural Plants | 15 | Elders, spiritual practitioners | Significantly eroded |
| Craft and Utility Plants | 12 | Women, craftspeople | Largely lost |
| Total Documented Species | 137 | - | - |

Common medicinal uses include respiratory ailment treatments using plants like *Adhatoda vasica*, digestive problem remedies involving *Terminalia chebula* and *Phyllanthus emblica*, skin condition treatments employing *Azadirachta indica* and *Curcuma longa*, and wound healing preparations with *Aloe vera* and various other species. Preparations typically involve decoctions, powders, pastes, or oils using traditional methods passed down through generations.

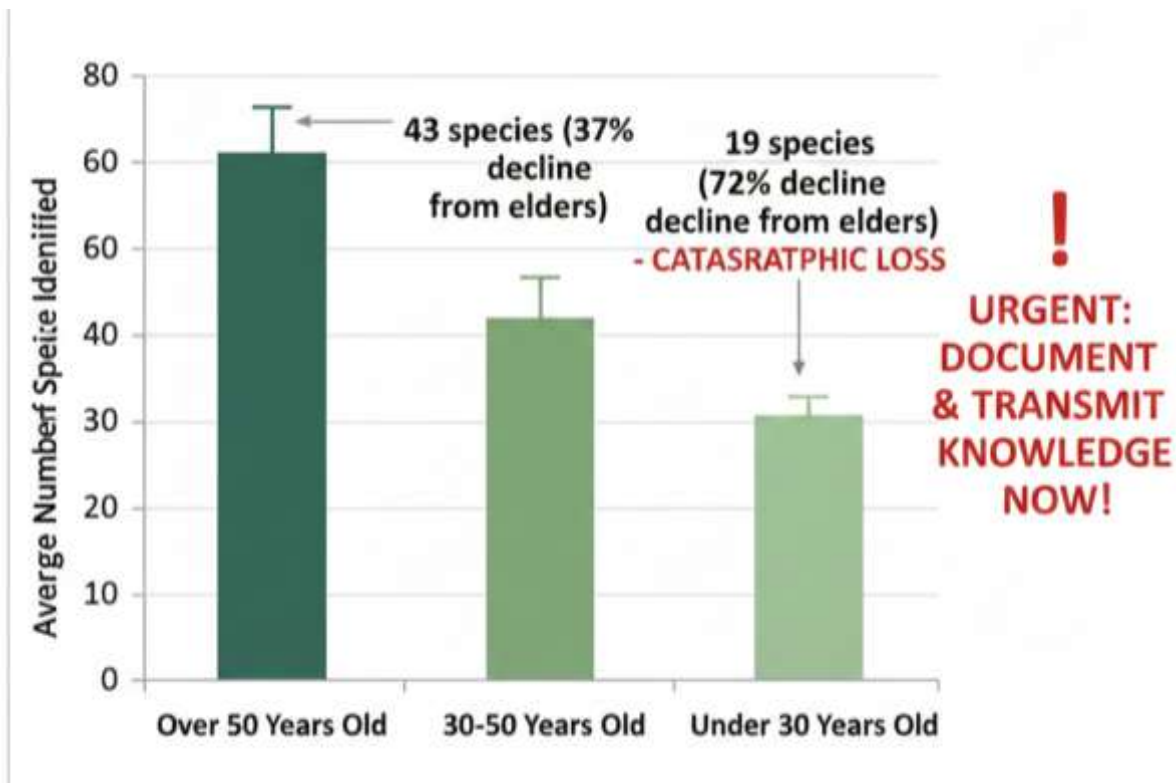


Figure 2: Generational Knowledge Retention Comparison

Those maintaining strong plant knowledge tend to be elders who learned in childhood when traditional livelihoods dominated, women engaged in herbal product businesses who economically benefit from this knowledge, and individuals who serve as informal healers within their communities. This concentration suggests knowledge could be preserved and transmitted through targeted initiatives supporting these knowledge holders.

6.5 Language and Cultural Practices

This language shift responds to practical pressures. Education occurs entirely in Kannada, requiring children to develop proficiency for academic success. Employment contexts similarly demand Kannada competency. Young people perceive Vaagri as marking tribal identity that invites discrimination, preferring to assimilate linguistically into mainstream society. Parents sometimes encourage Kannada use believing it benefits children's prospects.

However, language loss carries cultural consequences. Vaagri encodes specialized vocabulary for birds, plants, and traditional practices that Kannada cannot precisely convey. Traditional songs, stories, and oral histories lose meaning in translation. Language shift thus accompanies broader cultural erosion.

Traditional cultural practices persist but face challenges. Festivals and rituals continue, though often in modified forms. Traditional dress has largely given way to mainstream clothing except during special occasions. Dietary practices have changed as forest foods become unavailable and dietary diversity expands. Marriage practices have shifted with increasing inter-community marriages, particularly among educated youth, though family elders often resist such unions.

6.6 Experiences with Development Programs

Government development programs for scheduled tribes theoretically provide opportunities, but implementation gaps limit benefits for the Hakki-Pikki. Scholarship programs for tribal students reach relatively few community members due to lack of awareness, complex application procedures, and documentation requirements. Residential tribal schools

exist but receive mixed reviews—some families appreciate educational opportunities while others criticize cultural alienation and poor conditions.

Livelihood programs including skill training, micro-enterprise support, and self-help groups have minimal penetration. Only 12% of surveyed households participated in government livelihood programs, citing lack of awareness as the primary barrier. Among participants, satisfaction remains low due to inadequate training quality, insufficient follow-up support, and mismatch between training topics and local opportunities.

Housing schemes have reached some families, with 18% receiving government assistance for home construction or improvement. However, long waiting lists and complex procedures exclude many eligible households. Healthcare schemes including Ayushman Bharat provide coverage in theory, but practical access remains limited due to distant facilities, procedural barriers, and discrimination experiences.

6.7 Community Development Priorities

Focus group discussions and interviews explored community perspectives on development needs and priorities. Participants identified several critical areas requiring intervention. Education emerged as the top priority, with community members recognizing that educational advancement provides the primary pathway out of poverty. They emphasized needs for better school infrastructure in their settlements, additional scholarship support, and educational assistance programs that address economic barriers to school attendance.

Livelihood diversification ranked second, with strong interest in skill training programs matched to local opportunities, support for expanding herbal product businesses including capital assistance and market linkages, and help securing land rights to enable agricultural development. Community members expressed frustration that their traditional knowledge receives minimal recognition while others commercialize similar products profitably.

Healthcare access improvements were frequently mentioned, including establishing health facilities closer to settlements, addressing discrimination in government health services, and integrating traditional medicine knowledge into formal healthcare systems. Women particularly emphasized maternal healthcare needs given their negative experiences with institutional childbirth.

Basic infrastructure needs remain substantial, with demands for improved water supply, toilet facilities, electricity reliability, and road connectivity. Poor infrastructure perpetuates marginalization and limits livelihood opportunities. Language preservation emerged as a priority primarily among elders, who fear losing their linguistic heritage. Younger participants showed less concern, reflecting their pragmatic focus on mainstream integration for economic advancement.

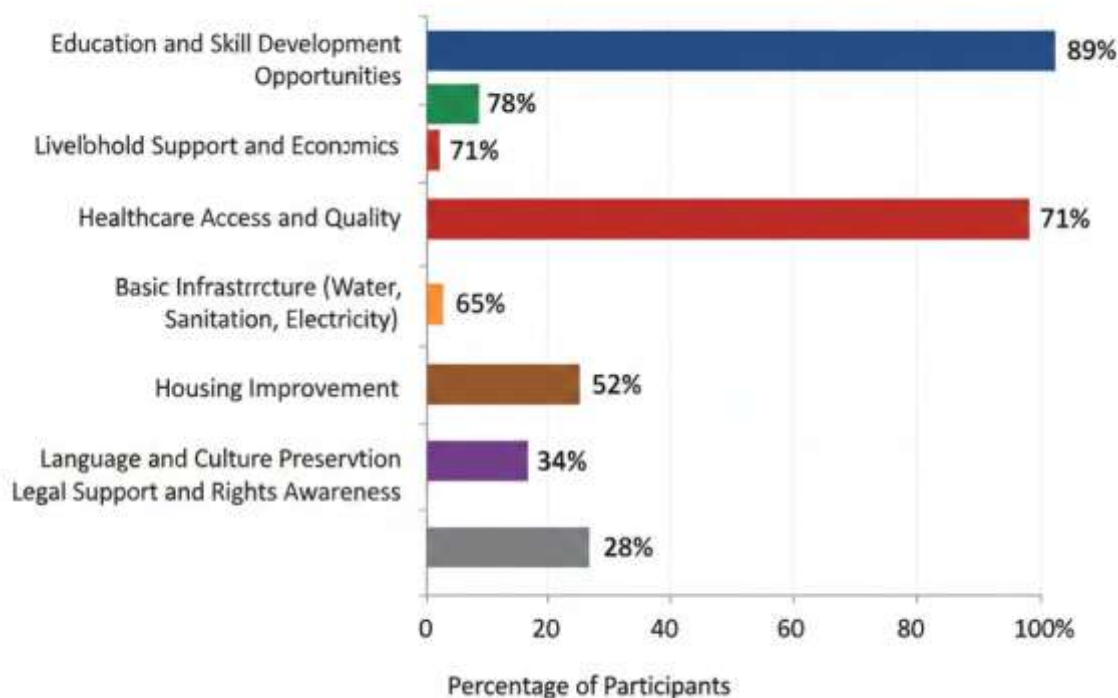


Figure 3: Community Development Priorities Ranking

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 Marginalization and Livelihood Disruption

The findings clearly demonstrate that the Hakki-Pikki community faces persistent marginalization characterized by poverty, limited education, poor health, and inadequate infrastructure. This marginalization has deep structural roots in the disruption of traditional livelihoods without adequate alternatives. When conservation policies criminalized bird catching and restricted forest access, the community lost economic foundations developed over generations. The alternatives available—agricultural labor, small trade, migration—generally provide low, unstable incomes insufficient for household needs.

This pattern reflects broader tensions between conservation and tribal rights documented across India and globally. Conservation policies designed from preservationist perspectives often ignore indigenous peoples' sustainable resource use and their rights to traditional territories. The Hakki-Pikki experience illustrates how conservation can inadvertently create poverty when implemented without considering dependent communities and providing genuine livelihood alternatives [13]

7.2 Ethnobotanical Knowledge as Asset and Vulnerability

The community's extensive plant knowledge represents both a valuable asset and a vulnerability. As an asset, this knowledge enables livelihood adaptation through herbal product businesses and maintains health through traditional medicine. Validation of traditional plant uses through scientific research demonstrates that this knowledge contains genuine therapeutic value accumulated through observation and experimentation over generations [14].

However, this knowledge faces vulnerability from multiple directions. Generational transmission is breaking down as youth lack forest access and incentives to learn. Legal ambiguities around forest product collection create risks for

knowledge application. Commercialization of traditional knowledge by outsiders proceeds without community benefit or consent. Knowledge erosion represents irreplaceable cultural loss and eliminates potential future applications.

7.3 Adaptation Strategies and Entrepreneurship

The emergence of herbal product businesses demonstrates community agency and entrepreneurial adaptation. Rather than passively accepting livelihood loss, some families transformed traditional knowledge into commercial enterprises. Women's leadership in these businesses reflects their ethnobotanical expertise and challenges gender stereotypes about entrepreneurship. These initiatives demonstrate that appropriate support could enable wider replication [15].

However, these businesses face constraints including limited capital restricting scale expansion, inadequate market linkages limiting sales reach, competition from established companies with superior marketing, and ongoing legal uncertainties about forest product collection. Development interventions supporting these enterprises through capital access, marketing assistance, and legal clarity could substantially improve outcomes.

7.4 Language Endangerment and Cultural Change

Vaagri language shift toward Kannada reflects rational individual responses to structural pressures. Young people correctly perceive that Kannada proficiency provides educational and economic advantages while Vaagri speaking marks them as tribal and potentially invites discrimination. However, aggregated individual decisions produce collective language loss with cultural consequences [16].

Language preservation requires addressing both immediate pressures driving shift and creating positive incentives for retention. This might involve Vaagri instruction in schools, documentation and promotion of Vaagri literature and media, and efforts to reduce discrimination against tribal identities that make language shift seem necessary for advancement.

7.5 Development Program Gaps

Limited penetration of government programs reflects several factors. Information gaps mean many eligible community members remain unaware of available schemes. Procedural complexity creates barriers for people with limited literacy and bureaucratic familiarity. Documentation requirements exclude those lacking formal land titles and identity documents. Geographic remoteness means services concentrate in towns rather than tribal settlements. Discrimination sometimes impedes access even when people seek assistance.

Addressing these gaps requires outreach efforts that bring information to communities, simplified procedures accommodating limited literacy, flexible documentation requirements recognizing tribal circumstances, service delivery in settlements rather than requiring travel to towns, and accountability mechanisms addressing discrimination in program implementation.

7.6 Toward Culturally Appropriate Development

The study's findings suggest several principles for culturally appropriate development interventions. First, interventions should build on existing strengths, particularly ethnobotanical knowledge, rather than imposing external models. Supporting herbal enterprises leverages existing assets while creating economically viable livelihoods. Second, interventions must address structural constraints including land rights, market access, and legal ambiguities rather than focusing only on individual capacity building. Third, participatory design involving community members in planning ensures interventions address actual priorities rather than externally imposed agendas. Fourth, cultural preservation deserves integration into economic development rather than treatment as separate concerns.

8. CONCLUSION

This study documents the contemporary situation of the Hakki-Pikki tribal community in Shivamogga and Davanagere districts, revealing persistent marginalization alongside adaptive resilience. The community faces substantial challenges including poverty, limited education, poor health, and inadequate infrastructure rooted in the disruption of traditional livelihoods by conservation policies and environmental changes. Despite these challenges, the Hakki-Pikki retain valuable ethnobotanical knowledge and demonstrate entrepreneurial adaptation through herbal product businesses.

Several key findings emerge. First, traditional livelihoods centered on bird catching and forest product gathering have largely collapsed due to legal restrictions, forcing diversification into low-paid agricultural labor, continued but legally ambiguous forest product collection, and emerging herbal businesses. Second, educational attainment remains extremely low, limiting economic opportunities and perpetuating poverty across generations. Third, the community maintains substantial medicinal plant knowledge that provides livelihood opportunities and healthcare benefits, though transmission to younger generations is breaking down. Fourth, the Vaagri language faces endangerment as younger people shift toward Kannada for educational and economic reasons. Fifth, government development programs theoretically available to scheduled tribes reach the community minimally due to information gaps, procedural barriers, and implementation failures.

Effective interventions require multi-dimensional approaches. Education initiatives must address both access and quality, providing infrastructure in tribal settlements, scholarships sufficient to offset economic barriers to school attendance, and culturally responsive teaching that respects rather than denigrates tribal identity. Livelihood development should prioritize support for herbal product enterprises through capital access, skill training in business management and marketing, facilitation of market linkages, and legal clarity around forest product collection. Formal recognition and protection of traditional knowledge through documentation initiatives, benefit-sharing arrangements when knowledge is commercialized, and integration of traditional medicine into healthcare systems would honor community assets while creating opportunities.

Language preservation requires active intervention including Vaagri instruction in schools, documentation of oral traditions, and promotion of Vaagri media. Basic infrastructure improvements addressing water, sanitation, electricity, and connectivity remain essential for dignified living conditions and economic development. Crucially, all interventions must employ participatory approaches that center community voices in planning and implementation rather than imposing external agendas.

The Hakki-Pikki experience offers lessons beyond this specific community. Their situation illustrates broader tensions between conservation and indigenous rights, between cultural preservation and economic advancement, and between traditional knowledge systems and modern markets. Resolving these tensions requires moving beyond simplistic dichotomies toward integrated approaches that recognize cultural identity and economic wellbeing as complementary rather than competing goals. Development that erases cultural distinctiveness in pursuit of economic integration ultimately impoverishes both individuals and society. Conversely, cultural preservation that ignores genuine economic needs perpetuates poverty. The challenge involves creating pathways that enable communities to maintain cultural identity while accessing educational and economic opportunities.

Future research should extend this documentation to other Hakki-Pikki settlements, conduct detailed linguistic analysis of Vaagri, systematically record ethnobotanical knowledge before generational loss proceeds further, and evaluate intervention effectiveness over time. Longitudinal studies could track how development initiatives and broader social changes impact community wellbeing and cultural preservation. Comparative analysis across different tribal communities facing similar transitions could identify common patterns and successful adaptation strategies.

Ultimately, the Hakki-Pikki deserve development approaches that respect their dignity, value their knowledge, and support their aspirations while enabling them to define their own futures. This research contributes toward that goal by

documenting current conditions, analyzing challenges, and proposing culturally grounded interventions designed in dialogue with community members themselves.

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