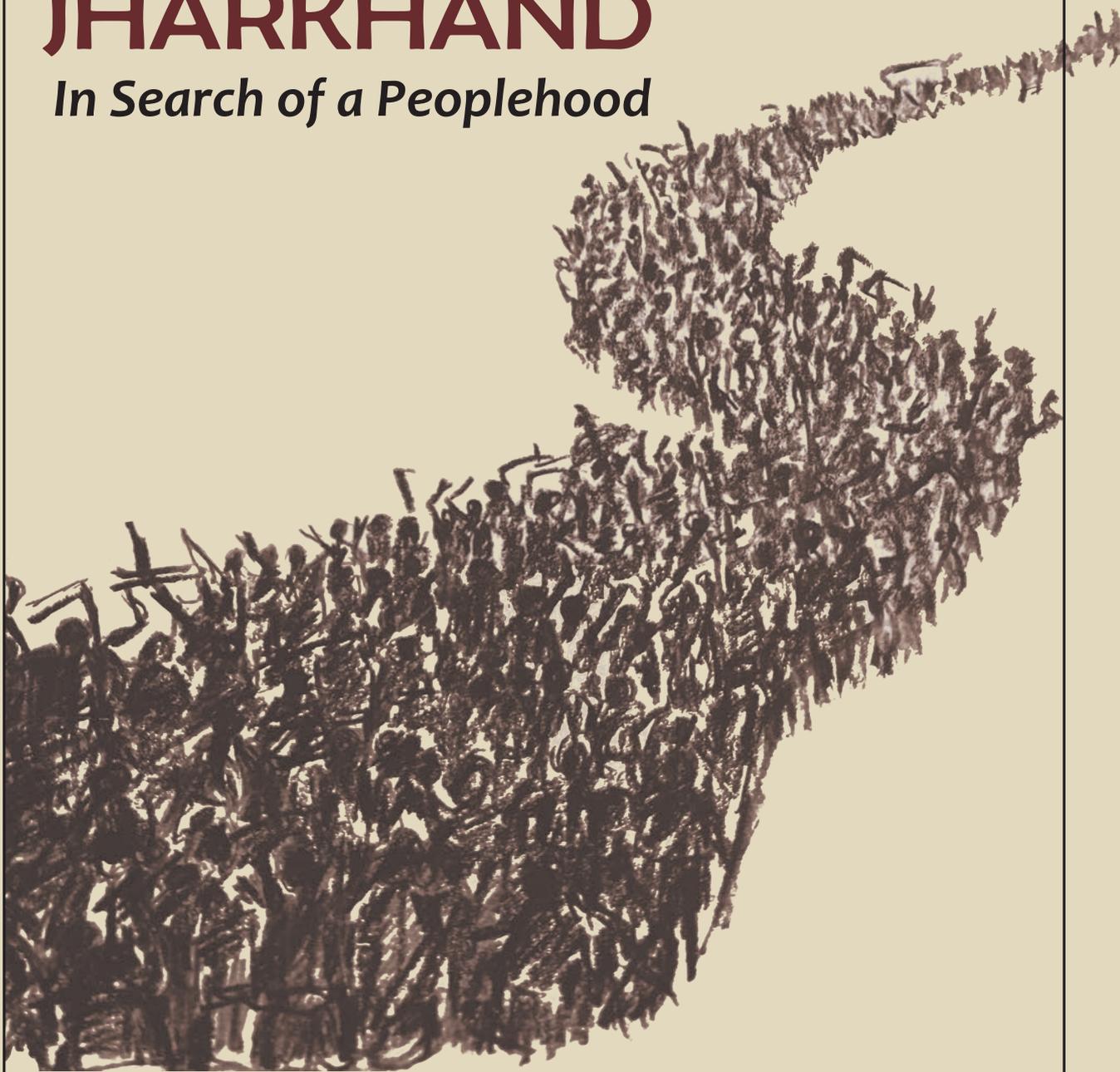


THE ADIVASIS OF JHARKHAND

In Search of a Peoplehood



Edited by **Kumar Rana & Devika Modi**

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Kumar Rana and Devika Modi

Contributors

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The Adivasis of Jharkhand: In Search of a Peoplehood
*A book describing the socio-economic and
political conditions of the individual Adivasi communities of Jharkhand*
Edited by Kumar Rana, Devika Modi

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ADVANCE PRAISES FOR THE BOOK

The Adivasi civilization of Chhotanagpur and Santhal Pargana is a treasure, not only for India but for the entire world. This engaging report will help us all to value that civilization and learn from it.

—*Jean Dreze*
Visiting Professor
Ranchi University

This book highlights the deep-rooted values of democracy, equality and ecological sustainability amongst the Adivasis of Jharkhand, while at the same time pointing to the persistent disadvantages they confront in modern India. Through a careful presentation of available data on education, health and livelihoods, and the variations amongst Adivasi groups, the book makes a call for justice: the recognition of Adivasis as co-citizens and teachers, not just marginalised populations; the redistribution of resources and services to make available equal opportunities; and ensuring representation in critical domains of governance and livelihoods. A must read for policymakers and practitioners in Jharkhand and more widely.

—*Nitya Rao*
Professor
Gender and Development, University of East Anglia, UK

Over the years, the crisis of the adivasis has deepened with the issues that have not been addressed previously, and the newer ones have been accumulating. It is apparent in the report that the majority of the people still rely more on their traditional livelihoods that are based on Jal, Jamin and Jungle than the life centered around cities. It is because of the socio-cultural contradictions and deep rooted insecurities that make them hesitant to reside in cities. Being an Adivasi and having been working in the community for more than three decades, I can visualize the realities of the report presented. The figure shows us a mirror where the Adivasis of Jharkhand in particular and of the country in general stand in modern development parameters. Aima sarhao.

—*Boro Baski, PhD,*
Trustee of Ghosaldanga Bishnubati Adibasi
Trust and the co-founder of Rolf Schoembs Vidyashram,
Santiniketan, West Bengal.

A well written document which is easy to read and understand. I highly recommend this book to those seeking to understand the current thinking of the Adivasi. This book moves on from the idea that Adivasidom is limited to the CNT and SPT Act. Most tomes written on the Adivasi is the view from Outside looking In. Here is a book which addresses that shortcoming. As societies evolve, the rather archaic view has been that Adivasi Society is stuck in a timer warp and have not evolved. The essays use data, skilfully edited, to provide a very current picture of Adivasi Society. I am sure readers will enjoy the book and gain a lot of knowledge of communities that are largely ignored but exploited for commercial gain.

—*Jayant Jaypal Singh*
Activist and son of Jaipal Singh Munda.

Tribal emotional outbursts against injustice are seldom accompanied by organized hard facts. The language of data happens to be more convincing and compelling for the redressal of popular grievances and rights predation. The present volume would be of immense help to the tribal social movements and the policy makers as well. The struggle against injustice is after all a battle of wits.

—*Samar Bosu Mullick*
Institute of Community Forest Governance (ICFG)
and Jharkhand Jangal Bachao Andolan (JJBA)

This book is a rare feat of comprehensive and systematic engagement with each Adivasi community in Jharkhand. Grounded in their everyday economic, social, and cultural lives, accompanied by social interfaces and reciprocity, and in shared historical and contemporary economic, political, social, and cultural experiences, it introduces an innovative lens for seeing them as communities in search of peoplehood.

—*Virginius Xaxa*
Visiting professor at the Institute for Human Development (IHD)
New Delhi

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FOREWORD

Scheduled Tribes (STs), often referred to as Adivasis, remain among the most disadvantaged communities in India. They make up a little more than 8% of the country's population, yet continue to fall behind other social groups on many social and economic indicators. While most ST communities live in hilly and forested regions, some are also found in the plains. Their ways of life vary widely, with clear differences across tribes in livelihoods, living standards, cultural practices and languages.

Jharkhand has one of the highest shares of tribal population in the country, with STs accounting for over 26%. Despite this, the state's tribal communities lag behind many other tribal groups in human development outcomes and related indicators. Jharkhand is home to 32 tribal communities, eight of which are classified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). Some groups, such as the Santhal, are numerically large, while others have very small populations. They also differ significantly in economic conditions, language and culture. This book offers a concise analytical account of their development trajectories and cultural life. Each of the 32 communities is introduced with brief notes on their livelihoods, education and other key aspects.

The Institute for Human Development (IHD), and especially its Eastern Regional Centre (IHD-ERC) in Ranchi, has a strong mandate to study tribal groups and other vulnerable populations. In nearly two decades, IHD-ERC has remained closely connected with Jharkhand's people, particularly its Adivasi communities. Drawing on this long engagement and on publicly available data, the IHD-ERC team has put together a book that introduces both general readers and professionals to the philosophically and culturally rich, yet socio-economically disadvantaged, world of Jharkhand's Adivasis.

Equally noteworthy is the way this book has been developed: through a collective and deeply consultative process. I hope readers will find it engaging and informative. I appreciate the efforts of my colleagues at IHD-ERC, Ranchi, and especially the editors, Shri Kumar Rana and Dr. Devika Modi, for bringing this volume to fruition.

New Delhi
24 November 2025

Alakh N. Sharma
Professor and Director
Institute for Human Development

PREFACE

Adivasis of Jharkhand: In Search of a Peoplehood is a significant scholarly contribution that revisits the historical, cultural, and developmental trajectories of the Adivasi communities of Jharkhand. Edited by Kumar Rana and Devika Modi, the volume represents a rigorous and ethically grounded engagement with the long and unfinished journey of Adivasis toward recognition, dignity, and self-definition. The editors and contributors deserve commendation for producing a work that is simultaneously empirical, analytical, and reflective—an uncommon synthesis in contemporary scholarship on Indigenous societies in India.

The volume stands out for its balanced combination of empirical precision and interpretive depth. Its tripartite structure—contextual introduction, community profiles, and interpretive lessons—reflects a carefully conceived academic design. The contributors employ interdisciplinary methodologies to interrogate the historical processes that have shaped Adivasi life from the colonial to the contemporary period. The analyses of demography, education, health, and economy are grounded in reliable data while remaining attentive to lived experience and moral implications. Particularly commendable is the book's ability to critique the state's developmental paradigm and societal neglect without lapsing into romanticism. It exposes how the marginalization of Adivasis is not a reflection of their incapacity but a symptom of the moral and ecological failures of the dominant civilization itself.

Conceptually, the volume marks a paradigm shift in Adivasi studies. It moves beyond the limited frameworks of welfare, assimilation, and ethnic essentialism to articulate a more dialogical and relational understanding of “peoplehood.” This notion of peoplehood transcends administrative and ethnic categories, positing instead a moral, spiritual, and ecological framework for community life. The book thereby redefines Adivasis not as passive recipients of development but as co-citizens, moral interlocutors, and custodians of alternative epistemologies. In doing so, it transforms the language of policy into that of partnership, and the discipline of anthropology into a space of mutual learning and ethical encounter. The paradigm shift lies in recognizing Adivasi worldviews as vital to reimagining development, democracy, and sustainability in the twenty-first century.

For policymakers, bureaucrats, and development professionals, this volume is both diagnostic and prescriptive. The empirically rich chapters provide substantive evidence to inform inclusive policy design, particularly in areas of education, nutrition, and land rights. More importantly, the interpretive insights urge a reorientation of governance—from paternalistic interventionism to participatory partnership. The book calls for listening to community wisdom, engaging with Adivasi institutions, and respecting local knowledge systems as legitimate sources of development thinking. Non-governmental organizations and

civil society actors will find in it valuable guidance for formulating culturally sensitive and ethically informed interventions.

The volume's most enduring contribution lies in advancing the discourse on Adivasi peoplehood in Jharkhand. Through its nuanced ethnographic studies and reflections on Sarna religion, associative identity, and Adivasi literatures, it recovers the plural and dynamic character of Adivasi self-understanding. It highlights how traditions of consensus, gender balance, and ecological stewardship embody democratic and sustainable alternatives to the dominant developmental model. At the same time, the authors critically acknowledge internal social challenges, demonstrating intellectual honesty and reflexivity in addressing issues such as gender inequality and harmful traditional practices.

In essence, 'Adivasis of Jharkhand: In Search of a Peoplehood' is both a scholarly intervention and a moral invitation. It compels the academic community, policymakers, and citizens alike to reimagine justice, development, and democracy through the lens of reciprocity and ecological consciousness. The editors and contributors have rendered a distinguished service to Adivasi studies by giving intellectual and moral visibility to a people whose struggle for identity continues to define the conscience and future of India's democracy.

Dr (Fr) Joseph Marianus Kujur, SJ
Director, Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS)
Ranchi, Jharkhand

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We express our sincere gratitude to Professor Alakh Sharma, Director of the Institute for Human Development (IHD), whose guidance was instrumental in bringing this book to fruition. We are also deeply thankful to Professors Joseph Marianus Kujur, Jean Drèze, Dev Nathan, Nitya Rao, Virginius Xaxa, Dr. Boro Baskey, Mr. Jayant Jaipal Singh, and Dr. Samar Bosu Mullick, who encouraged us in this endeavour and offered valuable advice at various stages of the writing process.

Our colleagues at IHD, New Delhi—especially Ms. Priyanka Tyagi, Ms. Jyoti Girish, Dr. Swati Datta, and Dr. Bhim Reddy—have been a continual source of motivation and practical support. We are grateful to Ms. Mary Topno and Mr. Rajiv Ranjan Kumar for their assistance in many aspects of the work. We owe special thanks to Ms. Anwasha Rana for her editorial support. Mr. Amlan Bishnu's artwork has greatly enhanced the visual appeal of the book, and we are thankful to Mr. Subhamoy Roy for permitting the use of some of his drawings.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to the publishers, particularly Mr. Basu Acharya—himself an eminent scholar—for placing their trust in the significance of this work.

We are especially indebted to the Adivasi community members, village elders, youth groups, women's collectives and local leaders with whom we had the privilege of interacting during various project works. Experiences gathered from those projects have deeply enriched this book. We extend our sincere thanks to the field researchers who contributed to those projects.

We are also grateful to the wider network of scholars, activists and practitioners whose discussions, comments and shared resources have informed our thinking. Their perspectives have added depth to our understanding of the multiple layers that shape Adivasi life in Jharkhand.

Team IHD-ERC

INTRODUCTION

Adivasi Co-citizens as Teachers

Time to return. The researcher had spent a full agricultural calendar year in the village. Satisfied with his accomplishment—having completed fieldwork in the village—he was arranging to leave the next morning. As he was packing his things, Dhena Marandi, his research assistant in the village, came to invite him to a village gathering on the street outside the house where he was living. “What’s the meeting about?” he asked. “Come, and you will see”, Dhena replied. The people had gathered (people mean men, generally women are not made part of the village councils. Although women in Adivasi societies enjoy relative freedom than their non-Adivasi counterparts, they do not have equal status in ownership of property, social participation, and decision making). The event began with the serving of rice beer in leaf-cups. After the first round of drinks, an elderly man broke the silence, “The rice beer is very nice, but there is no *mera* in it.” The Santals, like other Adivasis of Jharkhand, are fond of riddles and speaking with double meanings. The *mera* is the residual of the fermented rice that is whirled and rinsed to make the rice beer. Here, however, the meaning of the interrogative sentence was, “the drink is good, but tell us what the drink is for? What is the purpose of the gathering?” At that, *majhi haram*, the village headman, who was very friendly with the researcher, addressed the gathering: “Listen, everybody. The meeting is in honour of the *mahasay* (in Santali, *mahasay* stands for a teacher; but it also stands for any educated man).¹ He has lived with us for a whole year. Now that he is leaving tomorrow morning, we have gathered here to bid him goodbye.” The researcher was surprised, for he had not slightest idea about the farewell. Following the announcement, everybody spoke about how much they had enjoyed the researcher’s company. Finally, the researcher was asked to say something. He thanked them and said a few words.

When he was done, Dhena made a supplementary remark: “If there is any mistake in any of the *mahasay*’s words or deeds, please forgive him.” It was as if someone had slapped the researcher in the face: why hadn’t he thought before, that no matter how careful he was, his words or actions may seem wrong to someone in the village? What happened is not a big deal; what could have happened is crucial. While the researcher’s educational and social upbringing had failed him, his illiterate companion had fixed it: on this occasion, it is immaterial what you think; what is important is what others think of you. You can only be respected when you can

1 Interestingly, a female teacher is called *cicit dai*, but an educated woman does not have a feminine of *mahasay*. Whether it is related with the rarity of educated women among the Santals or some kind of gendered imagination that has resulted in the absence of a feminine of *mahasay* is not known.

respect others—acknowledging the possibility of making mistakes is a form of respect. At the same time, he taught him what friendship can be. Friendship means the union of the hearts of two different people—it is the duty and right of a friend to say what the other one has forgotten to mention. The Adivasi people—Scheduled Tribe in constitutional and administrative nomenclature²—have a treasure of such foundational knowledge, which they do not hesitate to share with others, no matter if the ‘other’ considers them enemies.

Discussion on the Adivasis in the public often tends to take the route of seeing the communities as ‘them’—‘others’. A cross-pollination of narrow self-interest, leading to deceit and exploitation and resistance to learn from others resulting in ignorance, blights the vision of the supposed mainstream society. As a result, it fails to see the immense treasure of cultural heritage of the Adivasis and thus sacrifices the broader interest of the Indian society at large. For example, contrasting sharply with the stratified deliberation in Indian polity and social behaviour, where possession of power determines which voices are heard, the Adivasis inherit an elementary value of equality of reasoning. Everybody in the community, generally speaking, has the right to speak. This draws on and leads to relying on consensus in making decisions in social life, starting from the family level. If even the smallest child in the house wants to say something, it must be listened to; it cannot be silenced by saying, “You are a child, you don’t know anything.”

Again, every person present at the village meeting must be listened to. Despite several counter-influences contributing to the eradication of traditionally preserved values, one can still witness many such village meetings which last for several nights to reach a consensus by listening to all and scrutinising the views presented. There have even been cases where the initial majority view took a reverse turn. One of the authors of this book recollects one such meeting:

A villager was caught stealing vegetables from another villager’s garden. A village council meeting (*bicar*) was organised. All but one villager agreed upon imposing a certain amount of fine on the convict. The lone dissenter, however, remained adamant on his point: The amount of fine imposed upon the convict is so hefty that he will have no option but to steal again to pay it. The majority was also firm in setting an example to stop stealing. The council went on for several nights, but finally the dissenter convinced all the participants to change their minds. The fine was reduced.

The author mentioned above was then a child. He asked an elderly villager on the second or third day of the council, “Uncle, why is the *bicar* going on? Everybody except that one

2 According to the social scientist Virginius Xaxa, “Defining ‘tribe’ has conceptual as well as empirical problems for the academician. But this term of administrative convenience has now been adopted by the Adivasis themselves to mean the dispossessed, deprived people of a region. There is no claim to being the original inhabitants of that region, but a prior claim to the natural resources is asserted vis-a-vis the outsiders and the dominant caste. The Adivasi identity now gives the marginalised peoples self-esteem and pride” (Xaxa, (1999). However, for the purpose of our work, we find the term Adivasi more appropriate as it adds to the conceptualization of the concerned peoples in terms of historical rootedness. The richness of the cultural and moral inheritance manifested in the term Adivasi immediately build an imagination of

person has agreed to the decision, so why are you listening to his arguments?” “Look, when a stick is loosened from the *torodang* (fishing trap made of bamboo sticks stitched together), it does not affect fishing—the fish cannot make a way through the narrow gap created from the loosened stick. But, there will be a much bigger problem. The gap created by the loosening of the first stick will loosen another stick, then another, and another. Finally, you will lose the entire *torodang*. Similarly, one person’s dissatisfaction does not matter much in the immediate count. But, in the long run, it matters a lot, since the sole dissatisfied person will start infecting others, and one day the entire community will fall apart.

What can be a better form of democracy? Jaipal Singh Munda, one of the most prominent leaders of the Adivasis, who witnessed in his society the expansive tradition of valuing consensus and achieving it through intensive deliberations of ‘all’, had asked this. His collective experience led him to proudly announce at the Constituent Assembly, “You cannot teach democracy to the Adivasi people; you have to learn democratic ways from them. They are the most democratic people on earth.”³ His announcement is, indeed, an echo of the indigenous peoples of the world. For example, as the economic historian Amiya Bagchi underscores, the indigenous peoples of the Americas “were in effect pushed back to the levels of civilization below those they had attained before the arrival of the Europeans.”⁴ What kind of civilization was it? Doug Good Feather, an American Indian, writes, “Indigenous cultures strive to identify and honour each person’s unique identity. They collectively support each person’s distinct value and contribution to the community. This comes from the mindset that everyone is important because everyone is a teacher.”⁵

Adivasi Peoplehood: An Associated Living World

The “everyone” of the Adivasi people goes beyond the human communitarian boundary to form a conglomeration of all living and non-living beings. In the words of Nirmal Minz, “Land defines our personhood and reciprocity. The concept of nature as our relative makes us treat our relatives with respect, and deal with them justly, be them other human beings, trees, animals and insects, water, air or sunshine.”⁶ Minz’s understanding not only applies to the Jharkhandi Adivasis but is a common current across the Adivasi societies in the globe. For example, the “Anishinaabeg (plural of Anishinaabe) understood themselves to be related not only to each other but to all of creation.” The Anishinaabeg, an indigenous community living around the Great Lakes region of Canada and the United States, see all the living and non-living beings as inseparable. Take the word, Nii’kinaaganaa. It is broken down this way:

Nii: “I am” or “my.” Kinaa: “all of them.” Ganaa: “relatives, my relatives.” The phrase could mean any of these things: I am my relatives, all of them. I am related to everything. All my relations.

3 Munda (1947), Speech at the Constituent Assembly, 24 January, 1947

4 Bagchi (2005)

5 Good Feather (2021)

6 Minz (2007)

The Anishinaabeg language “does not divide into male and female the way European languages do. It divides into animate and inanimate. The world is alive with beings that are other than human, and we are all related, with responsibilities to each other.”⁷ It is not unique to Anishinaabe. Many Adivasi communities across the world have the same sense of relatedness. From the folk tales of India to the origin myths of the Seneca Indians to the animal tales of the Orang Asli people of Malayasia, we find a common thread that connects human beings with their natural world, where all beings are considered living. For example, in the Santal folk tales⁸ and Orang Asli tales of animals⁹, birds and animals are found in conversation with each other. In the Seneca tales, a stone tells a story to a boy.¹⁰ In the folk tales of southern Indian Adivasis, stories take human forms.¹¹ A Wampanoag legend of Aquinnah (Martha’s Vineyard in the coastal region of Massachusetts) has a moving description of the tribespeople’s turning into whales, to avoid the repression of the invading white colonisers.¹²

It is one of the biggest ironies in the modern world that the Adivasis, who form the most expansive global community by sharing a common philosophical understanding, are physically, economically, and socially pushed to the margins.

The significance of Adivasi life and worldview offers the crucial lesson of nurturing human relationships with nature. The Mundas of Sarwada told John Baptist Hoffman, the maker of the famous *Encyclopaedia Mundarica*, “We, the Mundas (Hodoko) will not be happy in a country that has no forest.” Hoffman was so impressed with the statement that he incorporated this into his magnum opus.¹³ Even today, despite the most brutal attacks of the modern world on indigenous life and nature, living in and conversing with nature remains a distinct characteristic of the Adivasis. One such example is the following of the historically established prohibition on cutting down young trees unless unavoidably necessary. In many forest-covered villages, they are seen walking for miles in search of dry wood. Even today, the people of the Mal Paharia community do not set foot on the land for at least three years after harvesting the part of the forest they choose for their traditional cultivation of *Kuram*. Their cultivation does not require a plough or a harrow. At the beginning of the monsoon, two people cut down a part of the forest trees above the ground, and with the help of a hoe or a spade, they bury the seeds of maize, sorghum, etc. under them. When the crops ripen, they cut them down and do not tread on that path. When the Santals of that region need wood, they carry dry branches from cut trees for their *kuram*, no matter how long the journey may be.

Contrasting sharply with the value of valuing everything—humans, creatures, forest, hills, rivers, pebbles—humans in the name of modernity have pushed the planet to the brink of

7 Krwec (2022)

8 Bodding (1925, 1927, 1929)

9 Liat Ong and Dylang (2021)

10 Curtin (1922)

11 Ramanujan (2009)

12 Lee (2025)

13 Bosu Mullick (2022)

destruction. In Jean Drèze's words:

We have reached a point, perhaps for the first time in history, where there is a real danger that the human race will self-destruct relatively soon, or perhaps go back to the middle ages. Nuclear war, climate change, genetic engineering, pandemics and a worldwide economic crisis are just five examples of possible ways in which this could happen.¹⁴

This contrast is tragically evident in deforestation data: Jharkhand alone lost over 5% of its forest cover between 2001 and 2020, mostly to mining and infrastructure projects—often in violation of the Forest Rights Act (2006), which legally safeguards Adivasi land claims.

Drawing on the Adivasi life experiences, Drèze suggests that only a “new culture of human cooperation across the world” can save the planet, including humans. It requires:

Creating the conditions that make cooperation possible. If we are to develop this culture of cooperation and solidarity, we would do well to take a leaf from the Adivasi way of life. To say that the Adivasi way of life is the wave of the future may sound like wishful thinking, but failing that, there may be no future at all.¹⁵

Adivasis, of course, are more than willing to share their knowledge, cultural heritage, and warmth of humanness. But, this cannot be a one-way traffic. The greed of the ruling order has bereft them of their forests, land, rivers and vast nature. The historian Bhangiya Bhukhya describes how in the Adivasi heartland of Central Indian Gondwanaland, “the British colonial rulers conquered the hill and forest tracts, and initially sought to integrate the Adivasis into wider society as property-owning peasant subjects. They viewed forest communities and their territories as essentially ‘wild’, treating them in a different way from the settled people of the plains.”¹⁶ The same history was thrust upon the Adivasis of Jharkhand. As Ramesh Sharan points out:

The alienation and restoration of Adivasi land rights has been one of the most complex and sensitive issues in Jharkhand. Over the years the Adivasis have witnessed continued dispossession of both individual and community control over their resources. The continued alienation has not only intensified their poverty, but also seriously threatened their identity in their homeland.... The history of the implementation of the laws protecting the Adivasis has been replete with violations.¹⁷

The history of displacement of the Adivasis has no exclusive geography. The political-economic geography of the present world is the geography of vandalizing the Adivasi world. As Joseph Lee re-describes the history and geography of the Aquinnah Wampanoag peoples:

like so many other previously undisturbed Indigenous lands, Aquinnah could not escape the American land-gobbling machine.... The discovery of natural resources

14 Dreze (2022)

15 Ibid

16 Bhukya (2013)

17 Sharan (2005)

on Indian land would be quickly followed by American encroachment onto it. The government either turned a blind eye or actively helped settlers violate its own treaties. When gold was discovered in the Black Hills, Americans eagerly poured in, violating the recent Treaty of Laramie, which had declared the Sioux the sole owners of the land. When the Ojibwe refused to leave their timber-rich land, the government tried to legislate their land claims into thin air so that Americans would have unrestricted access to the billions of dollars to be made from Minnesota timber.¹⁸

The Adivasis offer another very important suggestion about gender relation. Despite prevailing inequalities between men and women, the Adivasis generally follow customs that attach much more importance to equality between men and women than what is, to a great extent, absent in mainstream society. In a conversation between an illiterate Santal Adivasi man and an author on the origin of the name of a place, Lodha-Ludhni (man and woman of Lodha Adivasi community), the Santal man connected it with the customary Adivasi way of invoking man and wife together: “Be it in the field [to cultivate land] or in the forest [to harvest fruits or collect firewood or leaves] or in the haat [local weekly/periodic markets], man and woman go together. But, Dikus are seldom seen as a couple – the woman is always confined to the house, as if in a jail, and the man is always outside.” That did not mean, however, that Adivasis enjoyed equal status in society. As the man recognized, Adivasi women had to shoulder much more workload than the men did: “The woman in the Adivasi household has to do the household chores, and farm work in their own field, and in others’ fields – as a daily wage earner.... Man enjoys more power, woman enjoys less. Yet, among the Adivasis this difference of power is much less than that among the Dikus.”¹⁹ There is a strong element of reciprocity and justice in gender relations, which is being disrupted by structural reasons including land alienation and migration for survival. Women’s agency is not directed towards one-upmanship but rather toward building harmony with nature, negotiating social relationships and building an alternate definition of power as productive.²⁰

In a word, Adivasis are not only organized as groups or community, but form a peoplehood, which may be understood as a historically and morally constituted form of collective existence grounded in reciprocity, equality, and relational interdependence—both among human beings and between humans and the natural world. It extends beyond administrative or ethnographic categories such as “tribe” or “community” to signify a shared moral and epistemic orientation through which individuals recognise themselves as co-constitutive members of a larger living order. Peoplehood represents a mode of belonging that fuses ethical, social, and ecological dimensions of life. It embodies a democratic imagination rooted in empathy, justice, and cooperation, offering an alternative paradigm to hierarchical and extractive models of modernity and citizenship.

18 Lee (2025)

19 Rana (2022)

20 Rao (2024)

Whose Misfortune?

Despite inheriting such prosperity, they have to live a life of utter uncertainty. In return, they have been given hunger, poverty, premature death and illiteracy as “gifts”. As per Census 2011, Jharkhand’s Adivasi literacy rate (57%) is significantly below the state average (67%). The percentage figures of primary, higher secondary and college education completion rate among the Adivasis were only 14, 3, and 2 per cent respectively. Child mortality is alarmingly high: 57 out of every 1,000 Adivasi children die before their fifth birthday, compared to the national average of 41 per 1,000. One in two families of the Adivasis fall below the poverty line, 57 out of every 1000 children born in their homes die before their fifth birthday, and four out of every ten Adivasis are illiterate.

Across the country, Adivasis are deprived of education, health, and employment. A greater violation of their rights is the deprivation of their constitutional status. For example, in Assam, the contribution of Adivasis from the Jharkhand cultural area to the tea gardens, the agricultural fields, and the economic prosperity is immense. However, in this state, they do not get Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. The reason is class-based: If they get this status, at least a section of Adivasis will get the opportunity to improve their standard of living by using constitutional protections, but who will work in tea gardens for incredibly cheap wages if they get it? The government is, clearly, motivated to act on behalf of the Assamese ruling class or their representatives. To add to this, there is the unimaginable violence committed by some Adivasi groups, like the Bodos of Assam, against the Adivasis of Jharkhand with the patronage of the government. During the ethnic violence in the Kokrajhar district of Assam, particularly in the late 1990s and early 2000s, thousands of Santals were displaced and dozens were killed, with entire villages razed to the ground. Human rights report from the period document these targeted attacks, often with the silent complicity of the state.

Thousands of Santal villagers were forced to flee to refugee camps. In the articulation of the High-Level Committee on Socio-economic, Health and Educational Status of Adivasi Communities of India, “Adivasi people find themselves placed in a subordinate position to outsiders in their own homeland and have developed a negative identity. Adivasi society is egalitarian, but they now have to deal with a hierarchical and exploitative society.”²¹

According to the committee, nearly 25 per cent of Adivasi households in Jharkhand engage in seasonal migration, often to work in brick kilns, rice mills, or as agricultural laborers under precarious conditions. These journeys are not only physically exhausting but also emotionally traumatic, particularly for women and children.²²

Deprivation of education and subsequent skill development has left the Adivasis to gain “entry into the working class as lowly paid unskilled workers, on a hire and fire basis. Every technologically sophisticated industry has a core of highly skilled workers. In the case of Jharkhand, this core has mostly been drawn from other regions of the country. The local people or the indigenous inhabitants, both Adivasi and non-Adivasi, have been relegated to a very

21 GoI (2014)

22 Ibid

special section of the proletariat: *khalasis*, peons, scavengers, etc.”²³

Are only the Adivasis being deprived through this? Isn't humanity at large being deprived of the long-running moral and cultural streams of Adivasi societies that Jaipal Singh Munda had communicated to the Indian leaders so eloquently? The problem is that the Adivasi question is generally not seen from the perspective of reciprocity; rather, it is viewed through the lens of power. The development of the Adivasis is thought of with a patronisingly benevolent attitude towards them: “Something must be done for them.” The effect of this otherness, on the one hand, obscures the vision, and on the other hand, further increases the distance that others have historically created with the Adivasis.

If the distance was created through colonial expansion, evicting the Adivasis from their lands, making them second-class citizens in their homeland, transforming a self-sufficient economy into one dependent absolutely on wage labour for subsistence, independent India has not done much to repair the damages done. A Santal woman activist spoke of a terrible realisation: “We, the men and women of Jharkhand, have a century-old relationship with mainland Bengal. Yet, the Bengali *munib* (master) does not speak Santali, and the Santal *munish* (labourer) does not speak Bangla. There is no room for conversation between us. It is so unfortunate that we live on the same earth, and yet, we are so different from each other.” This disconnect is not merely linguistic or cultural—it is institutional. Despite comprising over 26 per cent of Jharkhand's population, Adivasis are grossly underrepresented in public administration, with less than 5% occupying senior government positions.

It is not the Adivasis who have “othered” themselves; it is the state and larger society that has kept them perennially dependent upon wage work, leaving no opportunity to flourish by acquiring education, maintaining good health, and ensured participation in the public affairs—the job market, administration, policy making.

That the Adivasis are fellow citizens is often denied by supposedly mainstream Indians. That they lag behind others in modern education, science, and healthcare is because they have been neglected from crucial discourses and deprived of opportunities. In contrast, Adivasis are often held responsible for their poor achievements. If one reason for such neglect lies in the selfishness of the ruling sections of the society—to grow at the expense of others—the other reason is rooted in a carefully preserved ignorance about the Adivasis and their societies. Fighting for that opportunity together—in a sense of co-citizenship—is one thing, but it is also a major duty to free ourselves from the blind spot that India has voluntarily deprived itself of the various cultural and philosophical richness spread across the indigenous world. The idea that we need to “save them” while at the same time exploiting their natural resources but be unwilling to acknowledge their knowledge systems and wisdom is as disrespectful as it is foolish self-deception. Injustices and atrocities committed against the indigenous people cannot be eliminated without reciprocity and India cannot be transformed into a truly free and independent country without it. In Gopinath Mohanti's novel *Paraja*,²⁴ depicting the lives of the Paraja Adivasis of southern Odisha, Shukra Jani's god turns his back on him. That

23 Alam (1990)

24 Mohanty (1997)

turning away is a sign of a great crisis in India: the absence of empathy. Shukra Jani is a victim of that absence just as the country is a victim of self-deception.

Nature has given the Adivasis a spacious heart, where all mankind can comfortably fit in. The Adivasis, as Jean Drèze underscores, “remain one of the strongest bastions of egalitarian counter-culture in India today.” The so-called civilised world has a lot to learn from the great philosophical richness of the Adivasis about the concept and practice of democracy, egalitarianism, and justice. Indeed, in this bleak hour, when the human-made devastations of a myriad kind, natural calamity, pandemic and war, are making the existence of Earth uncertain, the readiness of the self-styled mainstream societies to learn from the Adivasis is a precondition to avert the catastrophe. What Adam Smith observed in the mid-eighteenth century about the Africans can be copy-pasted with minor changes to appreciate the Adivasis of our country. He wrote, “There is not a negro from the coast of Africa who does not, in this respect, possess a degree of magnanimity which the soul of his sordid master is too often scarce capable of conceiving.”²⁵ In other words, narrowing the knowledge gap and fostering interest in Adivasi life is important even from the standpoint of enlightened self-interest.

This book

This book seeks to respond to this moral imperative modestly by introducing the Adivasis of Jharkhand to a general readership. Adam Smith teaches us: “We can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us.”²⁶ The present exercise is to help remove “ourselves” of the prejudiced position which sees the Adivasis as “others” instead of seeing them as co-citizens, who not only deserve equal opportunities to flourish, but also have many things to offer to aid in the development of the country.

This book is an attempt to respond to that invitation. It is structured in three parts and across seven chapters. Part 1 contains the first four chapters, which provide an overview of the Adivasis of Jharkhand. Chapter 1 explains the demographic pattern and the changes over time. Chapter 2 presents the educational achievements of the Adivasis of Jharkhand. Chapter 3 examines the nutritional and health status of the Adivasis of Jharkhand. Chapter 4 describes the economic condition of the Adivasis of Jharkhand, and issues related to it. The four chapters together provide an analysis of the condition of Adivasis compared to the state’s overall population.

Their declining demographic share and marginal urban presence reflect displacement and weakened political voice, while fragile educational gains are undermined by steep dropouts, particularly among boys, and poor infrastructure in remote areas. Health outcomes remain deeply unequal, with Adivasi communities experiencing higher malnutrition, anaemia, and child mortality, alongside limited access to functional healthcare. Economically, their vulnerability is starkest: the 2023–24 consumption data shows Scheduled Tribes have the

25 Cited in Sen (2010)

26 Smith (2010)

lowest per capita expenditure in both rural and urban Jharkhand, far below state averages and strikingly behind socially advantaged groups, underscoring persistent marginalisation in livelihoods, income, and access to welfare. Yet, the resilience of Adivasi societies—seen in balanced sex ratios, strong community networks, and cultural cohesion—demonstrates the foundations of a more inclusive future. The enduring contrast, however, between resource-rich lands and impoverished lives, and between constitutional promises and daily deprivation, demands a conscious policy shift that addresses historical injustices through protection of land rights, equitable investment in education, health, and employment, and respect for Adivasi cultural traditions.

Part 2 contains two chapters (5 and 6). Chapter 5 presents detailed profiles of all 24 officially recognized Adivasi communities in the state, excluding the Particularly Vulnerable Adivasi Groups (PVTGs). In addition to outlining the socio-economic conditions of the individual communities, this section also highlights their distinctive cultural, linguistic, and economic characteristics.

Chapter describes the PVTG groups, focusing on their socio-economic status as well as their linguistic and cultural practices. These two sections and chapters together bring out the diverse world of the Adivasis of Jharkhand, characterized not only by wide variations in social and economic achievements but also by significant linguistic, religious, and cultural distinctions.

What is, however, especially important is not just the diversity itself but the similarities and intercreativities among the groups, which are of considerable significance. For example, despite belonging to different linguistic or socio-cultural origins, many groups share common surnames (e.g., Santal and Muinda, Munda and Oraon, Oraon and Kharia, Mahli and Santal, Ho and Munda, Oraon and Ho, and so on). Furthermore, a large proportion of Adivasis across various groups (46%) embrace a common religious belief—Sarna.

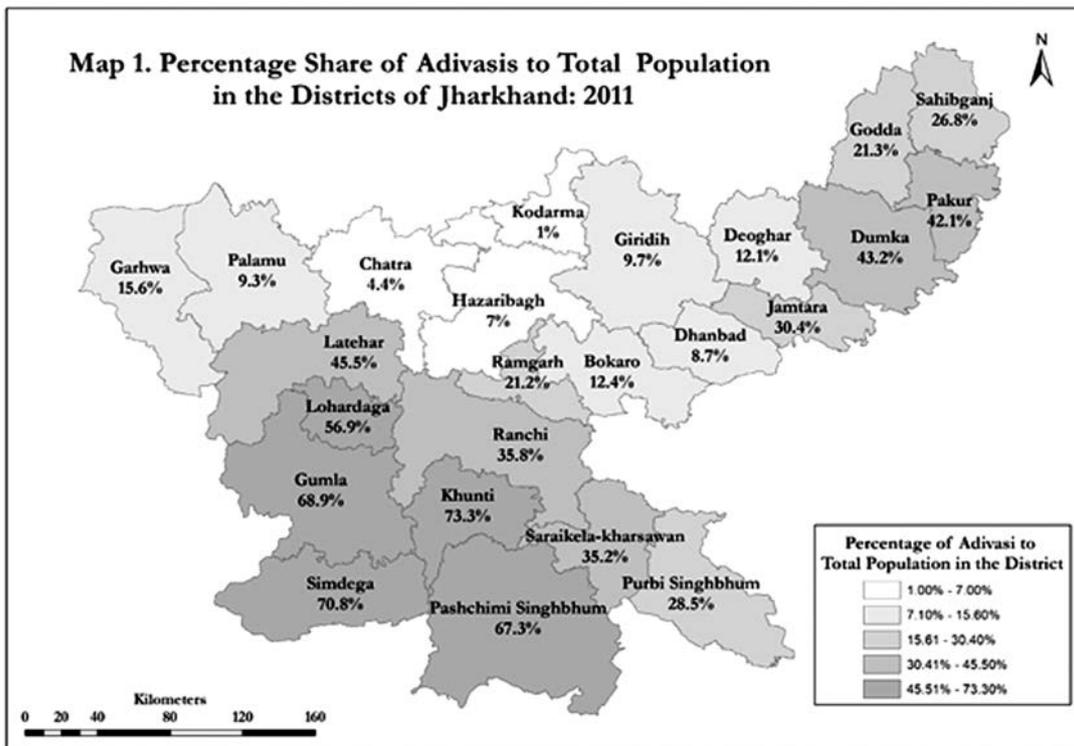
The issue of language is equally noteworthy. While the majority of Adivasis retain their mother tongues, some groups have adopted or inherited the languages of other, numerically dominant, communities. For instance, Santali speakers (29.3 lakhs) outnumber the Santal population (27.5 lakhs). In contrast, in some groups the number of speakers of their original languages is considerably smaller than their actual populations. For example, the speakers of Mundari and Kurukh (the language of the Oraons) number 9.4 lakhs and 9.3 lakhs respectively, whereas the corresponding populations of these groups are 12.3 lakhs and 17.2 lakhs.

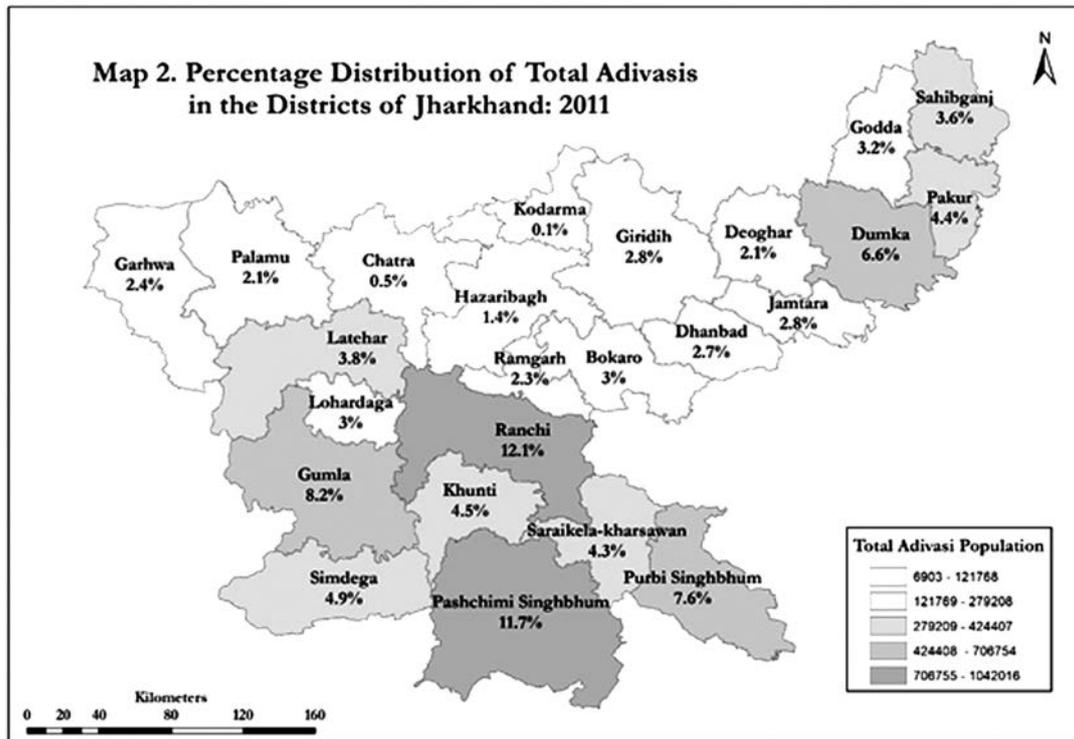
By bringing to the fore these important aspects of the lives of Adivasis in Jharkhand, these chapters contribute to a deeper social understanding, particularly of the unifying undercurrents flowing through the diverse population groups. The chapters also include maps that illustrate the geographical distribution of the individual communities.

Part 3 contains a concluding chapter (7), which puts forward a set of actionable policy priorities, while also exploring how Adivasi and non-Adivasi communities can engage in reciprocal learning—sharing values and practices that can enrich Indian society as a whole. This structure reflects a central argument of the book: that understanding Adivasi life is not

simply about documenting marginality, but about rethinking the frameworks of citizenship, development, and coexistence through a more equal, respectful dialogue.

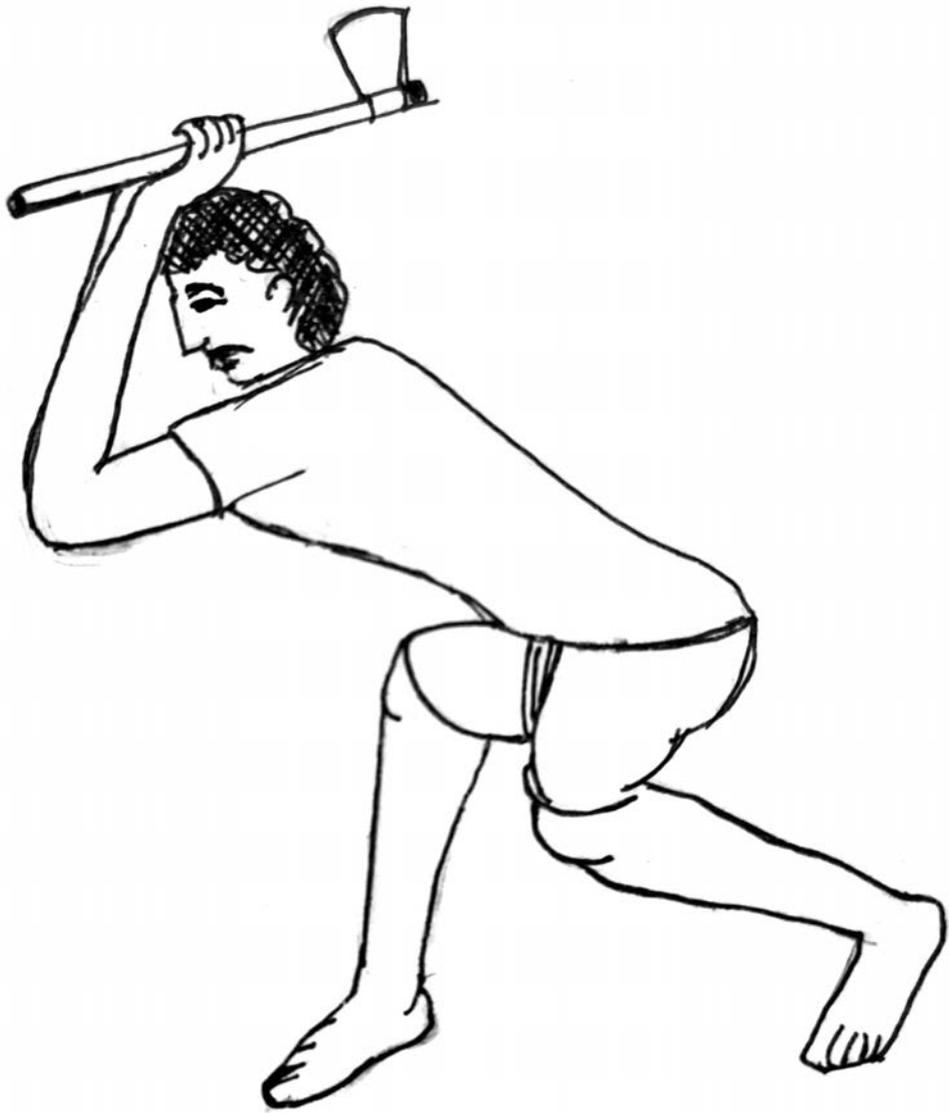
This book, then, is a modest response to a deep moral and civic imperative: to reintroduce the Adivasis of Jharkhand not as marginal ‘others’ but as co-citizens—teachers, thinkers, and caretakers of a cultural and ecological heritage that holds lessons for us all. As Adam Smith urged, true understanding requires distancing ourselves from our narrow positions and seeing through the eyes of others. In learning from Adivasi societies, we are not just righting a historical wrong—we are reclaiming a future rooted in justice, humility, and solidarity.





Part I

WHERE DO THE ADIVASIS
OF JHARKHAND STAND?



A Contrasting Presentiment

“What a splendid experience it was! Tall buildings, glittering shopping centres with glass facades, different cars of imported make, mobile phones, internet cafes, nursing homes, hotels and finely-dressed men and women.” It presented a huge contrast to Agatha Baskey, a village level activist, who “had the opportunity to visit Ranchi”, the state capital of Jharkhand. Her daily experiences were of her area “caught in a web of poverty, unemployment, debt, and illiteracy” and the lives of villagers who had to “walk at least 20 km to reach the village”, besides the stark reality of opportunity deprivation: “A small stream provides drinking water to the people. A primary school – completely dilapidated – stands in a corner of the village. The teacher seldom comes. There is no public health facility within a distance of 20 km. Most of the villagers are hungry. Let alone two square meals...There is no opportunity for wage employment in the locality as well. In addition to hunger, they have to contend with the *mahajans* [moneylenders].... Hunger, poverty, malnutrition and further aggravation of their condition owing to illiteracy and ill-health have pushed them to death.” The most striking contrast, however, lies in the uncomplaining nature of the Adivasi villagers. Unlike the wealthy, urban, non-Adivasi development beneficiaries—who never appeared happy—the Adivasi always replied to the customary question, “How are you?” with a smile: “We are well; how are you?”

Two decades have passed since the odd presentiment was published in a national daily, *The Telegraph*.²⁷ Jharkhand was then a newly born state. Yet, any close observer may relate the description with a freshly gathered one. Things, of course, have changed, but not for the betterment of common *Jharkhandis*, a large part of whom are Adivasis. In other words, when compared with the case of bereavement of the Adivasis from their own settings and their opportunity deprivation, the situation has remained unchanged since the “civilizing” intervention of the British colonial rule. It introduced mining and railways, ruined nature by extracting its mineral and forest resources, and launched modern industries. Yet, the lives of the people, to whom the land had belonged for centuries, were reduced to depending upon manual wage earning, migrating to distant lands, suffering from hunger and ill health, and facing illiteracy and pre-mature deaths. In the introduction to F B Bradley-Birt’s *Chota Nagpore: A Little Known Province of the Empire*, Northbrook, once Governor General of India, observed, while “certain classes” have made progresses, “the masses of the people remain much the same century after century.”²⁸ Alas, the reality of Northbrook’s time is more pungent a reality than it was 122 years ago.

27 Baskey (2004)

28 Northbrook (1903)

Of many descriptions of colonial-era Jharkhand, the then-Santal Pargana and Chotnagapur, one of the most picturesque is that by F B Bradley-Birt. He portrayed on one hand the beauty of the natural setting, full of hills, flora, and fauna; and on the other hand, drew pictures of the inhabitants who have been “inhabiting the land from time immemorial” with their “age old customs” and “savage practices”, with very little material requirement for survival. Bradley-Birt, like many of his colleagues and countrymen, perhaps truly believed that the extension of industrial revolution of 18th and 19th century Europe to the Indian hinterlands would really benefit mankind at large. Has the belief come anywhere close to reality? A closer examination of data available in public domain tells a different story.

Our analysis demonstrates the structural inequalities seeded in the colonial period—land alienation, marginalisation in governance, and unequal access to education—persist in new forms. Modern indicators such as restricted urbanisation among the Adivasis, sharp educational drop-offs for Adivasi girls, especially at higher level of schooling, and entrenched poverty mirror the same exclusionary forces that had once driven the Adivasis out of their own lands and reduced them to depend on wage slavery. Linking past to present, the historical “meeting place of races” that Bradley-Birt mentioned²⁹ has become a meeting place of enduring disparities, where the legacy of geographic isolation and socio-political exclusion still shapes the developmental outcomes of Jharkhand’s Adivasi communities.

Jharkhandi Adivasis are not only a historically marginalized group but are also the custodians of the state’s rich cultural and natural heritage. The chapters in this part provide an overview of the socio-economic conditions of the Adivasis of Jharkhand, comparing them with the average populations wherever relevant.

29 Bradley-Birt (1905)

Chapter 1

DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION AND MARGINALIZATION

The region now known as Jharkhand has long been regarded as the Adivasi heartland of India. Historically part of the Chotanagpur plateau in the south and the Rajmahal range in the north, it was separated from Bihar in the year 2000 to form a new state, primarily in response to long-standing demands of the Adivasis and other native Jharkhandis by for autonomy, recognition, and protection of the cultural identity and ancestral lands of the Adivasis as well as other *Jharkhandi* groups. For centuries, this forested and mineral-rich region was home to a number of Adivasis.³⁰ These communities lived in relative isolation, practicing subsistence agriculture, animal husbandry, and forest-based livelihoods, with strong community governance and cultural cohesion. While forming part of a larger *Jharkhandi* identity, sharing socio-cultural commonalities, each community inherits several distinct features, including language, customs, and social norms, preserved across generations in their ancestral territories.

Colonial Disruption and Early Demographic Shifts

The demographic landscape of Jharkhand began to change significantly during the British colonial period, particularly from the early 20th century onwards. Two major factors catalysed this transformation. Firstly, the colonial administration forcibly displaced large numbers of Adivasi people from their native lands. Many were transported to far-off regions such as the tea plantations of Assam, Bengal, or even the Andaman Islands, as part of British labor extraction strategies. Secondly, the colonial introduction of the Zamindari system enabled upper-caste non-Adivasis to claim control over Adivasi lands, further alienating indigenous communities from their resources.³¹

Simultaneously, the emergence of mining, railways, and industries in Jharkhand's resource-rich districts—such as Jamshedpur, Ranchi, Bokaro, and Dhanbad—attracted waves of non-Adivasi migrants from Bihar, Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh. These migrants, arriving as laborers, traders, clerks, and administrators, began to settle permanently, encouraged by state policies and infrastructure development. The influx of outsiders and the displacement of indigenous people gradually eroded the demographic dominance of Adivasi communities in the region.³²

30 Kisku-Rapaj (1985)

31 Mounds of records are available on the subject. see, Hamilton (1984); Ambagudia (2010); GoI (2004); GoI (2006); GoI (2006a) Hembrom (2003)

32 For detailed discussion see, Munda and Bosu mullick (2003)

Post-Independence Period: Development Without Inclusion

After India's independence, the pace of demographic and socio-economic transformation in Jharkhand intensified. A series of state-sponsored development projects, including large dams, industrial zones, mining expansions, and urban infrastructure, were launched under the guise of progress. However, these projects often led to the mass displacement of Adivasi populations, typically without proper compensation or rehabilitation. Dispossessed of their lands and livelihoods, many Adivasi families were pushed into poverty and forced to migrate for survival.

Displaced Adivasis of Jharkhand, when unable to adjust to new conditions within a few years, often migrate to work in brick kilns of Uttar Pradesh or rice mills of neighbouring states to the agriculturally prosperous areas of Bihar, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh or Punjab mainly for sowing/transplanting/harvesting of paddy and wheat and to the metropolitan towns and cities as domestic workers and maid servants, or those having no opportunities find themselves placed in a subordinate position to outsiders in their own homeland and have developed a negative identity while getting transposed from their egalitarian society to a hierarchical and exploitative society.³³

Those who stayed behind were often excluded from the benefits of industrial development. Due to lower levels of formal education and skills, Adivasi workers were largely employed in low-wage, unskilled jobs such as khalasis, scavengers, and daily-wage laborers.³⁴ Skilled positions in these emerging industries were disproportionately occupied by migrants from outside the region. As a result, Adivasis in Jharkhand found themselves economically sidelined and socially marginalized in their own homeland.

Trends in Demographic Composition (1961–2011)

The 2011 Census data show that Jharkhand's Adivasi population is highly unevenly distributed across districts. In the southern and western belt—the districts of Khunti (73.3%), Simdega (70.8%), Gumla (68.9%), West Singhbhum (67.3%), and Lohardaga (56.9%)—Adivasis form most of the population. Districts such as Ranchi, Dumka, Saraikela-Kharsawan, Pakur, and East Singhbhum fall in the middle range, with Adivasi shares of around 25–40%, reflecting significant but not majority Adivasi presence. A second cluster of districts, including Garhwa, Deoghar, Giridih, Godda, and Bokaro, show relatively low levels of Adivasi concentration, with shares between 10–15%. At the other extreme, Chatra (4.4%) and Koderma (0.96%) record the lowest proportions, where Adivasi groups are small minorities. Overall, this distribution connects the regional concentration of Adivasi populations in Jharkhand, with cultural resilience, emphasis of Adivasiness in shaping the identity, relating the identity with traditional religious practices, namely, Sarna, etc. in the high-share districts, while low-share districts show much greater assimilation into non-Adivasi linguistic and social patterns.

³³ GoI (2014)

³⁴ Alam (1990)

Table: 1.1. Share of Adivasis in the Districts of Jharkhand: 2011

District	ST Population Total	Total Population	ST Share (%)
Khunti	389626	531885	73.3
Simdega	424407	599578	70.8
Gumla	706754	1025213	68.9
Pashchimi Singhbhum	1011296	1502338	67.3
Lohardaga	262734	461790	56.9
Latehar	331096	726978	45.5
Dumka	571077	1321442	43.2
Pakur	379054	900422	42.1
Ranchi	1042016	2914253	35.8
Saikella-Kharsawan	374642	1065056	35.2
Jamtara	240489	791042	30.4
Purni Singhbhum	653923	2293919	28.5
Sahibganj	308343	1150567	26.8
Godda	279208	1313551	21.3
Ramgarh	201166	949443	21.2
Garhwa	205874	1322784	15.6
Bokaro	255626	2062330	12.4
Deoghar	180962	1492073	12.1
Giridih	238188	2445474	9.7
Palamu	181208	1939869	9.3
Dhanbad	233119	2684487	8.7
Hazaribagh	121768	1734495	7.0
Chatra	45563	1042886	4.4
Kodarma	6903	716259	1.0

Source: Census 2011

Between 1971 and 2011, the share of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Jharkhand's population declined steadily, from 32.1% in 1971 to 26.2% in 2011. This downward trend was observed across most districts, though the extent varied. Adivasi-majority areas such as Simdega, Gumla, Khunti, West Singhbhum, and Lohardaga maintained high shares (above 55–70%) throughout the period, showing only slight fluctuations. In contrast, districts like Ranchi, Dumka, Saraikela-Kharsawan, and East Singhbhum had moderate shares (25–40%), which also declined over time as urbanization and in-migration grew. The lowest shares were

recorded in Koderma, Chatra, and Giridih, where the Adivasi population remained below 10% across the decades. Overall, the data highlights how Adivasi presence in Jharkhand has become relatively more localized, with strongholds in the southern and western belt, while other regions have seen the Adivasi proportion fall as non-Adivasi populations expanded faster.

**Table 1.2: Change in the Share of Adivasi's Population
in the Districts of Jharkhand: 1971 to 2011**

District	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Jharkhand	32.1	30.3	27.7	26.3	26.2
Garhwa	16.0	13.7	12.1	12.3	12.4
Chatra	3.9	4.3	4.1	4.1	4.4
Kodarma	13.8	15.3	12.8	12.2	12.1
Giridih	10.6	9.1	8.9	8.5	8.7
Deoghar	50.1	51.9	46.6	44.8	43.2
Godda	16.6	16.3	15.7	15.4	15.6
Sahibganj	10.9	10.5	9.9	9.7	9.7
Pakur	28.3	29.4	25.1	23.6	21.3
Dhanbad	71.7	72.7	69.8	67.2	68.9
Bokaro	7.0	7.4	7.0	6.9	7.0
Lohardaga	35.9	38.9	32.7	31.6	30.4
Purbi Singhbhum	76.2	76.7	73.4	72.4	73.3
Palamu	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.0
Latehar	47.9	46.3	45.4	45.2	45.5
Hazaribagh	60.5	58.7	56.4	55.7	56.9
Ramgarh	55.4	54.6	49.3	44.6	42.1
Dumka	9.0	9.1	9.2	9.0	9.3
Jamtara	65.3	66.8	65.5	65.4	67.3
Ranchi	32.2	30.1	28.9	27.8	28.5
Khunti	22.4	21.3	20.7	20.3	21.2
Gumla	41.2	40.0	37.3	36.2	35.8
Simdega	36.9	36.1	31.1	29.1	26.8
Pashchimi Singhbhum	42.0	40.9	38.2	35.9	35.2
Saikela-Kharsawan	73.7	74.8	72.4	70.2	70.8

Source: Census 1971 to 2011

Urbanization and Adivasi Under-Representation

Urbanisation in Jharkhand has reshaped the state's demographic profile, though its impact on Adivasis has been limited and uneven. According to Census 2011, 24 per cent of Jharkhand's population lived in urban areas, up modestly from 21 per cent in 1991. However, only about 9 per cent of the Adivasis resides in urban areas, a figure that has remained stagnant for nearly two decades. This means that while Adivasis constitute over a quarter of the state's population, they make up only around 10 per cent of the total urban population. Such limited Adivasi migration to cities means that many Adivasis remain concentrated in rural and forested regions, where access to modern infrastructure, healthcare, and educational facilities is more restricted. Moreover, urban development in Jharkhand—often linked to mining, industry, and infrastructure projects—frequently takes place on Adivasi lands, leading to displacement without adequate integration into urban economies. In cities, Adivasis also face the challenge of being a small minority, which can weaken their political voice and influence in governance. While remaining in rural areas helps preserve cultural traditions and community cohesion, it also limits participation in the economic opportunities that urban growth can offer, reinforcing socio-economic disparities between Adivasi and non-Adivasi populations.

Table 1.3. Urbanization and the Adivasis of Jharkhand

Year	Share of Urban Population to Total Population (%)	Share of Adivasi Urban Population to Total Adivasi Population (%)	Share of Urban Adivasi Population to Total Urban Population (%)
1991	21.2	7.3	9.5
2011	24.0	9.0	9.8

Source: Census of India, 1991, 2011

This under-representation can be attributed to multiple factors, including poor access to urban housing, employment barriers, and cultural dislocation. Urban expansion often occurs in regions rich in minerals and forests—traditional Adivasi lands—leading to their displacement and loss of cultural ties.

Female Male Ratio and Gender Dynamics

In his immensely influential paper, “Missing Women”, Amartya Sen showed how “Social inequality outweighs women’s survival advantage in Asia and Africa.” He wrote: “Everywhere about 5% more boys than girls are born. But women are hardier than men and, given similar care, survive better at all ages – including in utero.”³⁵ He demonstrated how the Female-Male Ratio (FMR) can be a crucially important indicator of general social equality. The female–male ratio (FMR), or sex ratio, is the number of females per 1,000 males and serves as an important demographic indicator of gender equality, women’s health, and social conditions. A balanced or

35 Sen (1992)

higher FMR often reflects better survival chances for women, more equitable social practices, and healthier living conditions, while a low ratio can point to gender discrimination, neglect, or higher female mortality.

In Jharkhand, the overall FMR as per Census 2011 is 948 females per 1,000 males, slightly below the national average of 940. However, among the Adivasis in the state, the FMR is significantly higher at 1,029 females per 1,000 males. This comparatively balanced ratio among Adivasis is often attributed to Adivasi social structures that afford women an important role in agriculture, forest-based livelihoods, and community decision-making, as well as the absence of strong son-preference practices such as female foeticide. The sex ratio is crucial for policy-making because it not only signals the status and well-being of women but also impacts long-term social stability and equitable development.

Districts like West Singhbhum, Khunti, and Simdega show some of the highest FMR, while Dhanbad, Ramgarh, and Bokaro report the lowest. The child FMR (0–6 years) among the Adivasis is also more favourable at 976, compared to the state average of 948, suggesting more equitable treatment of girls within the Adivasi communities.

These findings imply that despite socio-economic challenges, Adivasi societies retain a more inclusive and egalitarian gender culture, in contrast to patriarchal practices prevalent among some non-Adivasi groups. What is worrying, however, is that some of the Adivasi groups are seemingly influenced by the so-called mainstream societies to adopt son-preference as an idea of life practices (described in some details in Chapter 3 and 4).

Age Structure and Population Profile

An analysis of age-wise population distribution reveals a youthful demographic profile among the Adivasi communities. As per Census 2011, 17 per cent of the Adivasi population is below 6 years, compared to 16.1 per cent among non-Adivasi. Similarly, the 7–18 years group constitutes 28.5 per cent of the Adivasi population, again higher than the non-Adivasi proportion.

However, Adivasi representation declines significantly in older age groups, particularly among those aged 60 and above. Only 7 per cent of Adivasis are found in this category, compared to 7.8 per cent of non-Adivasi. This indicates lower life expectancy and lack of access to quality healthcare, nutrition, and geriatric care.

Table 1.4. Age Wise Demographic Profile

Age Group	Share of Adivasi Population (%)	Share of Non-Adivasi Population (%)
Below 6 years	16.97	16.11
7-18 years	28.49	27.72
19 - 40 years	30.53	31.96
41 - 60 years	16.99	16.54
Above 60 years	7.02	7.67

Source: Census of India, 2011

This youthful structure offers a potential demographic dividend, but it remains largely untapped due to limited investment in education, health, and skill development among Adivasi youth.

The demographic transformation of Jharkhand over the last century reflects a complex interplay of colonial policies, industrialization, displacement, and unequal development. While Adivasi communities once formed the majority in the region, they now account for only about one-fourth of the population. This decline is not merely statistical but represents a deeper erosion of cultural identity, land rights, and socio-political autonomy.

Despite this, Adivasi societies continue to show resilience, with positive indicators like gender balance, youthful populations, and strong community networks. These strengths must be harnessed through inclusive and targeted policies, including:

- Protection of land and forest rights.
- Rehabilitation of displaced populations.
- Investment in health, education, and employment.
- Promotion of Adivasi languages and culture.

A failure to address these issues risks further marginalization of Adivasi communities and a betrayal of the very purpose for which the state of Jharkhand was created.

Bilingualism

In Jharkhand, nearly 8.6 million individuals report speaking Adivasi mother tongues, highlighting the rich linguistic diversity of the state. Among them, close to 6.9 million—about 80 per cent—are also proficient in a second language, most commonly Hindi, followed by regional languages like Bengali and Odiya depending on Adivasi distribution. This high bilingualism rate reflects both cultural adaptability and the pressures of integration with broader linguistic communities. It suggests that while Adivasi languages continue to serve as important identity markers, bilingual proficiency is critical for mobility, education, and access to wider socio-economic opportunities across Jharkhand.

Table: 1.5. Bilingualism summary for Jharkhand

Total Adivasi Language speakers	Speakers of a Second Language	Share of Bilingualism among the Adivasis (%)
8645074	6884881	79.6

Source: Census 2011

Chapter 2

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

The connection of education and the emancipation of the downtrodden, that had its first collective application by the Social Democratic Form (SDF) in the UK, in 1883, was articulated in the following manner:

Educate. We shall need all our intelligence.
Agitate. We shall need all our enthusiasm.
Organise. We shall need all our force.

B R Ambedkar, a principal maker of our constitution invoked the same—“Educate, Agitate, and Organise”—to use as a tool for the emancipation of the lower rung of the society.

While education is a cornerstone of human development and a vital tool for empowerment, especially for marginalized communities, it becomes a tool in the hands of the ruling dispensation, who uses all in their power to deprive the deprived further and ensure that they remain there. Among Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes) in Jharkhand, educational attainment is not just a measure of academic progress, but a key determinant of broader socio-economic well-being, health, gender equality, and political participation. Although literacy and enrolment rates have improved over time for both Adivasi and non-Adivasi populations in the state, a significant gap persists, underlining the deep-rooted inequalities that affect access, retention, and quality of education for Adivasis.

Literacy Status: Comparative Overview

According to the Census 2011 data, the overall literacy rate in Jharkhand stood at 66 per cent (from 54 % in 2001). However, when disaggregated by social groups, the disparities are stark. The literacy rate among the Adivasi population was only 57 per cent, significantly lower than the 75 per cent literacy rate among non-Adivasis. This gap reflects not just a lack of access to education but also structural and cultural barriers that prevent equitable participation.

In comparison, the national literacy rate in 2011 was 74 per cent, making the Adivasi literacy rate in Jharkhand substantially lower than both state and national averages. The low literacy levels among Adivasis are reflections of their historically disadvantaged position, compounded by geographical isolation, inadequate schooling infrastructure, and linguistic and cultural alienation.

Table 2.1. Literacy Rate of Adivasi Population vis-a-vis non-Adivasi population (per cent of Population Aged 7+)

	2001	2011
Overall	53.6	66.4
ST	40.7	57.1
Non-ST	65.5	75.2

Source: Census of India, 2001 and 2011

The low level of literacy seemed to have further afflicted the general educational progress: The 2011 Census data show that while 14 per cent of the Adivasi population above 6 years of age could complete primary education, only a miniscule section of 3 per cent and 2 per cent could move ahead with higher secondary and college completion.

Enrolment and Drop Out

Of late, however, there has been some progress in school participation among the Adivasis of Jharkhand, as is found in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) pattern. The GER provides a snapshot of how many children in the target age group are attending school at different levels. The GER is total enrolment at a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a per centage of the eligible official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education in a given school year.³⁶ The main source of school education data, the Government of India's Unified District Information Service + (UDISE+), reveals that while at the primary level the Adivasis have a better GER (indeed above the state average), with the progress toward higher levels of school education their participation declines gradually and substantially. To elaborate, while the reported comparative GER among the Adivasis and All at primary level is 100 per cent and 93 per cent respectively, at the higher secondary level it gets reversed (Adivasi 35 per cent, All 41 per cent).

Table 2.2. Gross Enrolment Ratio in Jharkhand (Primary to Higher Secondary): Adivasi and All: 2023-24

Primary (Standard 1 to5)			Upper Primary (Standard 6 to8)			Secondary (Standard 9-10)			Higher Secondary (11-12)		
Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
99.1	101.6	100.3	82.3	84.8	83.6	55.1	60.2	57.7	32.4	37.2	34.8
92	93.2	92.6	82.4	84.2	83.3	59.8	64.7	62.2	39.8	42.8	41.3

Source: Unified District Information Service + (UDISE+)-2023-24, Table 6.3, P.109.

³⁶ GER is calculated by using the following formula: GER = Enrolment at a particular level (for example, primary)/Population of official age group for that level (in this case primary). So, if the total enrolment at primary level is 100, and the total number children in that age group is 120, then GER will be $(100/125)*100 = 80$.

Again, compared to the all-India GER among the Adivasis, Jharkhand's performance appears to be lagging. Although the GER of Adivasis of Jharkhand at primary level (101 per cent) exceeds the all-India GER among the Adivasis (98 per cent), the pattern gets reversed from upper primary level (Jharkhand 84 per cent, all India 95 per cent). At higher secondary level the GER among the Adivasis of Jharkhand (35 per cent) falls 14 per cent point behind the corresponding all India figure.

Table 2.3. Gross Enrolment Ratio among the Adivasis of Jharkhand and India (Primary to Higher Secondary): 2023-24

	Primary (Standard 1 to 5)			Upper Primary (Standard 6 to 8)			Secondary (Standard 9-10)			Higher Secondary (11-12)		
	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	All
India	98	98.6	98.3	94.8	95.6	95.2	75.4	78.5	76.9	46	51.4	48.7
Jharkhand	99.1	101.6	100.3	82.3	84.8	83.6	55.1	60.2	57.7	32.4	37.2	34.8

Source: Unified District Information Service + (UDISE+) - 2023-24, Table 6.3, P.109.

Following the general pattern of enrolment across the country, especially among the marginalised sections, more girls than boys among the Adivasis of Jharkhand are found to be enrolled in school. Heartening as it is to see girls pursue education, the reversal in the pattern (from boys' domination to girls' preponderance) points toward a serious lacuna in the social dynamics in general and the educational system in particular. Whether boys are gradually losing interest in studies, or are pushed to join the labour market, or both, needs to be examined critically.

Dropout Rates: A Critical Concern

Despite higher rate of school enrolment, educational statistics of the country are still made to make room for Dropout. According to the UDISE+ 2021-22, nearly 4 per cent of the enrolled students dropped out of school at upper primary level. The corresponding figures for the secondary level was 9 per cent.³⁷ The corresponding figures among the Adivasis was reported to be 5.4 per cent and 12.7 per cent³⁸ – substantially above the state average.

Educational Infrastructure in Adivasi Regions

A key barrier to quality education in Adivasi areas of Jharkhand is deficient infrastructure. While the state has over 40,000 schools, nearly 60 per cent of government schools are situated in ST-majority blocks. Despite this, Adivasi areas suffer from acute shortages in basic amenities

³⁷ Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) – 2021-22. Although statistics for the overall Drop Out rate for 2023-24 are available, we are reduced to using the 2021-22 statistics as they are not available for the Adivasis in the 2023-24 report.

³⁸ Ibid. Also the figures were presented in the Rajyasabha, answering to a starred question (No.23), on 27 November, 2024

and staff.³⁹

Pupil–teacher ratios in remote Adivasi blocks often exceed 40:1, compared to the state average of 32:1, violating Right to Education (RTE) norms. Further, only 60 per cent of schools in Adivasi areas have functional girls’ toilets, and less than 50 per cent are connected to electricity. This lack of infrastructure not only hampers learning outcomes but also contributes to absenteeism and dropouts.

Government efforts like the establishment of over 500 residential schools—including Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) and Ashramshalas—have targeted these gaps, especially for Adivasi girls. However, these efforts, while laudable, remain insufficient in the face of the widespread infrastructural challenges.

Table 2.4. Availability of Educational Infrastructure in Public and Private Schools in Jharkhand and in Adivasi Areas

Indicators	Overall (Govt + Private)	Adivasi areas
Total Schools	~40,000	~60 per cent Govt Schools in ST- majority blocks
PTR (Pupil-Teacher Ratio, Govt)	32:01:00	Often >40:1 in remote blocks
Per cent of Schools with Toilets (Girls)	76%	<60% in Adivasi blocks
Per cent of Schools with Electricity	60%	<50% in Adivasi areas
Residential Schools (KGBV, Ashram)	500+	Primarily for Adivasi girls

Source: For Column 2, UDISE+ 2022–23; For, Column 3, GoI, Annual Report- 2022-23; Ministry of Adivasi Affairs

Public and Private Schools

An analysis of student distribution across government and private schools reveals a strong dependence of Adivasi students on the public education system. At the primary level, 72 per cent of all students in Jharkhand are enrolled in government schools, while 28 per cent attend private institutions. The trend is similar at the secondary level, with 68 per cent in public schools and 32 per cent in private.

However, of Adivasi students, over 90 per cent are enrolled in government schools, and only about 10 per cent access private institutions. This stark contrast underlines the socio-economic constraints of Adivasi families, who are unable to afford the relatively better-resourced and English-medium private schools that many urban and semi-urban families prefer.

This reliance on public schools, which are often poorly resourced and underperforming in Adivasi areas, further exacerbates educational inequalities.

³⁹ Pal (2025)

Table 2.5. Per centage Distribution of Students by their affiliation with Public vs Private Schools

School Type	Primary	Secondary	Adivasi Share in (per cent)
Government Schools	72%	68%	~90% Adivasi students
Private Schools	28%	32%	~10% Adivasi students

Source: For Column 2 and 3, UDISE+ 2022–23; For, Column 3, GoI, Annual Report- 2022-23; Ministry of Adivasi Affairs

Barriers

The state faces a persistent problem of human resource development, characterized by low levels of literacy and poor transition rates to higher levels of education. This challenge is further aggravated by a stratified system of educational delivery which, in tandem with the socio-economic divisions of society, marginalizes sections of the population—especially the Adivasis, who constitute more than one-fourth of the state’s population. While the overall educational underachievement of Jharkhand is exacerbated by the deprivation faced by the Adivasis, the internal disparities among Adivasi groups have also contributed to their persistently low aggregate achievement levels.

While the Adivasis lag behind the state average, there is a considerable variation within the Adivasi population: literacy rates range from the highest of 67 per cent to lowest of 33 per cent. Only 11 of the 32 Adivasi communities have literacy rates above the Adivasi average, while a mere 10 communities exceed the 60 per cent mark, and 8 communities remain below 40 per cent. The numerically largest Adivasi community of Jharkhand, the Santhals, lag behind many of the communities. This sharp variation in literacy extends the educational divide into the realm of higher education. While some communities record comparatively higher rates of attainment in higher (college level) education (ranging between 3.5% on the higher side to 0.7 per cent on the lower).

Inter-community differences are also reflected in gender-based disparities in educational progress. While the overall gender gap in literacy across all communities is 22 per centage points, the corresponding gaps range between 27 per cent on the higher side to 18 per cent to the lower. Educational expansion among the Particularly Vulnerable Adivasi Groups (PVTGs) is appallingly narrow. As we see from the Census 2011 data, only two of the eight PVTGs have literacy rates above 40 per cent.

One of the most pressing issues is geographical isolation. Many Adivasi communities live in remote and hilly areas with inadequate road connectivity, making daily travel to school difficult and, in some cases, dangerous. This lack of physical access discourages both students and teachers, resulting in irregular attendance and teacher absenteeism.

Another challenge is the language barrier. The medium of instruction in most schools is Hindi or English, which differs from the mother tongues of Adivasi children, such as Mundari,

Ho, Santhali, or Kurukh. This mismatch makes it harder for Adivasi students to understand lessons and participate actively in classroom discussions. Moreover, the cultural disconnection between the formal curriculum and Adivasi worldviews leads to further alienation. School content often does not reflect the knowledge systems, traditions, or histories of Adivasi communities, making education feel irrelevant or unwelcoming.

Economic hardship adds another layer of difficulty. A significant proportion of Adivasi families live below the poverty line, forcing children—especially boys—into wage labour or helping with domestic or agricultural work. Girls, in particular, are vulnerable to gender-based discrimination, which leads to early marriages, household responsibilities, and school dropouts. Inadequate sanitation facilities, especially toilets for girls, further discourages female participation in education.

Poorly trained teachers, many of whom are not sensitized to Adivasi cultures or equipped to address linguistic diversity, struggle to connect with Adivasi students. The lack of culturally competent pedagogy creates an unwelcoming learning environment and contributes to high dropout rates, particularly as students move to higher levels of education. These challenges combine to create a cumulative disadvantage for Adivasi children in the education system, especially for girls.

Finally, the problem of education of the Adivasis is very much linked to the general functioning of the system of education in the state. It has a highly unfavourable people teacher ratio (41) in government schools.

A report based on research conducted in 2022, in 138 primary and upper primary schools, pointed out the abysmal state of elementary education in the state. Public provisioning to comply with the Right to Education Act 2009, and to recover from the shock of long school closures owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, was too inadequate.⁴⁰ These problems add to the persistent neglect that the Adivasis have been facing for over two centuries.

In addition, it makes the democratic possibilities weaker. As is well known, the Adivasis' social systems are deeply rooted in fertile democratic soil. But, the expansion of modern democracy makes basic education a precondition for fuller participation in democratic governance. The experts in oral democracy find themselves at a huge disadvantage in the area of alphabet-based democracy. As Sanyal and Rao point out:

Literacy captures both social and economic disadvantages. The illiterate people in a village are also likely to be the poorest and to belong to socially subordinated castes and tribal groups. As a corollary, low-literacy villages are likely to have a greater per centage of socially and economically disadvantaged people.⁴¹

So, when the wider society needs to learn from the Adivasis a lot about how to internalize democracy, it is an imperative for the state and society to provide adequate arrangements for the Adivasis to learn how to excel in modern educational explorations.

40 Amitava and Dreze (2022)

41 Sanyal and Rao (2019)

Chapter 3

NUTRITIONAL AND HEALTH STATUS: TOP OF FORM

Adivasis in India, in general, tend to live for much shorter than the average population. Quoting an essay published in the *Lancet*, the most famous and long-extant journal of health, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs states that the “life expectancy at birth for ST population in India is 63.9 years, as against 67 years for general population.”⁴² The life expectancy was calculated by using some “indirect methods”, and so far, there has been no method devised to calculate the state level life expectancy of the Adivasis. Yet, given the poor socio-economic state of the Adivasis of Jharkhand, in all likelihood, an average *Jharkhandi* Adivasi is not only likely to live much shorter than her non-Adivasi co-citizens, but also tend to live shorter than many of the Adivasis living across the states of India. Health of the population, as we know from global studies, such as the WHO Commission for Social Determinants of Health,⁴³ Paul Farmer’s famous work, *Pathologies Power*,⁴⁴ and so on, depend much upon equality of social opportunities, economic democracy, and participatory governance. A recent study published in the *Lancet*, presents the health conditions of the Adivasis:

Despite their diversity, Indigenous populations experience common challenges of geographical isolation and socio-economic marginalisation, creating systemic barriers to healthcare access. These barriers have led to lower life expectancy and a higher disease burden among Indigenous populations compared to non-Indigenous populations. Health disparities are further exacerbated by high levels of poverty, discrimination, and a high prevalence of people who do not have a high school diploma or equivalent (due to opportunity gaps), all of which severely limit access to primary healthcare services.⁴⁵

Health outcomes in Jharkhand have improved in several respects since earlier survey rounds, but large and persistent gaps remain between Adivasi and non-Adivasi populations. Overall state indicators, as found by the National Family Health Survey -5 (NFHS-5) show declines in some mortality measures and modest improvements in maternal and child health coverage.⁴⁶ However, multiple studies and disaggregated analyses document that ST communities continue to lag on nutrition, anaemia, key child survival indicators, health-seeking behaviour, and access

42 GoI (2019)

43 WHO (2008)

44 Farmer (2004)

45 Kshatri et al. (2025)

46 IIPS (2021)

to health infrastructure⁴⁷.

Child Nutrition: Stunting, Wasting, Underweight

National and state NFHS-5 outputs and recent academic analyses concur that children from ST households have higher prevalence of undernutrition (stunting, underweight and often wasting) than their non-Adivasi counterparts in Jharkhand and elsewhere in eastern India. Although prevalence of stunting and underweight has decreased over time for all social groups, the absolute gap between Adivasi and non-Adivasi children persists.

Higher rates of undernutrition in ST populations are driven by multidimensional causes: poverty and low household food security, seasonal dependence on NTFPs and subsistence agriculture, poorer maternal nutrition and education, limited access to quality ICDS (Anganwadi) services, and constrained access to safe water and sanitation in many Adivasi habitations.

Undernutrition remains a serious challenge, particularly among ST children. Indicators of stunting (refers to a child being too short for their age, indicating chronic undernutrition), wasting (indicates a child is too thin for their height, reflecting acute or recent undernutrition), and underweight (meaning a child's weight is low for their age) show that ST children consistently fare worse than the state average.

Table 3.1. Nutritional Status of Children Under 5 Years in Jharkhand: Adivasis and All

Indicators	Adivasis (%)	Total (%)
Stunting (< -2 SD height-for-age)	44.9	39.6
Severe Stunting (< -3 SD)	23.3	17.7
Wasting (< -2 SD weight-for-height)	25.2	22.4
Severe Wasting (< -3 SD)	10.7	9.1
Underweight (< -2 SD weight-for-age)	46.4	39.4
Severe Underweight (< -3 SD)	19.5	14.3

Source: Compiled from NFHS-5

Signs of improved in Infant Mortality (IMR; refers to deaths of infants between 1 day and 1 year of age) and Neonatal Mortality (NNM; refers to deaths of infants within the first 28 days of life) have been seen between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5. However, Adivasi-dominated districts continue to report higher neonatal and infant mortality compared to better-served districts, reflecting geographic and social inequities.

On MMR, nationally and for most states, Sample Registration System (SRS) estimates show steady declines; state-level MMR estimates and targeted studies identify substantial improvements in Jharkhand over the last decade, but the burden remains unevenly distributed with worse outcomes in some Adivasi districts. The infant and maternal mortality burden

47 Rekha et al (2023)

in Adivasi pockets is driven by limited access to emergency obstetric care, delays in care seeking, higher prevalence of home births in some areas, transportation barriers, and shortage of specialists and functioning Community Health Centres (CHCs) and First Referral Units (FRUs) in remote blocks.

Anaemia among Women

Jharkhand reports very high anaemia prevalence among women of reproductive age in NFHS-5. Peer-reviewed studies indicate state-level prevalence near the national high levels reported in NFHS-5; research focused on Jharkhand cites prevalences in the range of ~65 per cent among women (15–49). Anaemia prevalence tends to be higher among disadvantaged groups, including many Adivasi communities. Anaemia prevalence is high across Jharkhand but significantly higher among ST women. Over seven in ten ST women are anaemic, a rate significantly above the state average.

Table 3.2. Anaemia among women (15-49 years) in Jharkhand: Adivasis and All

Indicator	Adivasi (%)	All (%)
Mild Anaemia (11.0–11.9 g/dl)	29.3	29.4
Moderate Anaemia (8.0–10.9 g/dl)	40.7	34.0
Severe Anaemia (< 8.0 g/dl)	2.0	1.9
Any Anaemia (< 12.0 g/dl)	72.0	65.3

Source: Compiled from NFHS-5

Causes of anaemia include poor dietary iron intake, frequent and closely spaced pregnancies, malaria and parasitic infections in certain districts, low uptake or late/insufficient Iron Folic Acid (IFA) consumption, and access problems to antenatal and nutrition services. Programmatic gaps in IFA supply and counselling in remote Adivasi areas exacerbate the problem. Strengthening Ante Natal Care (ANC) quality (early registration, full IFA course), deworming, malaria control in endemic pockets, and culturally tailored nutrition counselling are priorities to reduce anaemia among ST women.

Fertility Patterns

The number of children people have—and how this change over time—plays a crucial role in shaping both population growth and age structure. In turn, individuals' choices about when to have children and how many to have reflect broader social and economic trends. The total fertility rate (TFR) is the most widely used measure of birth patterns. It represents the average number of children a woman would have if she were to experience, throughout her life, the age-specific fertility rates observed in a given year. While overall fertility rates are similar, Adivasi women tend to have slightly lower wanted fertility but higher pregnancy rates in certain contexts. The NFHS-5 data for Jharkhand shows that the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) for both Adivasi and the overall population stands at 2.26, indicating that fertility levels have converged

between these groups. This rate is close to the replacement level fertility, reflecting a broader demographic transition in the state.

However, differences emerge in other indicators. The per centage of women aged 15–49 who are currently pregnant is slightly lower among Adivasi women (3.5 per cent) compared to the total population (4.2 per cent). This may reflect variations in reproductive behaviour, contraceptive use, or access to maternal health services.

The mean number of children ever born to women aged 40–49 is the same for both groups (3.5), suggesting that over a lifetime, fertility outcomes have been similar historically. Yet, the total wanted fertility rate — the number of children women desire — is lower among Adivasi women (1.79) than the state average (1.87). This gap between actual fertility and wanted fertility implies that both groups, but especially Adivasi communities, may still experience some level of unmet need for family planning services.

Overall, the data points to a narrowing fertility gap between Adivasi and non-Adivasi populations in Jharkhand, while also highlighting the importance of strengthening access to reproductive health services and ensuring that women's fertility preferences are met.

Table 3.3. Fertility Indicators in Jharkhand: Adivasis and All

Indicators	Adivasi	All
Total Fertility Rate	2.26	2.26
Women 15–49 Currently Pregnant (%)	3.5	4.2
Mean Children Ever Born (40–49)	3.5	3.5
Total Wanted Fertility Rate	1.79	1.87

Source: Compiled from NFHS-5

Mortality Rates

Mortality indicators for Adivasis are consistently higher than the state average, indicating gaps in maternal and child health services. Adivasi under-five mortality is more than 10 points higher than the state average.

NFHS-5 data reveals a clear mortality gap between Adivasi and the overall population in Jharkhand. Across all indicators, Adivasi mortality rates are higher, pointing to persistent disparities in maternal, newborn, and child health outcomes.

Neonatal mortality among Adivasis stands at 31.3 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to 28.2 for the state overall. This difference indicates higher risks in the first month of life for Adivasi infants, often linked to factors such as poor access to skilled birth attendants, inadequate newborn care, and higher prevalence of low birth weight.

The post-neonatal mortality rate is also higher among Adivasis (13.1) than the state average (9.7), suggesting challenges in preventing and managing infections, malnutrition, and other early-childhood illnesses.

The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) for Adivasis is 44.4, substantially above the Jharkhand

average of 37.9. Similarly, child mortality (ages 1–4) among Adivasis is 12.0 compared to 7.9 in the total population, pointing to disparities in post-infancy healthcare, immunisation, and nutrition.

The cumulative effect of these disparities is reflected in the under-five mortality rate (U5MR) — 55.8 among Adivasi children versus 45.4 for the state as a whole. This gap of over 10 deaths per 1,000 live births underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve antenatal care, delivery practices, immunisation coverage, nutrition, and postnatal follow-up in Adivasi -dominated areas.

Overall, these figures highlight that while Jharkhand has made progress in reducing child mortality, Adivasi communities continue to experience disproportionate health risks, requiring focused and culturally sensitive health outreach.

Table 3.4. Child Mortality Indicators in Jharkhand: Adivasis and All

Indicator	ST	Total
Neonatal Mortality (NN)	31.3	28.2
Post-neonatal Mortality (PNN)	13.1	9.7
Infant Mortality (IMR)	44.4	37.9
Child Mortality (4q1)	12.0	7.9
Under-five Mortality (U5MR)	55.8	45.4

Source: Compiled from NFHS-5

Health Registration (Death Registration as Proxy)

Death registration, a proxy for access to civil health records, is lower among STs in both urban and rural areas.

Death registration rates in Jharkhand reveal a significant gap between Adivasi populations and the state average, indicating unequal access to civil registration systems and formal health records. These disparities can affect not only legal documentation but also the ability to design targeted health and welfare policies.

In urban areas, Adivasi death registration stands at 49.7 per cent, compared to 56.2 per cent for the total population. The gender gap is more pronounced — only 37.6 per cent deaths of urban Adivasi women as opposed to 49.3 per cent for all urban women deaths are registered. The corresponding figures for men are 55 per cent and 61 per cent respectively.

In rural areas, where most of Jharkhand's Adivasi population resides, the gap persists. Overall rural Adivasi death registration is 33 per cent, compared to 36 per cent for the total rural population. The difference is again larger for women, with only 25.5 per cent of rural Adivasi women deaths registered, against 29 per cent for all rural females.

Looking at overall figures, just 35 per cent of Adivasi deaths are registered, compared to 40.4 per cent for the total population. Men registration among Adivasis is 41 per cent versus 47 per cent for all men, while women registration is significantly lower — 27 per cent for Adivasi

women compared to 33 per cent for women statewide.

These numbers suggest that Adivasi households face both geographic and socio-cultural barriers to death registration, including remoteness from registration offices, limited awareness of procedures, and potential distrust of formal institutions. Improving outreach, reducing bureaucratic hurdles, and integrating registration with local governance and health services could help close this gap.

Table 3.5. Death Registration in Jharkhand: Adivasis and All

Residence / Sex	Adivasi (per cent)	Total (per cent)
Urban – Male	55.0	60.9
Urban – Female	37.6	49.3
Urban – Total	49.7	56.2
Rural – Male	38.6	42.4
Rural – Female	25.5	28.8
Rural – Total	33.0	36.1
Overall – Male	41.1	46.7
Overall – Female	26.6	32.7
Overall – Total	35.1	40.4

Source: Compiled from NFHS-5

Health-Seeking Behaviour

Studies of Adivasi health behaviour in Jharkhand document dual patterns: (a) continued reliance on traditional healers and home remedies for many general ailments and maternal/newborn care in remote Adivasi communities, and (b) rising use of formal health services (ANC, institutional delivery, immunization) where access and outreach have improved⁴⁸. However, care-seeking for illnesses and timely use of formal services is lower among more remote and socio-economically deprived Adivasi households⁴⁹.

Lower health literacy, distance to facilities, transport costs, opportunity costs of missing work, and perceptions of poor quality (or cultural inappropriateness) of government services reduce health-seeking among Adivasi groups. Where NGOs and community outreach (ASHA, AWW) are strong, uptake improves.

Health Facilities and Human Resources

The activist Agatha Baskey wrote in 2004, “Medicare at primary health centres are non-existent even four years after the creation of Jharkhand.” The PHC is inaccessible and people have to

48 GoJ (2009)

49 Rekha et al (2023)

depend upon quacks.⁵⁰ Things do not seem to have changed much in the past five decades. State health audits and dossiers show shortfalls in specialist doctors and functional CHC/PHC infrastructure in Jharkhand; many Adivasi districts report larger service gaps. For example, state reports note shortfalls of specialists in CHCs and uneven distribution of health workforce and facilities across districts⁵¹. Geographic remoteness, poor road/transport connectivity, and difficulty in retaining skilled personnel in Adivasi districts contribute to facility deficits. Even where infrastructure exists on paper, functionality (equipment, drugs, staff) is often limited⁵².

50 Baskey (2004)

51 NHSRC (2021)

52 Ibid

Chapter 4

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND RELATED ISSUES

Occupational Pattern

Jharkhand is home to 32 officially recognized Adivasi communities, each with its own distinct language, customs, traditions, and socio-economic conditions. These communities are highly diverse and cannot be treated as a single, uniform group. While a small section of Adivasis has made progress by making themselves capable of gaining access to modern education, regular jobs in organized sector, and urban lifestyles similar to those of the more privileged/elite non-Adivasi populations. A large proportion of Adivasi groups continue to face deep-rooted challenges such as lack of access to quality education, healthcare, sustainable livelihoods, and upward social mobility. Thus, in Jharkhand's Adivasi society, variations are mainly due to availability of opportunities and capability to utilize the available opportunities. Differences in occupation like regular jobs in organized sector, settled farming, forest-based livelihoods, hunting, wage laboring, or crafting, etc. shape, to a great extent, their economic conditions, lifestyle, and socio-cultural environment.

A large proportion of Adivasis in Jharkhand are engaged in subsistence-level occupations such as small-scale farming, animal husbandry, forest collection, and cultivation of fruits and vegetables⁵³. Despite their engagement in multiple livelihood activities, the majority continue to live in conditions of hardship and deprivation. This is largely because their agricultural practices are primarily meant for self-consumption rather than market-oriented production. Moreover, their farmlands are often located in upland or undulating terrain with poor soil quality, limited irrigation facilities, and heavy dependence on erratic monsoon rains. The absence of modern agricultural implements and limited exposure to scientific methods of cultivation further exacerbate their vulnerability⁵⁴.

Some Adivasis make a living through traditional occupations like crafting, weaving, and making herbal medicines. These skills are handed down through generations. Yet, many Adivasis still live in traditional ways, relying entirely on forest products like mahua, sal seeds, and lac. These non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are key for their food and income, helping them meet basic daily needs, although often not enough for subsistence.

The occupational scenery of the Adivasi communities in Jharkhand is undergoing rapid changes, exposing them to mounting socio-economic challenges. Traditional means of

53 GoI (2014)

54 GoI (2008)

livelihood such as small-scale subsistence farming, animal rearing, and forest-based activities are increasingly becoming unsustainable. This shift is driven by multiple factors, including widespread land alienation, deforestation, erratic and insufficient rainfall due to climate change, and restricted access to forest and natural resources⁵⁵. New and modern occupational opportunities remain largely inaccessible to the majority of the Adivasi population, due to barriers such as limited education, lack of skill training, poor connectivity, and socio-economic marginalization⁵⁶. In Jharkhand, nearly 90 per cent of Adivasi households are either landless or marginal landholders, and, as a result, many are pushed into unskilled and insecure wage labour, especially in non-agricultural sectors like construction and transport—reflecting a significant shift from subsistence farming to casual labour due to widespread land alienation and limited livelihood alternatives⁵⁷. This occupational shift has, in all likelihood, not only disrupted their traditional socio-economic systems but also threatened their culture, heightened their vulnerability to poverty, displacement, and exploitation.

In contrast, non-Adivasis in Jharkhand have a wider range of occupations. Many work in formal sector jobs such as government services, education, trade, and private businesses and trade⁵⁸. In towns and cities, most non-Adivasis follow professional careers like teaching, banking, and administration. Those non-Adivasi people of Jharkhand living in villages are often involved in farming. However, they usually have better access to roads, irrigation, electricity, and markets. They also get more support from banks, government schemes, and other services. This gives them an advantage in improving their income and quality of life.

Employment

The employment pattern among the Adivasi communities of Jharkhand, as described above, reveals deep-rooted vulnerabilities shaped by the seasonal and informal nature of local livelihood options, compounded by restricted access to productive resources. A large section of Adivasis depends on subsistence agriculture, minor forest produce collection, and daily wage labor, which are often insufficient to sustain households year-round.⁵⁹ Consequently, seasonal migration has become a coping strategy, with many migrating to states such as Punjab, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal for temporary employment in agriculture or construction. While this migration provides short-term income, it often places Adivasi workers in exploitative conditions, lacking legal safeguards and social support, and increasing their vulnerability to trafficking and abuse.⁶⁰ Employment remains largely informal, insecure, and poorly paid, with most Adivasis engaged as unskilled agricultural laborers, construction workers, or self-employed in low-income activities like forest produce gathering. Their participation in the formal, salaried sector is minimal,

55 Xaxa (2004), GoI (2008), GoI (2014)

56 Kumar (2008)

57 PRADAN (2021)

58 Kumar et al (2020)

59 Shreerajan (2021)

60 Rao (2018)

hindered by systemic barriers such as low literacy, absence of vocational skill training, and geographic and infrastructural isolation.

In contrast to the Adivasi population, non-Adivasi communities in Jharkhand exhibit significantly higher participation in formal employment sectors such as government services, private enterprises, education, healthcare, and trade. This advantage is largely due to relatively better access to quality education, skill training, established job networks, and proximity to urban centers. Non-Adivasis also show a stronger presence in entrepreneurial ventures and small business ownership, supported by higher financial literacy, easier access to institutional credit, and greater integration into the formal banking system.⁶¹

Income and Expenditure

As stated above, Adivasi households in Jharkhand continue to face significant economic hardships due to limited, irregular, and low-paying sources of income. These income sources are not only seasonal and climate-sensitive but are also undermined by the absence of organized markets and effective value chains. Supplementary activities like small-scale livestock rearing exist but contribute marginally. The cumulative effect of these constraints results in severe income volatility. The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 shows that Adivasi households are heavily concentrated in informal, low-income livelihood categories (own-account cultivation, casual wage labour and small non-farm activities are dominant), underscoring the limited reach of salaried and formal employment among Adivasi families in Jharkhand. Income inequality in Jharkhand reflects significant disparities between Adivasi, non-Adivasi, and urban populations. While the state has seen growth in industries, mining, and services, the benefits have largely gone to non-Adivasi urban and semi-urban populations with better access to jobs, land, and capital. In contrast, most Adivasi communities—concentrated in rural and forested areas—continue to depend on low and irregular incomes from subsistence farming, forest produce, or casual labor. According to the *Jharkhand Economic Survey (2020–21)*, Adivasis are overrepresented among the lowest income groups.⁶² The NSS 77th Round (2019) reports that over 60 per cent of Adivasi households had little or no ownership of durable goods, savings, or credit access.⁶³ This limits investment in health, education, or livelihoods, reinforcing long-term inequality.

In Jharkhand, the 2023–24 household consumption expenditure data highlights a pronounced economic disparity faced by Scheduled Tribes (STs). Their average MPCE is the lowest among all groups, at just Rs.2,584 in rural areas and Rs. 4,817 in urban areas—both well below the state averages of Rs.3,056 and Rs.5,455, respectively. This indicates that even within urban spaces, where overall consumption levels are higher, ST households remain at a disadvantage compared to other groups. The gap is particularly stark when compared with the “Others” category, whose urban MPCE (Rs. 6,572) is nearly 36 per cent higher than that of STs, and whose rural MPCE (Rs.3,454) is about one-third higher. These differences

61 GOI (2014)

62 GoJ (2021)

63 GoI (2021)

suggest that while economic inequality between rural and urban households is significant, the disadvantage experienced by STs persists across both geographies, reflecting deeper structural marginalization. The data underscores that ST communities, despite forming a substantial share of Jharkhand's population, continue to be the most economically vulnerable, with consumption levels far behind the state's average and even further behind socially advantaged groups.

Table 4.1. Average MPCE (Rs.) by social group in Jharkhand - 2023-24

Categories	Rural	Urban
Adivasi (ST)	2,584	4,817
Dalit (SC)	2,950	4,053
Other Backward Classes (OBC)	3,386	5,394
Others	3,454	6,572
All	3,056	5,455

Source: GOI, "Survey on Household Consumption Expenditure: 2023-24", New Delhi: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, GOI, 2021

Poverty

Poverty in Jharkhand persists paradoxically amidst abundant natural resources, largely due to the skewed distribution and irrational exploitation of those resources, leading to marginalization and widespread deprivation. This poverty is not uniformly distributed; it is deeply stratified along social and ethnic lines, with Adivasi communities bearing a disproportionate burden. Adivasis constitute a significant share of the state's multidimensionally poor—those experiencing overlapping deprivations in health, education, and living standards.⁶⁴ The underutilization of government welfare schemes, often stemming from a lack of awareness, poor outreach, or bureaucratic hurdles, further exacerbates their vulnerability. Additionally, irregular and unplanned spending patterns, combined with unstable incomes, frequently trap Adivasi households in cycles of debt and drudgery. Basic infrastructure remains inadequate in many Adivasi habitations, with limited access to clean drinking water, sanitation, housing, electricity, and healthcare. These deficiencies significantly lower quality of life and restrict opportunities for upward mobility. The absence of key documents such as Aadhaar, caste certificates, or ration cards often results in exclusion from critical welfare programs like the Public Distribution System (PDS), social security pensions, and employment guarantees under MGNREGA, reinforcing their systemic poverty and exclusion.⁶⁵

A 2023 community-level in Jharkhand found that over 46 per cent of surveyed indigenous community members were living below the poverty line, with widespread seasonal migration

⁶⁴ GOI (2014)

⁶⁵ GOJ (2022)

reported (about 42 per cent of young men and 50 per cent of young women in the sample leaving home for work); the report also documents limited access to social protection and widespread land conflicts.⁶⁶

Living Status of the Adivasis of Jharkhand

Living status, also referred to as standard of living or living conditions, encompasses a wide range of interrelated components that define the overall well-being, economic security, and quality of life of individuals and households. These include income, employment, housing quality, access to health care, sanitation, education, social security, asset ownership, infrastructure, and participation in governance and development programs.⁶⁷

Housing in Jharkhand varies widely between urban and rural areas. While cities like Ranchi, Jamshedpur, Bokaro, and Dhanbad have seen the growth of pucca (permanent) housing structures, a large proportion of rural and Adivasi households continue to live in kutchra or semi-pucca houses made of mud, bamboo, and thatch. These dwellings are often overcrowded and vulnerable to seasonal damage from heavy rains or cyclones. According to Census 2011, only around 40 per cent of rural households lived in permanent houses, and this figure has seen only modest improvement over the past decade.

Sanitation remains a major concern, particularly in rural Jharkhand. Despite efforts under the Swachh Bharat Mission, open defecation continues in several villages due to the lack of usable toilets, cultural practices, and water availability issues. Many constructed toilets remain non-functional or unused. Lack of proper waste disposal systems also contributes to poor hygiene and the spread of disease, especially in Adivasi regions and urban slums.⁶⁸

Access to **safe drinking water** is another critical issue. While many urban households have piped water connections, rural areas often rely on hand pumps, wells, and seasonal streams. Water quality is a persistent problem, with high fluoride and iron contamination reported in several districts such as Palamu, Garhwa, and Giridih. During dry seasons, water scarcity becomes severe, especially in upland villages, forcing families—particularly women—to walk long distances in search of potable water.⁶⁹

In terms of **basic amenities**, electricity access has improved in recent years due to schemes like Saubhagya and rural electrification drives. However, the reliability of power supply remains inconsistent, especially in remote villages. Other essential services such as roads, transport, mobile connectivity, and digital access are also limited in far-flung areas, affecting mobility, education, and livelihoods.⁷⁰

Food Security is a continuing challenge in Jharkhand, where a large section of the population—particularly the Scheduled Tribes and rural poor—depends on subsidized grains under the Public Distribution System (PDS). Though PDS coverage is widespread,

66 IWGIA (2023); Over 46% of state Adivasis face economic hardship: Survey; ToI (2025)

67 PRADAN (2021)

68 IIPS (2021)

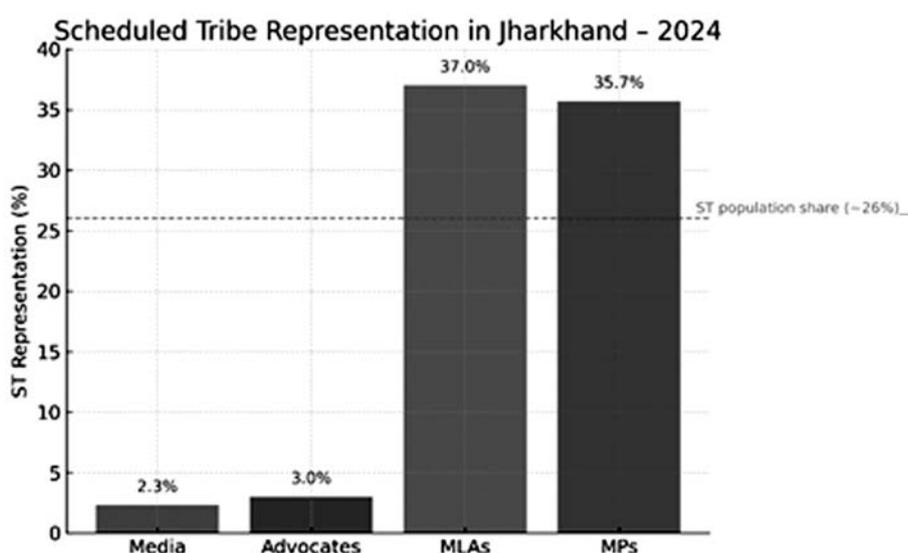
69 PRADAN (2021)

70 PRADAN (2021)

issues like irregular supplies, ghost ration cards, and corruption in delivery mechanisms hamper its effectiveness. Malnutrition and undernourishment remain high, as evidenced by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS- 5), which shows significant levels of stunting (39.6 per cent) and wasting (22.4 per cent) among children under five in Jharkhand.⁷¹

While Adivasis hold above-proportional representation in political positions—owing largely to constitutional seat reservations—their presence in media and the legal profession is disproportionately low compared to their ~26 per cent share of Jharkhand’s population (Census 2011). This imbalance highlights structural barriers to entry in professions that shape public discourse and justice access.

Chart 4.1. Representation of Adivasis in the Places of Influence



Source⁷²: Ranchi Press Club (2024), Jharkhand High Court (2024), Election Commission of India (2024), Jharkhand Vidhan Sabha (2024).

Representational equality seems to be a distant goal in Jharkhand. The representation of the Adivasis in political and administrative corridors has drawn largely on constitutional provision. In other words, the share the Adivasis have got in some spheres of public life like politics and administration, through constitutional bindings like reservation. The microscopic presence of Adivasis in media and the legal profession demonstrates how narrow the entrance for the Adivasis is in social spheres that control, to a great extent, who enjoys social benefits how much.

⁷¹ IGIDR and IHD (2022)

⁷² Ranchi Press Club (2024); Jharkhand High Court (2024); ECI (2025); Jharkhand Legislative Assembly (2024)

The Enduring Shadow of History

The lived realities of Jharkhand's Adivasis, traced across demography, education, health, and economic conditions, reveal a continuity of exclusion rooted in colonial dispossession and reinforced by uneven development in the post-Independence era. Their declining demographic share and marginal urban presence reflect displacement and weakened political voice, while fragile educational gains are undermined by steep dropouts, particularly among boys, and poor infrastructure in remote areas. Health outcomes remain deeply unequal, with Adivasi communities experiencing higher malnutrition, anaemia, and child mortality, alongside limited access to functional healthcare. Economically, their vulnerability is starkest: the 2023–24 consumption data shows Scheduled Tribes have the lowest per capita expenditure in both rural and urban Jharkhand, far below state averages and strikingly behind socially advantaged groups, underscoring persistent marginalisation in livelihoods, income, and access to welfare. Yet, the resilience of Adivasi societies—seen in balanced sex ratios, strong community networks, and cultural cohesion—demonstrates the foundations of a more inclusive future. The enduring contrast, however, between resource-rich lands and impoverished lives, and between constitutional promises and daily deprivation, demands a conscious policy shift that addresses historical injustices through protection of land rights, equitable investment in education, health, and employment, and respect for Adivasi cultural traditions. These are the non-negotiable pre-requisites for Jharkhand to transcend to a naturally humanly developed state.

Table 4.2. Adivasis in Jharkhand: Select Indicators

Indicator	Adivasis (STs)	Jharkhand Average	Sources
Land Ownership	~90% landless or marginal (<1 ha)	~70% marginal farmers	SECC 2011; All India Debt & Investment Survey – 2019; NSS 77 th Round
Formal Employment (Govt/Private Salaried)	5–7% of working population	~15%	NSS 2019
Casual Labour Dependence	~65% of workforce	~50%	NSS 2019
Seasonal Migration (15–35 age group)	42% men, 50% women (esp. rural Adivasis)	~30%	PRADAN, “Status of Adivasi Livelihoods Report: Jharkhand and Orissa”, 2021
Households Below Poverty Line (BPL)	~46%	~37%	National Multidimensional Poverty Index, NITI Aayog 2021
Households with Durable Assets (TV, fridge, vehicle)	<40%	~55%	NSS 2019
Food Security (Malnutrition under-5)	Stunting 39.6%; Wasting 22.4%	State avg: Stunting 39.6%; Wasting 22.4%	NFHS-5 (2019–21)

Educational Attainment (Literacy)	ST literacy: 57% (women 46%)	State avg: 66.4% (women 56%)	Census 2011
Secondary School Completion (Girls 15–17)	<25%	~40%	NFHS-5
Representation in Decision-Making (beyond politics)	Minimal in media, legal, corporate, higher bureaucracy	Dominated by non-Adivasis	Ranchi Press Club (2024), Jharkhand High Court (2024), ECI (2024), Jharkhand Legislative Assembly (2024).

Part II

PROFILES OF INDIVIDUAL
ADIVASI COMMUNITIES OF JHARKHAND



Chapter 5

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILES OF ADIVASIS OF JHARKHAND (Excluding the Particularly Vulnerable Tribes)

Adivasis—recognised administratively as Scheduled Tribes (STs)—contribute significantly to the demographic, economic, and cultural fabric of Jharkhand. The state, with 86,45,042 individuals who were enumerated as Adivasis, accounts for 8.3 per cent of the total Adivasi population in India. While scholars acknowledge that many shared historical and social dynamics characterise Adivasi life, it is equally well established that they do not constitute a homogeneous group. Rather, their identities reflect diverse ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic, and political trajectories. Across India, the state officially recognises more than 700 distinct Adivasi communities as Scheduled Tribes. Of these, 32 are found in Jharkhand, including eight that are categorised as Particularly Vulnerable Adivasi Groups (PVTGs), about whom a separate chapter follows in the present work.

The Government of India, through the *Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Orders (Amendment) Bill, 2022*, amended (i) the *Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 (the SC Order)*, and (ii) the *Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 (the ST Order)*. The Bill modifies the Schedule to the ST Order to include certain communities in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Jharkhand. These are the Deshwari, Ganjhu, Dautalbandi (Dwalbandi), Patbandi, Raut, Maajhia, Khairi (Kheri), Tamaria (Tamadia), and Puran communities. However, owing to the lack of recent data—which is expected to become available only after the Census operation scheduled for 2026—we must confine our analysis to the boundaries of the 2011 Census.

Nevertheless, despite the temporal limitations of the data—the last Census having been conducted 14 years ago—and the lack of material on the changes incorporated into the list of Scheduled Tribes, the available information on the socio-economic conditions of the Adivasis remains useful for introducing general readers, both Adivasis and non-Adivasis, to the diverse world of the Adivasis of Jharkhand.

In this chapter, we present the socio-economic and cultural aspects of 24 individual communities—Baiga, Banjara, Bathudi, Bedia, Bhumij, Binjhia, Chero, Chik Baraik, Gond, Gorait, Ho, Karmali, Kavar, Kharia, Kharwar, Khond, Kisan, Nagesia, Kol, Kora, Mudi-Kora, Lohra, Mahli, Munda, Patar, Oraon, Dhangar, and Santal. The descriptions cover population, demography, literacy and education, occupational patterns, language, religion, and cultural practices.

Notes

While the demographic and socio-economic descriptions are based mainly on Census of India data (2001 and 2011), the main source of data on cultural life practices are H H Risley's *Caste and Tribes of Bengal*⁷³, K S Singh's *The Scheduled Tribes*⁷⁴, Narmadeshwar Prasad's *Land and People of Jharkhand*⁷⁵, Birendra Prasad et al's *PVTGs in Jharkhand*⁷⁶ and some documentary films by Ramdayal Munda Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi, accessed from its website trijharkhand.in/en/documentary-films. The data also come from the field experiences gathered through several field reseraches conducted by the Instiitute for Human Development-Eastern Regional Centre (IHD-ERC), Ranchi.

1. Few of the terms used in the following two chapters have been elaborated here for reference.
 Female-Male Ratio: Number of women per 1000 men;
 Literacy Rate: $(\text{Total literates} / (\text{total population} - 0-6 \text{ population})) * 100$.
 Female Literacy Rate: $(\text{total female literates} / (\text{total female population} - 0-6 \text{ female population})) * 100$;
 Work Participation Rate: $(\text{Total workers} / \text{Total population}) * 100$;
 Main Workers are those who are gainfully employed for 183 days or more;
 Per centage of main workers: $(\text{Main workers} / \text{Total workers}) * 100$;
 Per centage of cultivators: $(\text{Number of cultivators among main workers} / \text{Main workers}) * 100$;
 Per centage of agricultural labourers: $(\text{Number of agricultural labourers among main workers} / \text{Main workers}) * 100$
2. The illustrations used in the book hold only aesthetic value and are not intended as authentic portrayals of the communities.

73 Risley (2003)

74 Singh (1994)

75 Prasad (1961)

76 Prasad et al (2024)

1. THE BAIGA



According to the 2011 Census, the Baigas in India comprise a total population of 552,495 individuals. Their habitations are distributed across various states, with a significant concentration in Madhya Pradesh (414,526), Chhattisgarh (89,744), Uttar Pradesh (30,006), West Bengal (13,423), Jharkhand (3,582), Bihar (543), Odisha (338), and Maharashtra (333). There has been a 43 per cent increase in the Baiga population of Jharkhand during the decade of 2001 and 2011.

Religion and Linguistic Identity

Majority of the Baigas are enumerated as Hindu (85 per cent), while around 14 per cent adhere to indigenous religious traditions such as the Sarna faith, and a small proportion (about 1 per cent) practice Christianity. In Jharkhand, the Baiga community speaks Baigani, a dialect shaped by influences from Chhattisgarhi and Gondi, but most members also display proficiency in Hindi and regional languages such as Sadri or Nagpuri. This linguistic adaptability reflects their interaction with diverse groups and their need to engage in wider socio-economic networks.

The 2011 Census bilingualism data show that 95.6 per cent of Baiga speakers in Jharkhand reported knowledge of Hindi as a second language, making it the most common medium of wider communication. A smaller section reported knowledge of a third language, most often Sadri or Nagpuri. This pattern demonstrates both the cultural pressures associated with minority language status and the adaptive strategies adopted by Baigas to integrate into the dominant linguistic economy of the state. While this bilingualism enables access to education, employment, and markets, it also places Baigani at risk of erosion, especially among younger generations they shift increasingly toward Hindi. Thus, the Baigas' multilingualism signifies both opportunities for socio-economic mobility and a challenge for cultural preservation.

PVTG Status and Demographic Indicators

Although the Government of India lists nine Particularly Vulnerable Adivasi Groups (PVTGs) under "Bihar, including Jharkhand," the Census clubs the Hill Kharia with the Savar community, leaving Jharkhand with eight officially recognized PVTGs. However, the official PVTG Jharkhand portal (accessed July 2025) lists ten groups, including the Baiga and Pokhariya. The Baigas are officially recognized as a Scheduled Tribe in Jharkhand, affirming their place within the state's indigenous framework.

According to the 2011 Census, the Baigas of Jharkhand have a female–male ratio (FMR) of 958, with a strikingly higher ratio among children under six years (1,104). Their literacy rate is 37 per cent, with male literacy at 43 per cent and female literacy at 30 per cent. Although the overall literacy level is low, the gender gap of 13 per centage points is narrower than the Jharkhand state average (22 points), suggesting a relatively balanced—though still limited—access to education across genders. Education levels remain particularly low, with only 3 per cent completing secondary school and less than 1 per cent reaching higher secondary or graduation levels.

Work and Livelihood

The work participation rate (WPR) among the Baigas in Jharkhand is 46.5 per cent (men 51 per cent, women 42 per cent). However, only one-fourth of these workers (25.6 per cent) are classified as main workers, i.e., engaged in stable employment for more than 183 days a year. The majority remain in insecure, irregular forms of work. Among main workers, 34.9 per cent are cultivators and 38.9 per cent are agricultural labourers, showing their heavy reliance on land and forest-based occupations. This indicates a lack of diversification into non-agricultural employment, leaving the Baigas particularly vulnerable to poverty, seasonal migration, and livelihood insecurity.

Social and Cultural Life

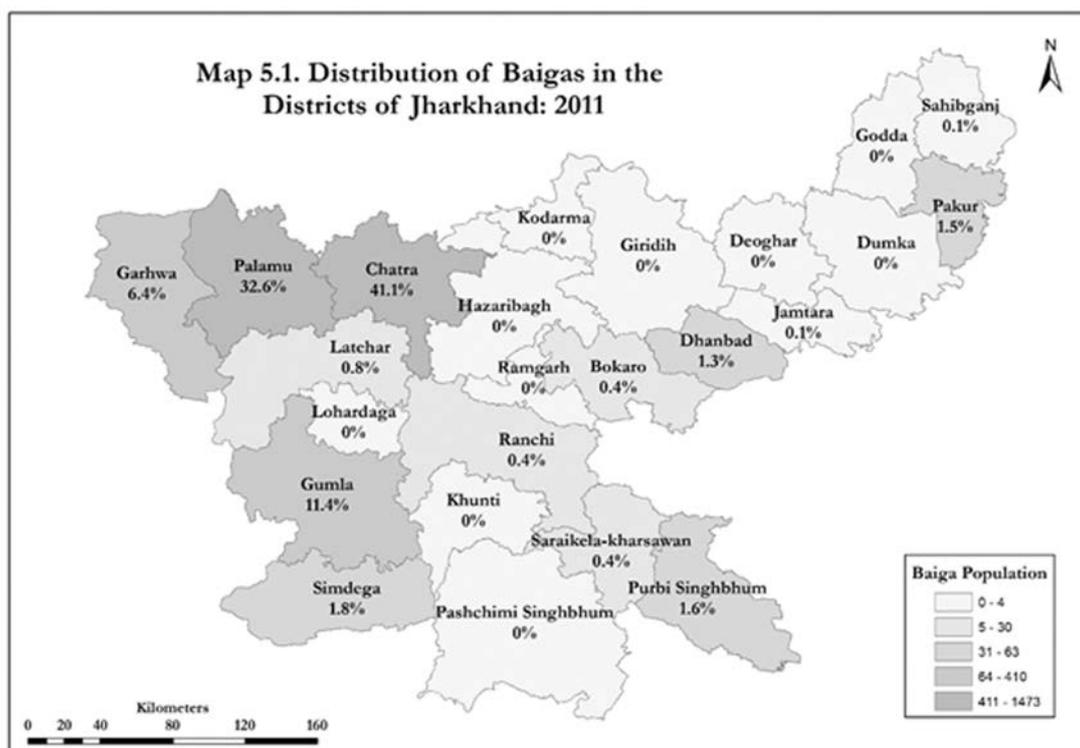
Known traditionally as “ojhas” or medicine-makers, the Baigas preserve a rich cultural heritage that includes music, dance, tattooing, and folk medicine. They maintain a patrilineal and patriarchal kinship system, with a unique reverse dowry practice, where the groom’s family compensates the bride’s family for the loss of a working member. Divorce is permissible within the community, with arrangements for compensation and child custody. This social framework emphasizes self-sufficiency and resilience, deeply tied to the forest ecosystem that sustains their lives and culture.

While the Baigas of Jharkhand did not play a direct role in the freedom movement, they engaged in indirect resistance against British colonial rule through non-cooperation—such as refusing to work for colonial authorities, preserving cultural traditions, and resisting land alienation. These actions, though localized, reflected a broader commitment to autonomy and identity.

Table 5.1. Select Indicators for the Baiga – 2011 Census*

Popu- lation	Fe- male-Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Litera- cy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Par- ticipa- tion Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Cultivators among Main Workers	Agricultur- al labourers among Main Work- ers(per cent)	Comple- tion of Secondary Education (per cent)
3,582	958	1104	36.7	29.6	46.5	25.6	34.9	38.9	3

Today, the Baigas of Jharkhand face persistent socio-economic marginalization. Low literacy, insecure livelihoods, and inadequate access to healthcare and modern infrastructure continue to define their condition. Their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness—especially the threatened status of Baigani—is both a source of pride and a point of vulnerability. The community remains caught between the need to integrate into modern economic structures through bilingualism and education, and the desire to preserve their ancestral identity and practices as a PVTG.



2. THE BANJARA



The **Banjaras** are a small yet culturally distinctive Adivasi group in Jharkhand, known for their centuries-old tradition of **nomadic trading**. Historically, they were central to the long-distance transport of commodities—especially salt—using pack animals, and their mobility shaped their economic and social identity. Today, while most Banjaras are settled, their communities continue to carry forward elements of their nomadic past through distinctive cultural practices.

Demographic Distribution

According to the 2011 Census, the Banjara population in Jharkhand is 487 individuals, scattered across 14 of the state's 24 districts. Their distribution is thin but widespread: Ranchi district has the highest concentration, with 123 persons, while Paschimi Singhbhum records only two individuals. Despite their small numbers, the Banjara population in Jharkhand grew by 30 per cent between 2001 and 2011—significantly higher than the growth rates of both the Adivasi population and the general population of the state. This demonstrates a remarkable demographic resilience for such a numerically minor group.

At the national level, the Banjaras are more populous in Andhra Pradesh (2.4 million, under the names Sugali, Lambadi, and Banjara), Odisha (18,257), and Bihar (2,709), with Jharkhand's presence representing only a very small fraction of the community.

Religion and Linguistic Practices

The Banjaras of Jharkhand overwhelmingly enumerated as Hindus (96 per cent), with small minorities following Christianity (1 per cent) or other traditional religious faiths (4 per cent).

The Banjaras of Jharkhand primarily speak Lambadi (also called Gour Boli or Gorboli), a dialect that historically served as the lingua franca of their nomadic trading networks. However, given their small and scattered presence in Jharkhand, Lambadi has limited vitality as a spoken language in the state. As a result, most Banjaras are bilingual or multilingual, shifting between Lambadi within the community and Hindi or local regional languages (such as Sadri or Nagpuri) in wider interaction.

According to Census 2011 bilingualism tables, a significant proportion of Lambadi mother-tongue speakers in Jharkhand reported proficiency in Hindi as their second language 75.8 per cent, while a smaller section declared knowledge of a third language, typically Sadri or Oriya (in bordering areas). This reflects the adaptive strategies of a numerically small Adivasi group, where bilingualism is not only a cultural resource but also a necessity for socio-economic survival.

Demographic Indicators

The female–male ratio (FMR) among Banjaras is 1,012, suggesting slightly more women than men in the population. However, the child sex ratio (0–6 years) is 939, indicating demographic stress and possible gender bias in younger cohorts.

The literacy rate is 40 per cent, significantly lower than the state average. Gender disparities are stark: male literacy stands at 55 per cent, while female literacy lags at 26 per cent, reflecting

persistent gender inequality in access to education. Educational attainment levels also remain poor: 19.6 per cent of literates possess only basic literacy, 10.5 per cent have completed primary education, while only 1.3 per cent have reached secondary level, 5.1 per cent higher secondary, and 3.3 per cent graduation. Taking secondary completion as the benchmark, only 10 per cent of Banjaras in Jharkhand can be classified as 'educated', leaving a large 90 per cent effectively uneducated.

Work and Livelihood

The work participation rate (WPR) among Banjaras is 39 per cent, with men participating more than women. Among workers, 59 per cent are main workers (men 72 per cent, women 39 per cent), meaning the majority still experience irregular or seasonal employment.

Occupational patterns highlight their distinct economic profile:

- 4.5 per cent are cultivators,
- 3.6 per cent are agricultural labourers,
- 30 per cent are engaged in household industries, and
- A striking 62 per cent are in "other occupations", which include trading, transport, and wage labour.

This shows a relatively lower dependence on agriculture compared to other Adivasi groups in Jharkhand, and a stronger orientation toward non-agricultural and artisanal livelihoods.

Cultural Identity and Heritage

The Banjaras maintain a vibrant and distinctive cultural identity through music, dance, ornaments, embroidery, and tattooing. Their nomadic past as traders continues to influence their traditions, marriage practices, and social organization. Marriage rituals are unique, often involving elaborate exchanges and performances, which distinguish them from neighbouring communities.

Their settlement in Jharkhand has led to the blending of traditional practices with new forms of livelihood. Yet, they continue to identify strongly with their nomadic heritage, which forms the basis of their cultural distinctiveness.

Historical Marginalization

The colonial state profoundly shaped the fate of the Banjaras. Under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, they were classified as a "criminal tribe", a label that stigmatised them as inherently criminal and led to systematic discrimination. This classification subjected them to surveillance, restrictions on movement, and compulsory registration, undermining their traditional livelihoods and accelerating their marginalization. Many Banjaras were forced into hard labour, land alienation, and poverty, while their reputation as "criminals" lingered even after the Act was repealed in the mid-20th century.

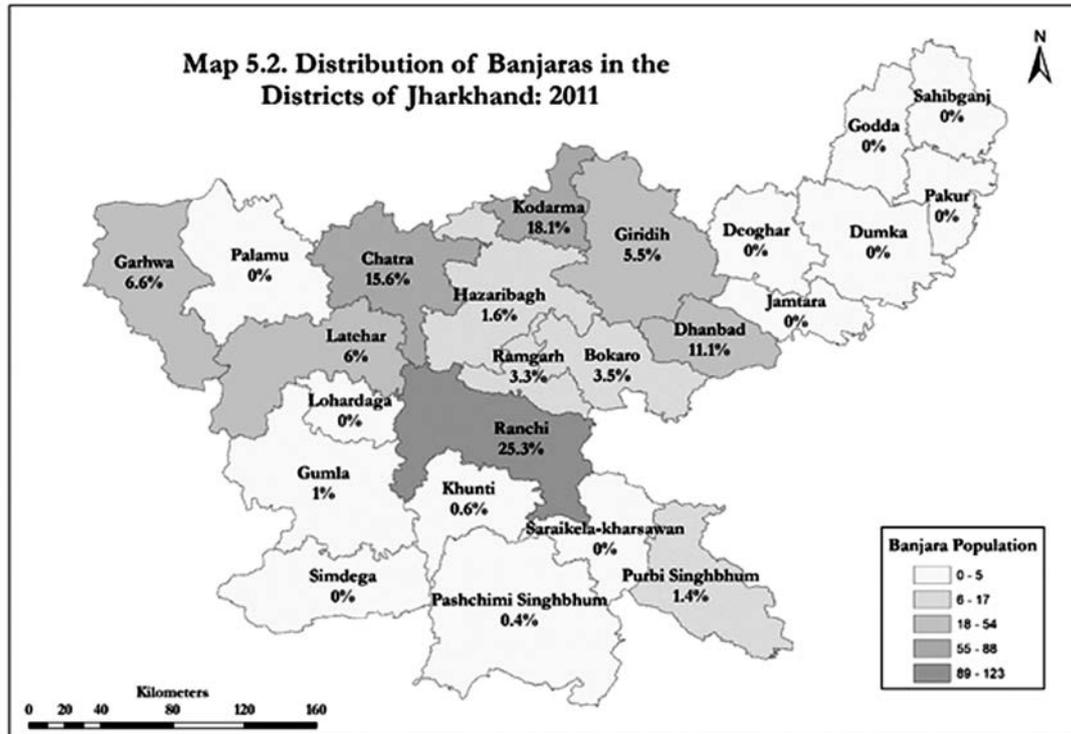
This colonial stigma continues to affect social perceptions, contributing to their exclusion and vulnerability in the modern period.

Table 5.2. Select Indicators the Banjaras – 2011 Census*

Population	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Participation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Cultivators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Secondary Completion Rate (%)
487	1012	939	40.3	25.6	39.0	58.9	4.5	3.6	10

Today, the Banjaras of Jharkhand remain one of the most numerically marginal Adivasi groups, struggling with educational backwardness, economic insecurity, and social exclusion. While their bilingualism allows integration into broader society, it also accelerates the erosion of Lambadi, their mother tongue, especially among younger generations. Their historical classification as a criminal tribe continues to cast a shadow, reinforcing stereotypes and limiting their social mobility.

Despite these challenges, the Banjaras embody remarkable resilience, maintaining a vibrant cultural identity while adapting to changing socio-economic contexts. Their presence, though small in Jharkhand, adds to the rich diversity of the state's Adivasi mosaic, making their study crucial for understanding processes of marginalization and cultural persistence among small Adivasi groups.



3. THE BATHUDI



The Bathudis are an Adivasi community with a strong cultural presence in Odisha, Jharkhand, and Bihar. Nationally, their population stood at 2,20,877 in the 2011 Census, with Odisha alone accounting for 98 per cent of this total. In Odisha, they are also known as *Bathuri*. The Bathudis claim a deep historical connection to the land, with oral traditions and mythological origin stories that situate them among the earliest settlers of the region. Their cultural practices—such as floral wall decorations, mat weaving, and leaf-plate making—highlight a tradition of craftsmanship and close ties to agriculture.

Demographic Distribution

In Jharkhand, the Bathudi population is just 3,464, representing a very small fraction of the community. Although spread across 16 districts, they are overwhelmingly concentrated in East Singhbhum, which accounts for 94 per cent of their presence. Despite their small number, the Bathudis witnessed a remarkable decadal growth rate of 211 per cent between 2001 and 2011 (from 1,114 to 3,464). This extraordinary increase points to possible in-migration from neighbouring Odisha, combined with natural growth.

Religion and Linguistic Practices

Nearly 99 per cent of Bathudis in Jharkhand are enumerated as Hindus, with negligible minorities following Christianity or other religions. The community's linguistic practices reflect its scattered presence and regional integration. In Jharkhand, most Bathudis are bilingual, speaking Hindi alongside local languages such as Bengali, Kurmali, or Ho. Their ancestral tongue, a dialect of Odia, is maintained by some, especially in households with close ties to Odisha.

The 2011 Census bilingualism tables reveal that around 74.6 per cent of Bathudi mother-tongue speakers reported proficiency in Bengali as a second language, while about 9 per cent reported knowledge of a third language, usually Hindi, Kurmali, or Odia. This reflects both adaptation to Jharkhand's multilingual environment and the vulnerability of Bathudi's distinct dialect to erosion.

Demographic Indicators

The Bathudi sex ratio stands at 975 females per 1,000 males, slightly lower than the state average, while the child sex ratio (866) reveals a marked imbalance among younger cohorts.

The literacy rate is 51 per cent (male 63 per cent, female 39 per cent), showing a substantial gender gap. Educational attainment is skewed towards the lower levels: 28 per cent of literates report only basic literacy, 16 per cent have reached primary level, 4 per cent secondary, 2 per cent higher secondary, and less than 1 per cent graduation. Measured by secondary completion, only 7 per cent of Bathudis can be considered 'educated'.

Work and Livelihood

The work participation rate (WPR) is 50 per cent (male 58 per cent, female 42 per cent). Among workers, 47 per cent are classified as main workers, pointing to high levels of underemployment.

Occupational data shows clear dependence on agriculture:

- 5 per cent are cultivators,
- 74.6 per cent are agricultural labourers, and
- 20 per cent are engaged in other forms of work.

This profile reveals deep structural vulnerability, with the majority of Bathudis dependent on insecure wage labour in agriculture. Women often supplement household incomes by weaving mats, preparing rice products, and crafting leaf plates.

Cultural Identity and Heritage

Bathudi society is organised around *khilli* (clans), with strict rules against intra-clan marriage. Their houses, often made of mud and thatch and adorned with decorative motifs, reflect both artistic expression and ecological adaptation. The community has long absorbed Brahminical influences, though Sarna traditions remain visible.

Historical Marginalization

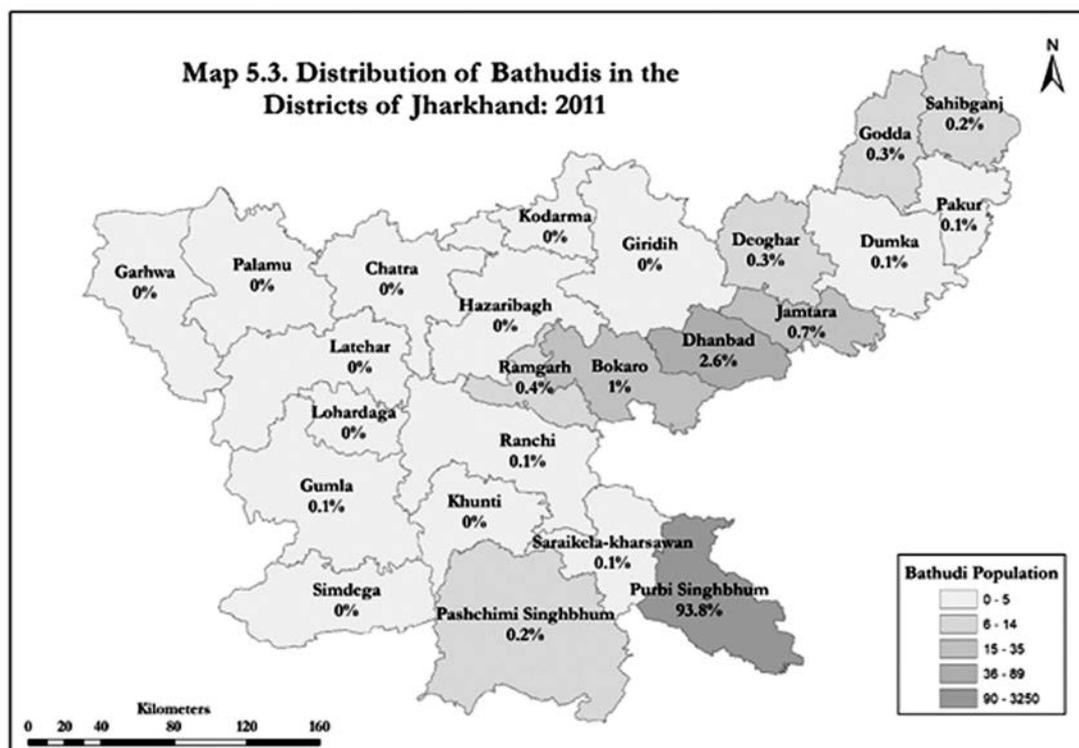
Although not subjected to the same colonial stigmatization as the Banjaras, the Bathudis have endured marginalization through poverty, landlessness, and limited access to education and healthcare. Their concentration in agricultural labour underscores structural dependency and vulnerability, especially in Jharkhand, where they lack the demographic strength they possess in Odisha.

Table 5.3 Select Indicators the Bathudi – 2011 Census*

Popu- lation	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Lit- eracy Rate (per cent)	Female Litera- cy Rate (per cent)	Work Participa- tion Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Work- ers	Agricultural labourers among Main Work- ers (per cent)	Secondary Comple- tion rate (%)
3,464	975	866	51.2	39.2	50.0	47.4	5.1	74.6	7

Today, the Bathudis of Jharkhand remain a numerically small and economically vulnerable community. High illiteracy, poor female educational attainment, and dependence on agricultural wage labour continue to hinder their development. Their bilingualism enables social and economic interaction in Jharkhand's multilingual society, but it also threatens the survival of their Odia-linked dialect.

Despite these challenges, Bathudis continue to preserve aspects of their cultural identity—through clan organisation, traditional crafts, and ritual practices—while navigating the pressures of marginalization and cultural assimilation.



4. THE BEDIA



The Bedias occupy a distinctive position in Jharkhand's social and cultural landscape. While classified as a Scheduled Caste (SC) in some states, they are listed as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) in Jharkhand. Historically associated with a nomadic lifestyle and even stigmatized under colonial policies, the Bedias today are largely settled agriculturalists, though vestiges of their past still inform their cultural practices and identity.

Demographic Distribution

According to the 2011 Census, the Bedia population in Jharkhand is 100,161, spread across nearly all districts, but concentrated in Ramgarh, Ranchi, Bokaro, and Hazaribagh. The community recorded a 20 per cent growth between 2001 and 2011, reflecting steady demographic expansion.

The sex ratio is relatively balanced, with 995 females per 1,000 males, and notably, the child sex ratio (0–6 years) is favourable at 1,023 girls per 1,000 boys—a positive indicator compared to many other Adivasi groups.

Religion and Language

About 70 per cent of the Bedias in Jharkhand are returned as Hindus, 0.1 per cent as Christians, and 29.9 per cent follow other faiths such as Sarna.

Linguistically, the Bedias are primarily speakers of Panchpargania and Khortha, which serve as their intra-community languages. For wider communication, they rely on Hindi (85.4) and, in border areas, Bangla. Nearly three-fourths of Bedia speakers reported knowledge of a second language, overwhelmingly Hindi, which strengthens their integration in Jharkhand's multilingual society. Around 12 per cent reported a third language, most often Bangla or Sadri, reflecting contact with neighboring linguistic communities.

Education

The educational profile of the Bedia community reflects both progress and persistent challenges. According to the 2011 Census, the overall literacy rate among the Bedias of Jharkhand is 58 per cent, but the gender gap is striking: while 69 per cent of men are literate, only 47 per cent of women can read and write. This disparity points to structural inequalities in access to education. A closer look at educational attainment shows that a large proportion—28 per cent of literates—are without formal schooling, possessing only basic literacy skills. Around 19 per cent of the population has completed primary education, while the proportion declines sharply at higher levels: 6 per cent have reached secondary education, 3 per cent higher secondary, and only 1 per cent graduation or above. When secondary completion is taken as the benchmark for being considered “educated,” the proportion of truly educated Bedias drops to a mere 10 per cent. This means that the vast majority, nearly nine out of ten, remain outside the fold of meaningful educational attainment. Such low levels of formal education, combined with a pronounced gender gap, pose serious barriers to the socio-economic mobility of the Bedia community, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization.

Work and Livelihood

The Work Participation Rate (WPR) is 42.8 per cent (men 52 per cent, women 34 per cent). Among workers, 55 per cent are main workers, indicating precarious employment for nearly half the workforce.

Occupational distribution reflects a transition from nomadic to settled livelihoods:

- 44.3% cultivators
- 24.4% agricultural labourers
- 31.3% in other occupations, including small-scale trading, wage labour, and services

This shows that while agriculture is the backbone of Bedia livelihoods, a sizeable minority continue to pursue diverse non-agricultural work, reflecting adaptability and socio-economic mobility.

Cultural Identity and Social Organization

Bedia society is organized into endogamous clans and territorial groupings, governed by caste councils headed by a Mahato. Their rituals, festivals, and deities reflect a blend of Brahmanical influences and indigenous practices. Major festivals include Sarhul, Fagun, Sohrai, and Jitiya. They retain a rich tradition of music, dance, and ritual art, which continue to reinforce community cohesion and identity.

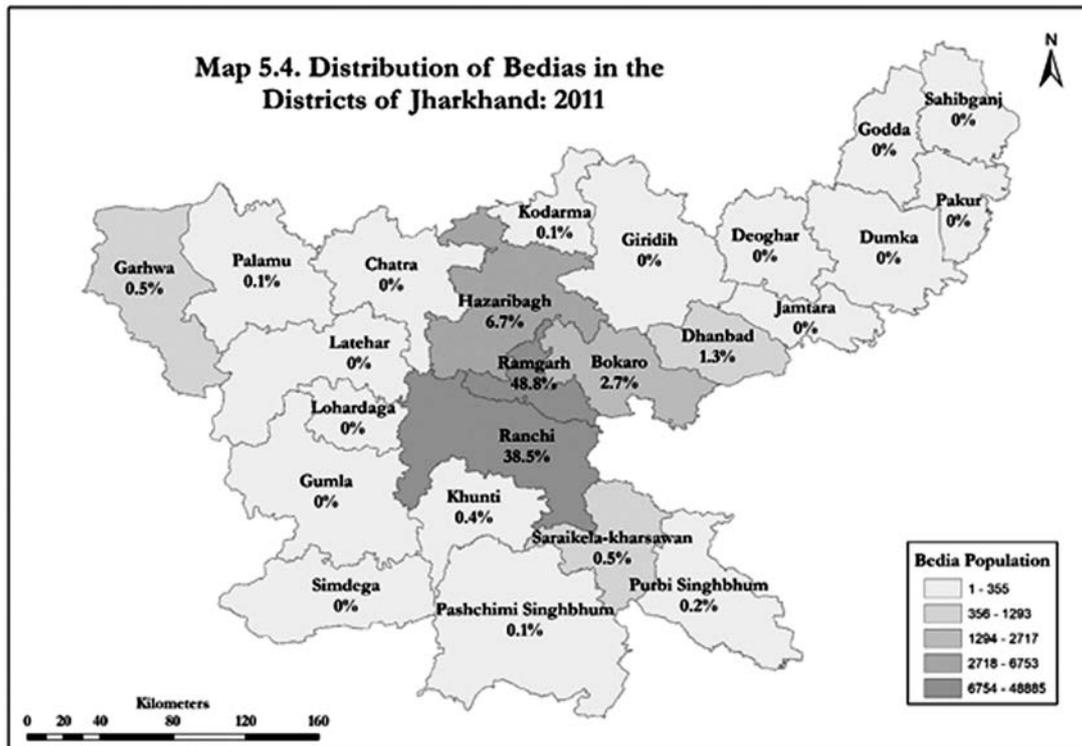
Historical Marginalization

Like many nomadic and semi-nomadic groups, the Bedias suffered from historical stigma. Under colonial rule, they were among the communities classified as “Criminal Tribes”, which subjected them to discrimination, restricted mobility, and enduring social stigma. Although the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed, its legacy lingers in the form of stereotyping and marginalization.

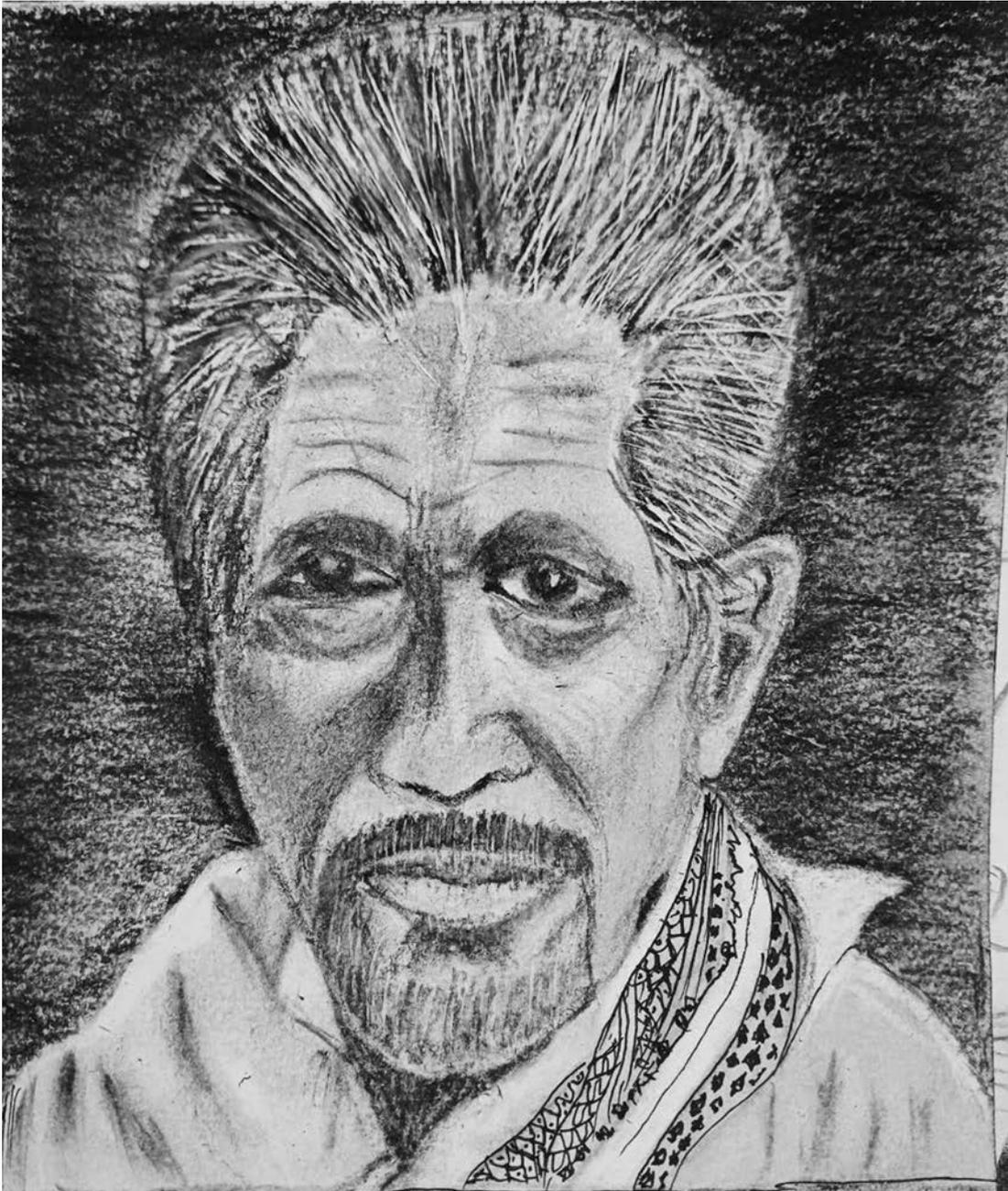
Table 5.4 Select Indicators the Bedia – 2011 Census*

Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Lit- eracy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Work- ers (per cent)	Second- ary Com- pletion rate (%)
1,00,161	995	1023	58.0	46.9	42.8	54.9	44.3	24.4	10

Today, the Bedias grapple with poverty, low literacy, gender inequality, and limited access to resources. Despite moving towards settled livelihoods, many face insecure employment and social discrimination. Efforts aimed at education, healthcare, and livelihood diversification remain critical for their socio-economic upliftment.



5. THE BHUMIJ



The Bhumij are part of the larger Munda Adivasi group and share cultural and linguistic affinities with other Munda-speaking tribes such as the Ho, Mundari, and Santali. Historically, they have been agriculturalists, forest dwellers, and artisans, known for their resistance against colonial exploitation during the Bhumij Revolt (1832–33) under leaders such as Dusha Bhumij, Jugal Bhumij, and Ganga Narayan Singh. Their identity today reflects a combination of traditional practices, Brahminical influence through Sanskritisation, and ongoing Adivasi revivalist efforts to reconnect with their Munda roots.

Demographic Distribution

According to the 2011 Census, the Bhumij population of Jharkhand stands at 2,09,448, constituting about 24 per cent of India's total Bhumij population (8,71,325). Within Jharkhand, they are concentrated overwhelmingly in Paschim Singhbhum (61 per cent) and Saraikela-Kharswan (33 per cent), with smaller numbers in other districts. The female–male ratio is 996, and the child sex ratio (0–6 years) is 968, both relatively balanced compared to many other Adivasi groups. Their decadal growth rate between 2001 and 2011 was 16 per cent, lower than the state averages for both the Adivasi and general populations.

Religion and Linguistic Practices

Religiously, the Bhumij community is diverse: 62 per cent follow Hinduism, 0.3 per cent Christianity, while a significant 37 per cent continue to follow Sarna or other indigenous faiths. Their linguistic profile reflects both their Munda heritage and regional influences. The traditional Bhumij language is closely related to Ho and Mundari, but many Bhumij are also fluent in Bengali, Odia, and Hindi, depending on their location. This multilingualism illustrates their integration into wider regional networks while retaining elements of their Adivasi linguistic identity.

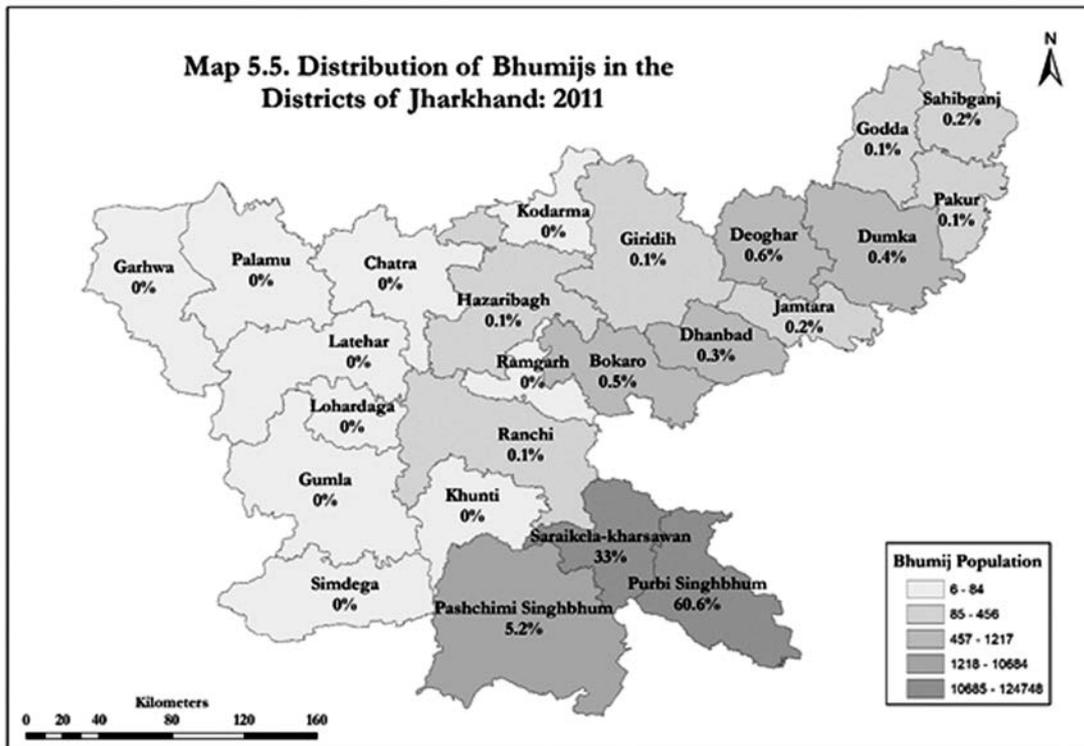
Historical Resistance and Colonial Experience

The Bhumij played a significant role in resisting British colonial rule, particularly during the Bhumij Revolt of 1832–33, which was sparked by grievances over land alienation, taxation, and exploitation. Their uprising, though suppressed, was an important episode in the broader landscape of Adivasi resistance movements against colonial domination in eastern India.

Table 5.5 Select Indicators the Bhumij – 2011 Census

Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Workers	Agri- cultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Sec- ondary Comple- tion Rate (%)
2,09,448	996	968	56.7	43.0	46.5	38.9	32.3	22.1	8

Despite their resilience, the Bhumij face serious challenges today: low levels of education, livelihood insecurity, poverty, land alienation, and cultural marginalisation. Many are still dependent on agriculture, which is vulnerable to drought and low productivity. Migration for wage labour is common, while issues of poor health and inadequate political representation persist. Their bilingualism and adoption of dominant regional languages help them navigate wider socio-economic spaces but also place their Adivasi language and identity under threat.



6.THE BINJHIA



The Binjhias are a relatively small Adivasi community whose identity varies across states. In Jharkhand and Bihar they are known as *Binjhia*, while in Odisha they appear as both Binjhia and Binjhal/Binjhar, and in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra they are largely recorded as Binjhar. This multiplicity of names reflects their complex history and spread across eastern and central India. Traditionally, they have lived in close-knit clan-based societies, practicing agriculture and artisanal crafts.

Demographic Distribution

According to the 2011 Census, the Binjhia population in Jharkhand is 14,404, marking a modest 16 per cent increase over the previous decade (12,428 in 2001). At the national level, their largest concentration is in Chhattisgarh (1.19 lakh), followed by Odisha (1.37 lakh under the name Binjhal/Binjhar). Within Jharkhand, their numbers are relatively small but culturally significant.

The female–male ratio among the Binjhias of Jharkhand is 968 women per 1,000 men, slightly below the state average, and the child sex ratio (0–6 years) is only 928, suggesting gender imbalances among younger cohorts.

Religion and Linguistic Practices

Religious affiliation within the Binjhia community is nearly evenly split: 48 per cent are Hindus, less than 1 per cent Christians, while 49 per cent follow Sarna or other traditional faiths. Their primary language is Binjhia, a member of the Munda subfamily, though bilingualism is common. Depending on their region, they also speak Hindi (92.8 per cent), Sadri, Panchpargania, Mundari, Santhali, or Bengali, which helps them integrate with neighbouring groups while maintaining their distinct linguistic identity.

Education

The literacy rate of the Binjhias of Jharkhand is 56 per cent—slightly below the state average for Adivasis. Male literacy stands at 69 per cent, compared to only 43 per cent for females, highlighting a wide gender gap.

Educational attainment is skewed toward lower levels: 30 per cent of literates possess only basic literacy without formal schooling, 18 per cent have completed primary education, 6 per cent secondary, 2 per cent higher secondary, and 1 per cent graduation. When using secondary completion as the benchmark, only 9 per cent can be considered educated, leaving 91 per cent effectively uneducated. This weak educational foundation severely constrains upward mobility.

Work and Livelihood

The work participation rate (WPR) among the Binjhias is 51 per cent, relatively high compared to other Adivasi groups, with 57 per cent of men and 45 per cent of women engaged in work. However, the quality of work remains insecure: only 54 per cent of workers are classified as main workers, indicating that nearly half experience irregular or seasonal employment.

Occupational patterns reveal a strong dependence on agriculture. Among main workers, 74

per cent are cultivators, 18 per cent are agricultural labourers, and the remainder are involved in artisanry, small-scale services, and other activities. This reliance on cultivation underscores their attachment to land, while also exposing them to the vulnerabilities of agrarian livelihoods.

Cultural Heritage

The Binjhias maintain a vibrant cultural heritage. Their society is organised into subgroups such as Asur-Binjhia, Agaria-Binjhia, Pahariya-Binjhia, and Dand-Binjhia, each with distinct septs. Kinship plays a central role in their social life, with exogamous clans forming the basis of community organisation. Practices such as cross-cousin marriage, levirate, and sororate unions are integral to their marital traditions.

Cultural expression is evident in their crafts and arts. The Binjhias utilise bamboo, wood, and Sabai grass to create ornaments, household items, and woven goods. Traditional paintings such as Kohbar and Sahrai decorate homes during festivals. Music and dance remain vital in their community life, accompanying social gatherings and religious rituals.

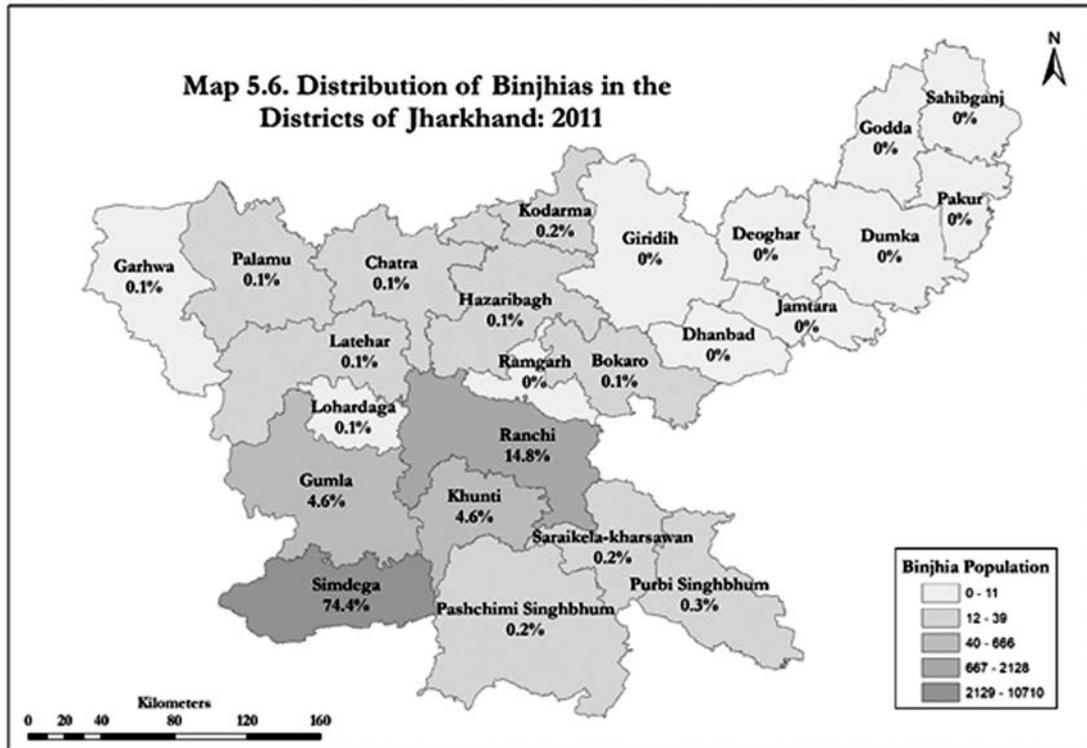
Historical Resistance and Colonial Experience

Like many other Adivasi groups of Jharkhand, the Binjhias actively resisted both colonial exploitation and local zamindari oppression. They participated in significant uprisings, including the Santhal Hul (1855–56) and Birsa Munda's Ulgulan (1899–1900). These movements reflected deep resentment against land alienation, excessive taxation, and forced displacement under colonial rule. The memory of this resistance continues to shape their identity and sense of pride.

Table 5.6 Select Indicators the Binjhia – 2011 Census*

Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Lit- eracy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Workers	Agri- cultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Secondary Completion Rate (%)
14,404	968	928	56.3	43.4	51.3	54.2	73.7	17.7	9

The Binjhias today face multiple socio-economic challenges. Limited educational attainment, inadequate access to healthcare, and insecure livelihoods constrain their development. Despite a relatively high work participation rate, underemployment remains widespread. Their cultural and linguistic identity, though resilient, faces pressures from dominant languages and external influences. As with many Adivasi communities, they remain marginalised in terms of political representation, economic opportunities, and social recognition.



7.THE CHERO



The Chero Adivasi community is concentrated primarily in Jharkhand and Bihar, with smaller populations in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and across the border in Bangladesh. In Jharkhand, their population stood at 95,575 in the 2011 Census, reflecting a 27 per cent increase from 75,540 in 2001. They are mainly settled in Palamu and Latehar, though smaller numbers reside in Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Gumla, Simdega, Khunti, and West Singhbhum. Like many other Adivasi groups, they remain predominantly rural inhabitants.

Historical Background

The Cheros trace their ancestry to Rajput lineage and are remembered as former rulers and chieftains of parts of Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh. Leaders such as Medni Rai and Pitambar Sahi played key roles in resisting Mughal and later British domination. The Cheros also participated in the Uprising of 1857, with Pitambar Sahi emerging as a prominent figure. Earlier revolts, including one led by Bhukan Singh (1819–1820), underscore their long history of opposition to outside rule.

Religion and Language

According to the 2011 Census, the majority of Cheros in Jharkhand are enumerated as Hindu (95 per cent), with a small share following Christianity (0.3 per cent), while about 4.7 per cent practice indigenous or other religions.

The Chero Adivasis are a multilingual community, with Hindi as their primary language (99.7 per cent), while many also speak Sadani, Mundari, Odia, and Santhali, depending on their regional setting and social interactions. The 2011 Census shows a high prevalence of bilingualism, as a large proportion of Chero mother-tongue speakers reported knowledge of an additional language. This reflects their close interaction with neighbouring communities and the influence of wider state and regional languages.

Gender and Literacy

The Female-Male Ratio (FMR) among Cheros was 956 females per 1,000 males, and 947 among children under six, both lower than the state average for Adivasis (1003 and 976). Literacy stood at 63.6 per cent (male: 76 per cent, female: 50 per cent). While this is 7 per centage points above the state Adivasi average, the male-female literacy gap is wider, reflecting persistent gender inequalities.

Education

Despite above-average literacy levels, secondary education completion remains low, with most dropping out after primary schooling. The gender disparity is sharp, as fewer women continue education beyond the basic level. Educational barriers such as poverty, cultural restrictions, and lack of infrastructure continue to limit their opportunities.

Occupation and Economy

Traditionally proud of their ruling past, today the Cheros are mainly engaged in agriculture

and wage labor. Of the total main workers, 39.2 per cent were agricultural labourers and 27.4 per cent cultivators, while a large share worked as marginal workers, pointing to irregular employment and livelihood insecurity. Their overall Work Participation Rate (WPR) was 38.1 per cent, with 33.4 per cent classified as main workers.

Social and Cultural Life

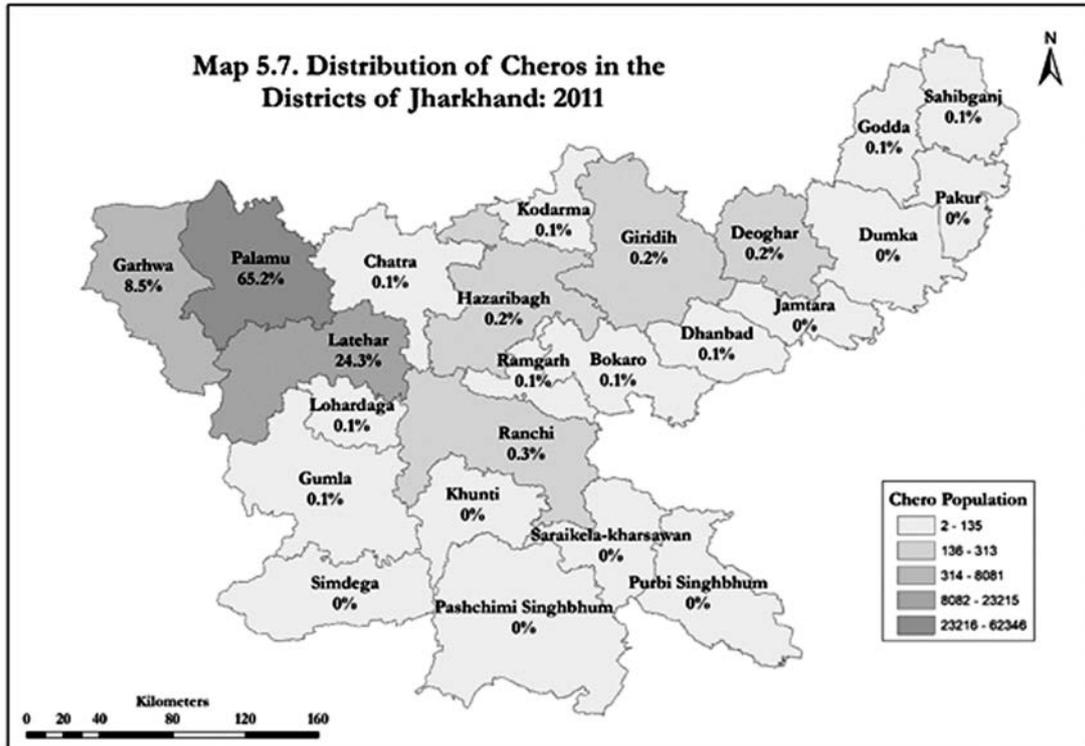
Chero society is organized into clans such as Mawar, Kuanr, and Mahato, following a patriarchal system where men dominate inheritance and decision-making. Exogamy is practiced, and customs include arranged marriages, animal sacrifices in rituals, ancestor worship, and worship of indigenous deities like Sairi-ma, alongside Hindu gods. Divorce is permitted through Adivasi councils, and women traditionally have limited inheritance rights.

The Cheros celebrate community festivals, practice animal sacrifices, and maintain oral traditions of storytelling, dance, and music. Their culture reflects both Brahminical influence and indigenous practices, illustrating their hybrid identity.

Table 5.7 Select Indicators the Chero – 2011 Census*

Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Lit- eracy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Workers	Agricultur- al labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Secondary Comple- tion rate (%)
95,575	956	947	63.6	50.4	38.1	33.4	27.4	39.2	2.9

The Cheros face multiple challenges such as land alienation, resource scarcity, low access to healthcare and education, and limited livelihood opportunities. However, government initiatives in land rights protection, employment programs, and cultural preservation offer scope for improvement.



8. THE CHIK BARAIK



The Chik Baraiks are a weaving community spread across Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Bihar. Traditionally engaged in handloom and weaving occupations, they are also closely linked with agriculture and local rituals tied to nature. Over time, the shift from weaving to cultivation has redefined their livelihoods, though traces of their artisanal identity remain. Their social life continues to reflect a strong community spirit, rooted in kinship ties, rituals, and festivals.

Demographic Distribution

According to the 2011 Census, the Chik Baraik population in India stands at 77,674, with the largest share in Jharkhand (54,163), followed by West Bengal (21,376) and Bihar (2,135). Within Jharkhand, they are scattered across almost all districts, though their density varies. Between 2001 and 2011, the Chik Baraik population in Jharkhand rose by 22 per cent (from 44,427 to 54,163), a growth higher than the state's average Adivasi population growth.

Religion and Linguistic Practices

Religiously, the Chik Baraiks are diverse: 62 per cent identify as Hindus, 4 per cent as Christians, and 34 per cent follow Sarna or other traditional faiths. Their mother tongues are Nagpuri and Sadri, but they frequently adopt Hindi (96.7 per cent) and other regional languages (Bengali, Odia) for wider communication, reflecting both adaptability and integration.

This shows that a large majority (about 7 in 10 Chik Baraiks) reported knowledge of at least one second language, most commonly Hindi (for inter-community and administrative purposes). Depending on their geographical distribution, some also reported Bengali (especially near West Bengal) and Odia (in southern Jharkhand bordering Odisha).

Demographic Indicators

The sex ratio among the Chik Baraiks is 997 females per 1,000 males, nearly balanced, while the child sex ratio stands at 960, slightly below parity.

The literacy rate is 65 per cent, higher than the average for Adivasis in Jharkhand. However, gender disparities remain: male literacy is 73 per cent compared to 54 per cent for females. Education levels are low in terms of attainment—32 per cent are only literate without formal education, 18 per cent have reached primary, 8 per cent secondary, 4 per cent higher secondary, and just 3 per cent graduation. With secondary completion as a benchmark, only 15 per cent of Chik Baraiks can be considered 'educated', leaving 85 per cent effectively uneducated.

Work and Livelihood

The work participation rate is 47 per cent, with men more active than women, though female participation is still higher than non-Adivasi averages. Employment stability remains a challenge, as only 55 per cent of workers are main workers, while the rest are engaged in irregular or seasonal jobs.

Occupationally, 55 per cent of main workers are cultivators, 21 per cent agricultural labourers, while others are involved in weaving and small-scale artisanal activities. This occupational shift reflects both adaptation to agrarian livelihoods and a gradual decline in traditional weaving.

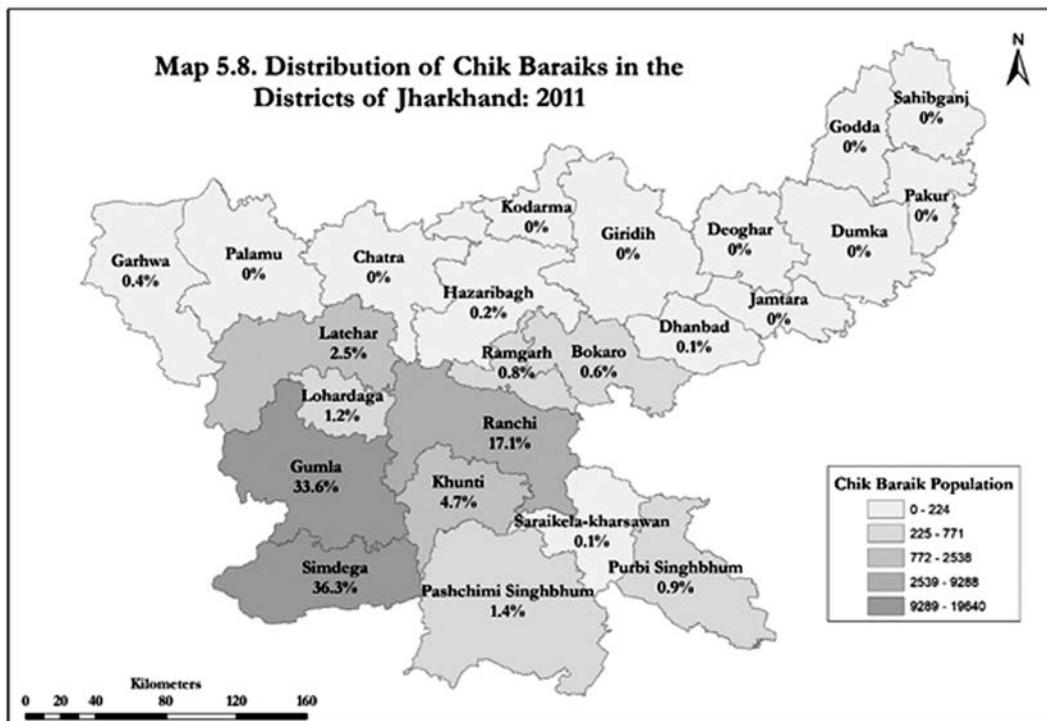
Social Organisation and Culture

The Chik Baraiks follow group endogamy and clan exogamy, with clans named after animals, plants, or objects. A strong local governance system regulates marriage, disputes, and community decisions, reinforcing social cohesion. Their festivals—Sarhul, Karma, and Sohrai—are deeply tied to agriculture and nature, involving rituals, dances, and traditional paintings.

Table 5.8 Select Indicators the Chik Baraik – 2011 Census*

Population	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Participation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Cultivators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Secondary Completion rate (%)
54,163	997	960	64.5	53.6	47.7	55.3	54.9	21.1	15

Like many Adivasi groups, the Chik Baraiks face land alienation, economic marginalization, and declining access to traditional weaving markets. Poverty, illiteracy, and irregular employment continue to affect their development. Modernization, while opening new opportunities, also threatens their artisanal heritage and cultural identity.



9. THE GOND



The Gonds are the largest Adivasi group in India. According to the 2011 Census, the Gonds have a total population of 1.3 crore. The Gonds inhabited a vast area of central India, stretching from the Satpura Mountains in the north to the Godavari in the south, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the east, and Maharashtra in the west. From their name, Central India was once known as Gondwana. In the Middle Ages, the Gonds established four separate kingdoms. The capital of the northern kingdom was Mashula; the southern kingdom's capital was Chandrapur, and the two central kingdoms had capitals at Deoghar and Kherla near Nagpur. The Gonds have a small population in Jharkhand (53,636). The majority of them live in Madhya Pradesh (50,93,124), Chhattisgarh (42,98,404), Maharashtra (16,18,090), and Odisha (8,88,581). They are also settled in Uttar Pradesh (5,69,035), Andhra Pradesh (3,04,537), Bihar (2,56,738), Karnataka (1,58,243), West Bengal (13,535), and Gujarat (2,965).

Between 2001 and 2011 the Gond population in Jharkhand has increased from 52,614 to 53,636 (22 per cent).

Demographics

In Jharkhand, the Gond population is distributed in all 24 districts, with a significant presence in southern and southeastern regions, particularly in Simdega, Garhwa, West, and East Singhbhum. The Gond tribe population in Jharkhand grew by just 2 per cent between 2001 and 2011, indicating a sluggish demographic trend.

The Gonds living in this vast area have many (over 50) intermarrying groups, all of which are known as Gonds, each with its own name. Their mother tongue is Gondi. In addition to Gondi, they speak Hindi, Telugu, Oriya, and Marathi, depending on their place of residence. There are four phratries or groups among the Gonds, which are exogamous, meaning that a man from one group cannot marry a woman from the same group. They are grouped according to four, five, six, and seven gods, alternatively termed as Nalben, Saiben, Sarben, and Yelben. Each group has its own totem – the tortoise, lizard, tiger, and porcupine, respectively.

Religion and Language

The Gonds are religiously plural, with the majority enumerated as Hindus, while a significant proportion follow Sarna or other indigenous faith traditions, and a smaller section have adopted Christianity. Their mother tongues are from the Gondi language family, but in Jharkhand they frequently adopt Hindi (67.4 per cent) and Odia as common second languages. This bilingualism reflects both their adaptability and the influence of regional socio-cultural contexts.

This shows that around two-thirds of Gonds reported knowledge of at least one second language, most commonly Hindi, which serves as the medium for administration, education, and interaction with other communities. A substantial number also reported Odia (15,984 speakers), especially in regions of Jharkhand adjoining Odisha, underlining how geography shapes their linguistic repertoire.

Gender and Literacy

The sex ratio among Gonds in Jharkhand is 994 females per 1,000 males, and 971 for children under 6. This shows a relatively better gender balance compared to the overall population, though slightly lower than the overall Adivasi population.

The overall literacy rate among Gonds in Jharkhand is 60 per cent. However, there's a notable gender difference in literacy (males' 71 per cent and females' 49 per cent). The literacy rate is comparable to the overall Adivasi population but lower than the state and national averages. Again, literacy breakdown for the Gond population in Jharkhand shows 31 per cent can read and write without formal education. The educational attainment levels are: 16 per cent primary, 7 per cent secondary, 4 per cent higher secondary, and 3 per cent graduates. Considering secondary level as the benchmark for being educated, only 13 per cent of the Gond population meets this criterion, while 87 remains uneducated.

Work Participation and Occupation

The industrial status of the Gonds shows that 51 per cent are cultivators, 20 per cent are agricultural laborers, and 29 per cent work in household industries or other occupations. This indicates their heavy reliance on agriculture for their livelihood.

The work participation rate among the Gonds (47 per cent) is comparable with the state average of the Adivasis and is much higher than the general trend in the state as well as in the country (around 35 per cent). The percentages of workers among males (53 per cent) and females (41 per cent) indicate active participation, although disparities remain. Nevertheless, despite the large working population, the availability of employment tends to be irregular, as only 53 per cent are recorded as main workers—those employed for six months or more in a year.

The Gonds are primarily engaged in agriculture, working as cultivators (51 per cent) and agricultural labourers (20 per cent), while also participating in household industries, forestry, cottage industries, hunting, and fishing. Some are involved in non-agricultural occupations like trade and services. Many among the Gonds rely on traditional livelihoods like collecting forest products, such as tendu (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) leaves and mahua (*Madhuca indica*) flowers, and may engage in shifting cultivation or hunting.

Culture and Heritage

The Gond tribe has a vibrant cultural heritage, marked by distinct traditions, customs, and art forms that reflect their deep connection with nature. Their society is organised into clans or sub-groups, each with its own unique identity. The Gonds follow animistic beliefs, worshipping a pantheon of nature gods and spirits, and hold trees, rivers, and animals in high reverence, embodying a profound respect for the natural world.

The Gonds in Jharkhand have a traditional social structure centered around clans (*pari*), lineages (*kita*), and sub-clans (*khandan*), with village councils regulating social life, including marriage and dispute settlement. They follow animistic beliefs, worshipping nature gods and spirits. Their social norms include prohibiting marriage within the same clan, permitting widow

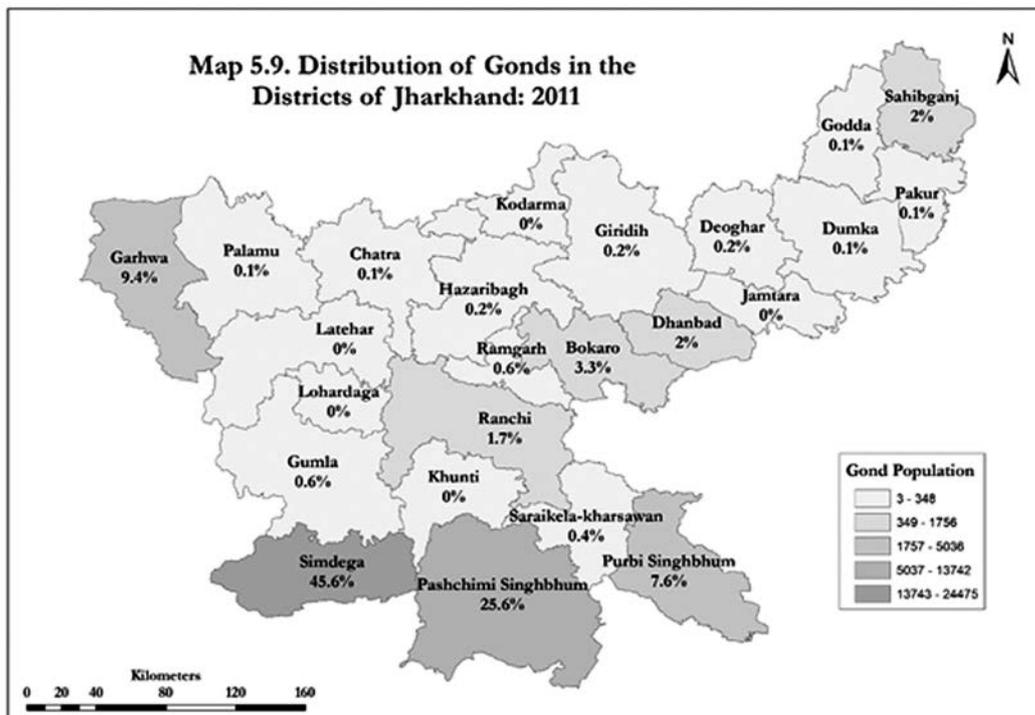
marriage, and involving village councils in approving marriages, which typically include a bride fee. Gender roles are defined, with men handling work-life and women managing household duties. Yet, women are treated with respect and consulted in decision-making.

Historically, they were displaced by colonial policies and land acquisitions, leading to land alienation, economic exploitation, and limited access to education and healthcare, which perpetuated poverty and inequality.

Table 5.9 Select Indicators the Gond – 2011 Census*

Population	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Participation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Cultivators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Secondary Completion Rate
53,676	994	971	59.8	48.6	47.1	53.4	51.4	19.8	13

Historically displaced by colonial land alienation and marginalized through limited access to education, healthcare, and resources, the Gonds today face ongoing economic vulnerability. Their dependence on agriculture and forest produce exposes them to cycles of poverty, though government interventions and cultural resilience provide some scope for empowerment.



10. THE GORAIT



The Goraitis form a numerically small community, with a total of 8,307 in India, according to the 2011 Census. Of them, the majority live in Jharkhand (4,973), and the rest live in West Bengal (2,498) and Bihar (836). Although they are spread across 19 districts of Jharkhand, they are mainly concentrated in Ranchi and Purbi Singhbhum.

Demographics

The Gorait tribe in Jharkhand experienced a significant surge, with a 26 per cent decadal growth rate between 2001 and 2011 (from 3,957 to 4,973). This remarkable increase outpaced the average decadal growth rates of both the state's overall Adivasi population and the general population, highlighting the Gorait tribe's notable demographic momentum during this period.

Religion and Language

The Gorait tribe in Jharkhand is predominantly Hindu, with 67 per cent enumerated as Hindu, while 32 per cent practice Sarna and other traditional faiths. A small minority, 1 per cent, identify as Christian.

Linguistically, the community primarily speaks Sadri, supplemented by Hindi for broader communication.

Bilingualism

The Goraitis are largely Hindu, with sections following Sarna or other indigenous faiths, and a very small minority identifying as Christians. Their mother tongue is Sadri/Nagpuri, but in Jharkhand they overwhelmingly adopt Hindi (75.8 per cent) as their most common second language, while Bengali (850 speakers) is also reported in areas close to the West Bengal border. This reflects their adaptability to wider socio-economic contexts and interactions with neighbouring populations.

This shows that about three-fourths of Goraitis reported knowledge of at least one second language, most commonly Hindi, which facilitates access to education, administration, and inter-community communication. A smaller share use Bengali, reflecting their cultural and geographical linkages with West Bengal.

This bilingualism plays a crucial role in:

- Education – children exposed to Hindi in schools are more likely to continue their studies and access government schemes.
- Livelihood – Hindi enables communication in markets, urban centres, and workplaces, broadening employment opportunities.
- Identity balance – while Hindi is used for external interactions, Sadri continues to be the dominant language of home, rituals, and community gatherings.

Thus, bilingualism reflects both adaptation to wider society and retention of cultural identity.

Literacy and Education

The Goraitis have a literacy rate of 62 per cent, with a considerable gap between men (73 per cent) and women (51 per cent). The work participation rate among Goraitis is 44 per cent (men

52 per cent, women 35 per cent). The Gorait tribe's literacy profile shows that 29 per cent are literate without formal education. The educational attainment levels are: 18 per cent primary, 9 per cent secondary, 5 per cent higher secondary, and 2 per cent graduates. Based on attainment of Secondary educational level, only 15 per cent can be considered educated, while 85 per cent fall into the uneducated category.

Economy and Occupation

Among the total workers, 52 per cent are enumerated as main workers. Of the main workers, 22 per cent are cultivators and 20 per cent are agricultural labourers. The rest are engaged in traditional and modern occupations. Interestingly, women outnumber men in agricultural work (while 21 per cent and 16 per cent of men are engaged in cultivation and agricultural labour, respectively, the corresponding figures for women are 26 per cent and 31 per cent). This highlights the community's diverse economic activities and the distinct roles of men and women within different sectors.

It is worth mentioning here that traditionally, the Gorait served as drum beaters, village messengers, and watchmen. Nowadays, they are engaged in diverse occupations, including traditional drum beating, agriculture, wage labour, and rickshaw pulling.

Social Structure

The Gorait of Jharkhand follow a traditional social structure characterized by endogamy, with marriage within the community, and exogamous totemic clans such as Khalkho, Induar, Topoar, Kerketa, Dhan, and Sontirki that prohibit marriage within the same clan. They are patrilocal and patrilineal, with families living with the husband's family and inheritance passing through the male line. Their social affairs are managed by a jati panchayat headed by a darina, assisted by upadarina and kotwar. Typically, the oldest son assumes leadership, sons inherit equally, and daughters receive maintenance and a bride price, highlighting a distinct social and familial hierarchy within the community.

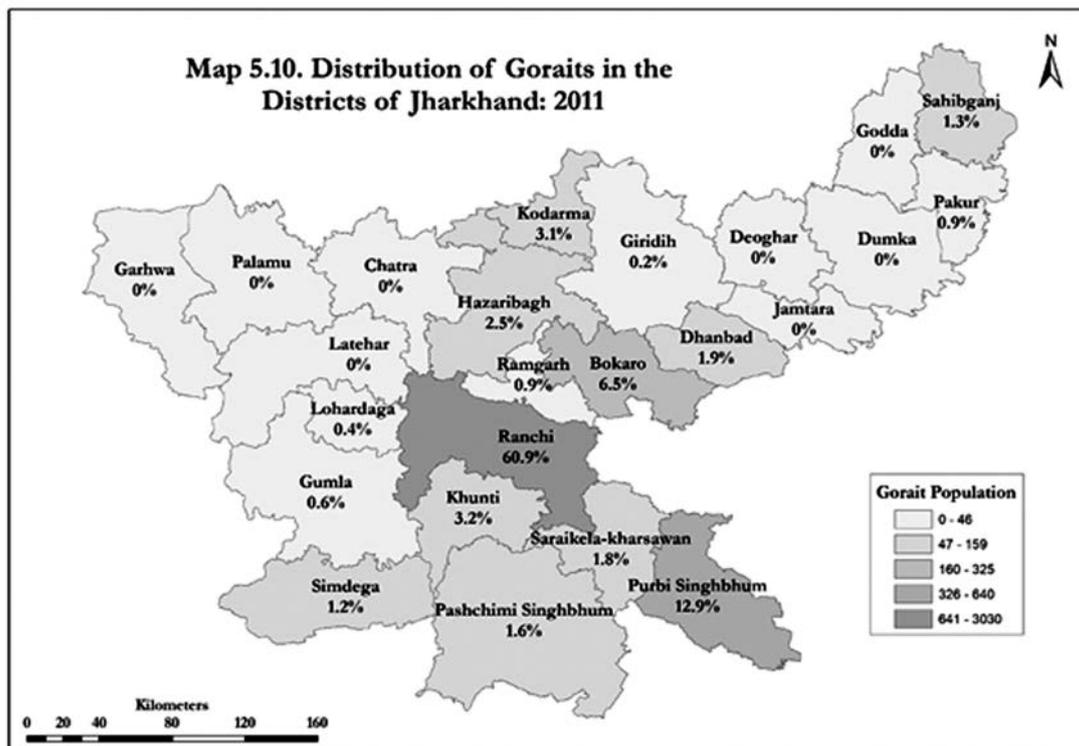
Festivals

The Gorait have a strong affinity towards Brahminical rituals and worship. They regularly visit temples to offer prayers and enthusiastically participate in prominent Brahminical festivals such as Holi, Diwali, and Navratri, albeit in their distinct way. However, the Gorait face considerable challenges in terms of livelihood and human development.

Table 5.10 Select Indicators the Gorait – 2011 Census*

Population	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Participation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Cultivators among Main Workers	Agri-cultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Secondary Completion rate (%)
4,973	968	988	62.0	51.0	43.5	51.7	22.3	20.1	15

Despite their demographic growth and adaptation through bilingualism, the Gorait face considerable challenges in terms of livelihood, educational attainment, and overall human development.



11.THE HO



The Hos belong to the Austroasiatic Munda ethnic group, possess a unique cultural identity and traditional way of life, and speak the Ho language. The Ho population in India is estimated to be around 1.42 million (excluding the Hos of Assam, who, like many other Jharkhandi tribes, are denied the Scheduled Tribe status in that state). They are primarily inhabitants of the Kolhan region of Jharkhand, particularly the district of West Singhbhum, but also reside in Odisha and West Bengal.

Demography and Religion

The Ho tribe in Jharkhand saw a significant 25 per cent population growth between 2001 and 2011 (from 7,44,850 to 9,28,289).

The community is deeply rooted in Sarnaism, with 93.7 per cent identifying as followers of this traditional faith (recorded as “other religions” in the 2011 Census). A smaller proportion follows Hinduism (4 per cent) and Christianity (2 per cent).

Linguistic Practices

Their mother tongue is Ho, which remains vibrant and widely spoken. According to the 2011 Census, 98.0 per cent of Ho speakers reported continued use of Ho itself as their main language, showing strong linguistic retention. At the same time, Hindi (7,250 speakers) emerged as the most common second language, used particularly for education, administration, and interaction beyond their immediate community.

The Ho language is the primary medium of communication and serves as the strongest marker of cultural identity. Alongside, many Hos use Hindi, Odia, and Bengali for interaction with outsiders.

- Ho dominates in household, rituals, and community affairs.
- Hindi is widely used in education, administration, and inter-Adivasi communication.
- Odia and Bengali are spoken in border regions and in migration-related contexts.

This bilingual (and sometimes multilingual) pattern reflects both the resilience of the Ho language and the community’s adaptability to wider socio-economic settings.

This indicates that linguistic loyalty to Ho remains extremely high, with nearly all speakers reporting its use. However, the spread of Hindi as a parallel second language reflects the pressures of integration into state institutions, markets, and wider communication networks. Thus, the Ho community exemplifies both cultural resilience in maintaining their mother tongue and adaptive bilingualism for socio-economic participation.

Gender and Survival

The Female to Male Ratio (FMR) among the Hos was 1021, while the corresponding figure among the children under six was 992. Both the figures demonstrate a higher degree of survival of the girls than what is found among most of the non-Adivasis population, especially in northern and western India.

Literacy and Education

The literacy rate among the Hos of Jharkhand was 54 per cent. Pitiably as the average Ho literacy rate was, huge difference in the rate of men (67 per cent) and women (41 per cent) caused further injury to the social life of the community. It is slightly lower (45 per cent) than not only the state average but also the average of the Adivasis. The Ho tribe's literacy profile in Jharkhand shows 28 per cent are literate without formal education. Besides, 15 per cent attained primary level, 6 per cent secondary level, 3 per cent higher secondary level, and 2 per cent graduates and above level. Based on secondary level of education, only 11 per cent can be considered educated, while 89 per cent are uneducated.

Economy and Occupation

Of the total Ho population, as high as 46 per cent were enumerated as workers, but even less than half (47 per cent) of them were main workers. This implied gross unavailability of regular employment. The Ho livelihoods looked to be primarily based on agriculture. Of the main workers, 47 per cent identified themselves as cultivators, while another 25 per cent were recorded as agricultural labourers. Others were engaged in non-farm activities like household industries, mining, and non-farm labour employment.

Cultural Heritage and Social structure

The Hos of Jharkhand have rich artistic heritage that finds expression in Sohrai paintings, Kohvar paintings, intricate jewelry, bamboo crafts, traditional musical instruments, and distinctive dances like Sohrai, Magei, and Paika, that reflect their vibrant cultural identity. They maintain the traditional Manki Munda Pratha system, a hierarchical self-governance structure blending political and religious elements. They are organized into "PIR" groups led by Mankis, with individual villages headed by Mundas who report to Mankis and are assisted by Dakuas. The society has transitioned from matrilineal to patriarchal and practices clan exogamy and tribe endogamy, influencing their social dynamics and marital customs.

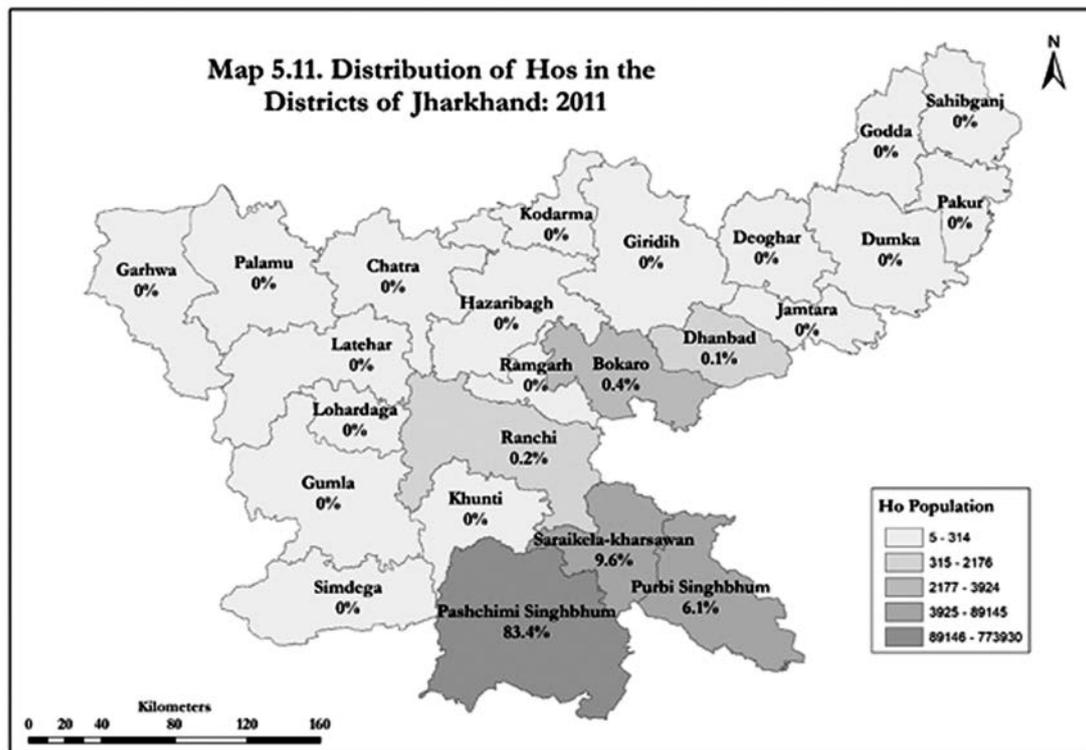
Resistance and History

The Hos had fought against British colonial rule for independence, protecting their autonomy, traditional lifestyles, and cultural practices. With the Mundas, they had actively participated in rebellions like the Kol uprising.

Table 5.11 Select Indicators the Ho – 2011 Census*

Population	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Cultivators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Secondary Completion rate (%)
9,28,289	1021	992	54.0	41.4	45.9	46.5	24.2	11

Despite their strong cultural heritage, the Hos remain among the most economically and socially vulnerable groups. Industrialization and resource extraction threaten their lands, forests, and livelihoods. They struggle to access government programs, face displacement from mining projects, and endure the erosion of their traditional ways of life.



12. THE KARMALI



The Karmalis, who live mainly in the villages of Jharkhan, are renowned for their artisanal skills in traditional ironwork and tool-making. A small number of Karmalis also live in West Bengal and Assam. As is the case with many other Jharkhandi tribes, the Karmalis have been denied Scheduled Tribe (ST) status in Assam. Their expertise in crafting tools, weapons, and household items demonstrates their rich cultural heritage, highlighting their unique artisanal traditions and skills passed down through generations.

Demography and Religion

With a population of 64,154 (Census 2011), Karmalis share a small per centage (0.7 per cent) of the state's total Adivasi population. In Jharkhand, the Karmali population is concentrated mainly in the districts of Ramgarh, Gumla, Bokaro, Ranchi, and Hazaribagh.

Decadal growth among the Karmali tribe populations of Jharkhand between 2001 and 2011 is 13 per cent (from 56,865 to 64,154). The Karmali community in Jharkhand is primarily enumerated as Hindu, with around 91 per cent of their population following Hinduism. A smaller segment, 9 per cent, practices other religions, mainly Sarnaism, while a negligible part (0.2 per cent) identifies as Christians, reflecting the community's strong affinity for Hindu traditions.

Language and Bilingualism

Their mother tongue is Sadri/Nagpuri, but according to the 2011 Census, an overwhelming 97.0 per cent of Karmali speakers reported adopting Hindi as their most common second language, underscoring its role as the principal medium for administration, education, and wider communication. A smaller group also reported knowledge of Santali (1,418 speakers), reflecting regional interactions with neighbouring Adivasi populations.

This demonstrates that nearly all Karmalis are bilingual, with Hindi serving as the dominant second language. While this provides strong access to socio-economic mobility and integration into wider state and market structures, it also highlights the risk of gradual erosion of their mother tongue in everyday use, especially among younger generations.

Gender and Survival

The Karmalis are distinct from the average Adivasis of Jharkhand in that they have a significantly lower female-male ratio (FMR) – only 932, compared to the state average of 1003. The ratio is found to be even worse (912) among children under six. This indicates a significant gender imbalance within the community. Whether the lower FMR among the Karmalis is related to the communities' growing adoption of Brahminical culture (discussed below) is yet to be studied.

Literacy and Education

The literacy rate among the Karmalis of Jharkhand is 62 per cent, which is higher than that of the state average. As is the case for many other groups, there is a wide gap in the literacy rates of males (74 per cent) and females (50 per cent). A significant portion of the Karmali, 31 per cent, are literate without formal education. About 20 per cent have educational attainment levels up

to primary, 7 per cent secondary, 4 per cent higher secondary, and 1 per cent graduates and above. Considering secondary education as the benchmark, only 12 per cent of the Karmali population is educated, leaving 88 per cent uneducated.

Economy and Occupation

The average Work Participation Rate (WPR) among the Karmalis is 37 per cent, with 53 per cent of the workers being classified as main workers. However, women's work participation and main worker status are significantly lower compared to men. This traditionally artisanal community has shown an increasing trend of adopting agricultural practices (17 per cent cultivators, and 18 per cent agricultural labourers) as their main work.

Cultural Heritage and Social Structure

The Karmali tribe's exceptional artisanal skills in tool-making deeply reflect their cultural identity and heritage. Their festivals blend traditional practices with elements of Brahminical influence. On the one hand, they worship various Brahminical gods; on the other, they revere spirits and ancestors, maintaining beliefs in sacrifices and witchcraft.

The traditional social structure of the Karmalis is patriarchal, with men holding authority, and village councils (Panchayats) led by a chief (Mahato) who govern village affairs. However, their traditional blacksmithing livelihoods are impacted by modernization and industrialization, potentially altering social dynamics while Panchayats continue to play a role.

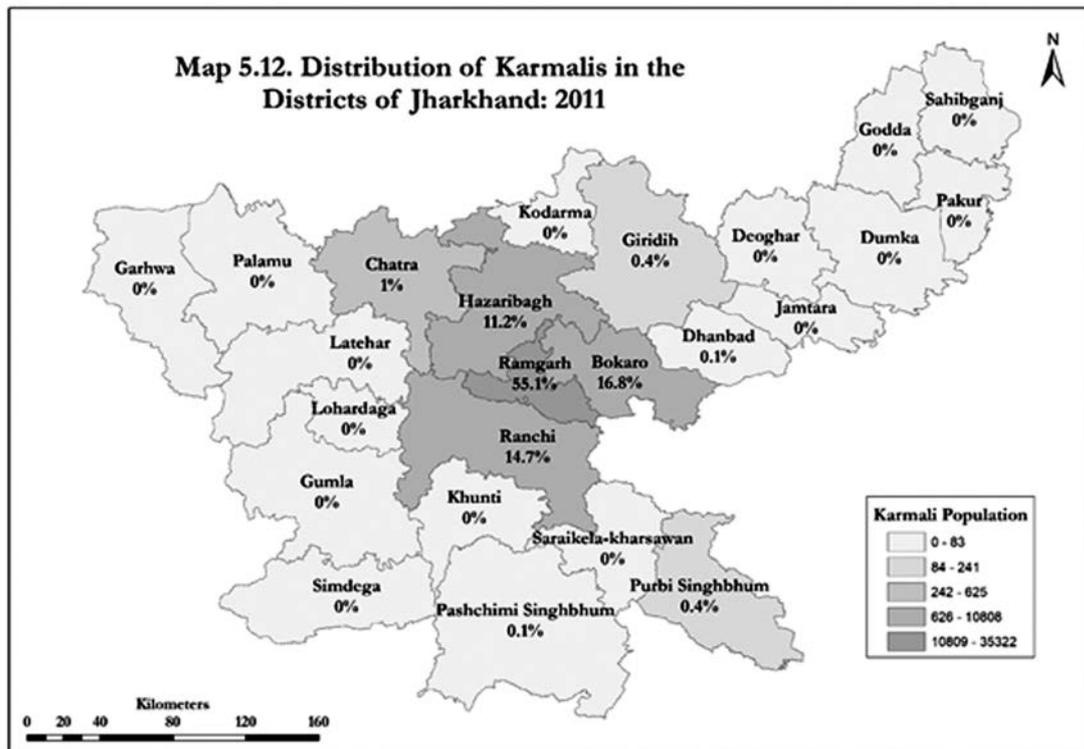
Resistance and History

The Karmalis in Jharkhand resisted colonial rule to defend their autonomy, preserve their cultural heritage, and maintain traditional customs and social structures. Through their Adivasi councils (Panchayats), they organised protests and upheld community order, showing their resilience against external forces.

Table 5.12 Select Indicators the Karmali – 2011 Census*

Popu- lation	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Work- ers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Sec- ondary Comple- tion rate (%)
64,154	932	912	62.4	50.3	37.1	53.1	17.1	17.6	12

Like other Adivasis of Jharkhand, they face challenges such as land alienation, displacement, and limited access to basic amenities, all of which threaten their cultural and economic stability.



13. THE KAWAR



Jharkhand has a small Kavar population of 8,145. The main homeland of the Kawars is Chhattisgarh, where, according to the 2011 Census, they have a population of 887,477 (of the total 946,672 in the country). The group is also present in Maharashtra (26,354), Madhya Pradesh (18,603), Odisha (5,225), and Bihar (868). They link their origin to the Kauravas of the Mahabharata. They are part of the larger Kanwar population, predominantly settled in what is called the Gondwana land region in Madhya Pradesh. Notably, the Kavar Adivasis are known by various names across different states, including Kavar, Kanwar, Kaur, Cherwa, Rathia, Tanwar, and Chattri in Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh; in Odisha, they are referred to as Kavar and Kanwar, and simply as Kavar in Jharkhand and Bihar.

The Kawars have been included in the Scheduled Tribe list in 2003. Therefore, it is not possible to measure their decadal growth rate, since they were not enumerated in the 2001 Census.

Demography, Religion and Bilingualism

The Kawars of Jharkhand are concentrated mainly in Simdega district.

Majority of the Kawars (92%) are enumerated as Hindu. While about 7 per cent of the Kawars are reported to be the followers of other religions mainly Sarnaism, only a very small proportion of them (0.8 per cent) follow Christianity.

Their mother tongue belongs to the Kawari linguistic group, but the 2011 Census shows that 91.8 per cent of Kavar speakers reported adopting Hindi as their most common second language, underlining its central role in education, administration, and inter-community communication. Additionally, Kurukh/Oraon (345 speakers) appeared as a secondary language of contact in some areas, reflecting regional interfaces with Oraon populations.

This indicates that the vast majority of Kawars are bilingual, with Hindi acting as the dominant second language for mobility and socio-economic integration. At the same time, the presence of Kurukh/Oraon highlights localized multilingualism shaped by neighbouring Adivasi interactions.

Gender and Survival

The female-male ratio (FMR) among the Kawars is 995, while the child FMR is 981. The ratios closely align with the overall trend among the Adivasis of the state.

Literacy and Education

The literacy rate among the Kawars is 64 per cent. Despite being higher than the average literacy rate of the Adivasis of the state, there is a wide gender gap in literacy among the Kawars (men 77 per cent, women 52 per cent). The Kavar tribe's literacy profile shows that 36 per cent are literate without formal education. The breakdown is: 19 per cent primary level, 5 per cent secondary level, 3 per cent higher secondary level, and 2 per cent graduates. With secondary education as the standard, merely 10 per cent of the Kawars are educated.

Economy and Occupation

The Work Participation Rate among the Kawars is as high as 51 per cent (men 57 per cent, women 42 per cent). Nevertheless, the share of main workers among the total workers of the community points to limited opportunities for regular work, as nearly half of them (46 per cent) are marginal workers engaged in paid jobs for less than six months in a year.

The majority of the Kawars are cultivators (62.7 per cent), indicating a strong dependence on agriculture as a primary source of their livelihood. Additionally, 28 per cent are engaged as agricultural laborers, highlighting the community's deep-rooted connection with the agricultural sector.

Cultural Heritage

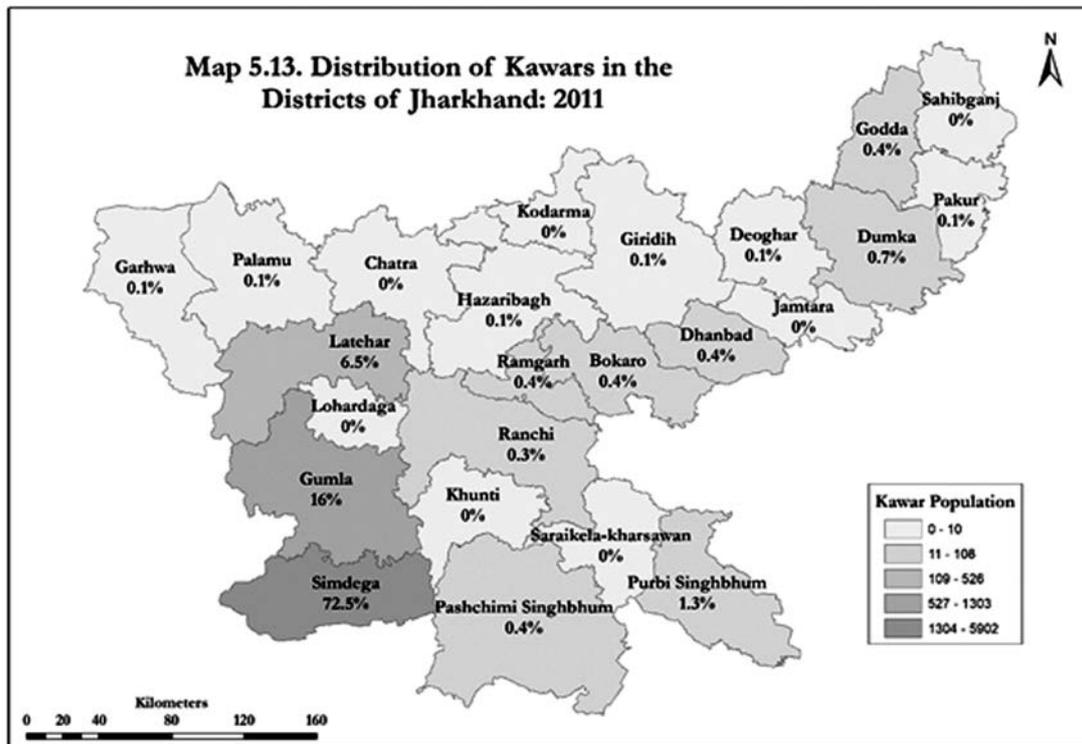
The Kawars have a rich cultural heritage, demonstrating unique art forms like Kohvar paintings, which symbolize fertility, and Paitkar scroll paintings that narrate stories. They are also skilled in woodwork and bamboo crafts. Their customs include distinct marriage rituals, such as exchanging bangles and bride price, and adhering to the Sarna nature-based religious faith. The Kawars' social structure is rooted in kinship and family lineages. With a claimed connection to the ancient Kaurava clan, their traditions are considered an integral part of Jharkhand's diverse cultural heritage.

Resistance and History

The Kawars, like other Adivasi groups, were significantly impacted by British rule in the form of land alienation, exploitation, and cultural suppression, which they resisted through various means, including participation in the 1857 rebellion. In post-independence India, the Kawars continue to face hardship, including land alienation, limited access to resources, and inadequate access to quality education and healthcare. To address these issues, potential solutions include strengthening land rights, promoting sustainable livelihoods, and improving access to basic infrastructure and services.

Table 5.13 Select Indicators the Kawar – 2011 Census*

Popu- lation	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Lit- eracy Rate (per cent)	Female Litera- cy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Workers	Agri- cultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Secondary Completion rate (%)
8,145	995	981	64.3	51.7	51.4	53.5	62.7	27.9	10



14. THE KHARIA



With a population of 196,135, Jharkhand has the second-largest Kharia population in the country. Odisha (222,844) and West Bengal (108,707) have the highest and third-highest Kharia populations respectively. Kharias also reside in Chhattisgarh (49,032) and Bihar (11,569), and, to a lesser extent, in Madhya Pradesh (2,429) and Maharashtra (745) also

The Kharia tribe in Jharkhand registered a decadal population growth of 20 per cent (from 1,64,022 to 1,96,135) between 2001 and 2011.

In Jharkhand, they are found in all districts except Giridih and Deoghar. However, they are mainly concentrated in the districts of Simdega, Gumla, Lohardaga, Purbi Singhbhum, and Ranchi. The community is divided into three subgroups: Dudh Kharia, Dhelki Kharia, and Hill Kharia. Each group has distinct demographic and occupational patterns. This description generally presents a broader picture of the community.

Religion and Belief

The Kharias in Jharkhand exhibit a notable religious diversity, with a majority of 68.0 per cent identifying as Christians. In contrast, 9 per cent follow Hinduism, and 22 per cent adhere to other traditional faiths, mainly Sarnaism.

Language and Bilingualism

Linguistically, the community primarily uses Sadri and their native Kharia language for internal communications, while interacting with others they use both Sadri and Hindi.

Their mother tongue is Kharia, which remains widely spoken. According to the 2011 Census, 67.5 per cent of Kharia speakers continued to use Kharia itself, reflecting strong linguistic retention. Alongside this, Hindi (53,410 speakers) emerged as the second most common language, serving as a bridge to education, administration, and broader socio-economic networks.

This indicates that while the Kharia language retains strong vitality, there is also widespread adoption of Hindi as a complementary second language, showing a balance between cultural resilience and integration into mainstream linguistic domains.

Gender and Demographic Balance

The female-male ratio (FMR) among the Kharias is 1,019 females per 1,000 males and is the highest among all Adivasi groups of Jharkhand. The under-six FMR is also higher (990) compared to most of the Jharkhandi Adivasi groups.

Literacy and Education

The group has a higher literacy rate (66 per cent) than the average literacy rate of the Adivasis of the state. Also, the male-female difference in literacy (14 per centage points) is lower than the state average for Adivasis (22 per centage points) and many other Adivasi groups. Among the Kharia tribe, 33.7 per cent are literate without formal education. The breakdown of remaining literates by their educational level is as follows: 16 per cent have completed primary education, 7 per cent secondary, 5 per cent higher secondary, and 3 per

centgraduation or above. Considering secondary education as the benchmark, only 16 per cent of the Kharia population is classified as educated, while the remaining 84 per cent are uneducated.

Economy and Livelihoods

According to the 2011 Census, 51 per cent of the Kharias are classified as workers. The high work participation rate signifies the economic vulnerability of the community; even the elderly and children are forced to work. A lower per centage of main workers (53 per cent) among total workers also indicates limited employment opportunities, as 47 per cent of workers are not ensured six months of work in a year.

A significant 69 per cent of main workers in the community are cultivators, and 15 per cent are agricultural laborers. Kharia women contribute to the household economy through various activities such as collecting minor forest products, spinning, weaving, and making ropes.

The Kharias of Jharkhand live with a mix of old and new traditions. They celebrate Sarhul, a festival in which they worship their village deity with sal (*Shorea robusta*) flowers and enjoy traditional dances. At the same time, many Kharias have adopted modern ways of dressing and working. Traditionally, men wear dhotis and women wear sarees, and their dances bring together young men and women in joyful celebration.

Cultural Life

The community's faith is diverse, with some members being Christian, others Hindu, and some following other beliefs. Despite these changes, the Kharias strive to keep their distinctive culture alive. Kharias of different subgroups speak different languages. Each subgroup is endogamous, and they practice animism, worshipping ghosts and spirits.

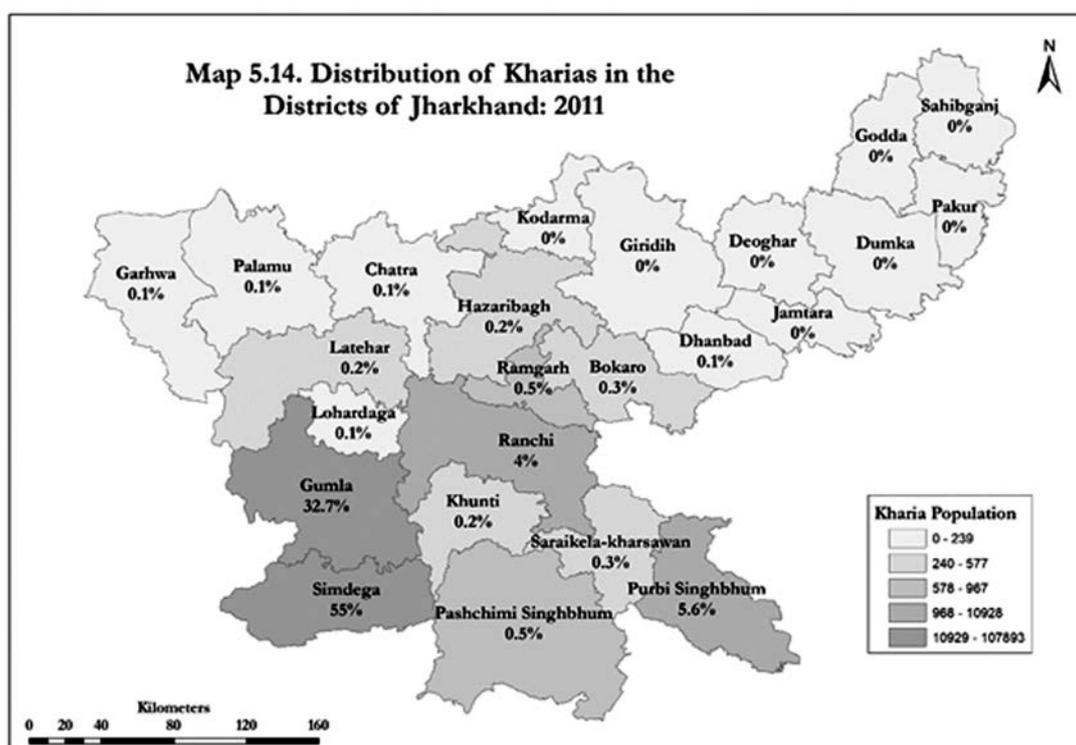
Resistance and History

The Kharia tribe of Jharkhand played a pivotal role in India's freedom struggle, particularly through the courageous leadership of Telanga Kharia. From 1850 to 1860, he led a fierce rebellion against British rule in the Chotanagpur region, rallying his people to resist land alienation and atrocities committed against Adivasis. Under his leadership, the Kharias established jury panchayats for self-governance and formed a formidable army of 1,500 trained men, employing guerrilla warfare tactics to challenge British authority and protect their rights and way of life.

Table 5.14 Select Indicators the Kharia – 2011 Census*

Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Lit- eracy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Second- ary Com- pletion rate (%)
1,96,135	1019	990	65.9	58.9	50.6	53.0	69.1	14.9	16

Today, the Kharia tribe faces challenges such as limited access to education, poverty, and dependence on forest resources, making integration into mainstream society complex. Overall, the Kharia tribe in Jharkhand is diverse, with variations in demography, occupation, and culture, and they strive to preserve their identity while addressing these challenges.



15. THE KHARWAR



a population of 2,48,974. According to the 2011 Census, the Kharwar population in Jharkhand was 2,48,974 making the state the primary home for the peoples. Smaller numbers of the Kharwars also reside in West Bengal (2,02,070), Uttar Pradesh (1,60,676), Bihar (1,25,811), and Odisha (2,265). In Jharkhand, the Kharwars constitute nearly 3 per cent of the total Adivasi population. They primarily live in the districts of Garhwa, Latehar, and Palamu.

Between 2001 and 2011, the Kharwar tribe in Jharkhand experienced a notable decadal growth rate of 30 per cent (from 1,92,024 to 2,48,974).

Religion and Language

The Kharwar community in Jharkhand is mainly enumerated as Hindu (89 per cent) while a smaller segment (10 per cent) follow other religions, mainly Sarna, and a microscopic 0.2 per cent of them are identified as Christians.

Their mother tongue belongs to the Kharwari linguistic group, but the 2011 Census shows that an overwhelming 99.5 per cent of Kharwar speakers reported adopting Hindi as their most common second language, making it nearly universal. A small number also reported knowledge of Kurukh/Oraon (388 speakers), reflecting local interactions with neighbouring tribes.

This indicates that the Kharwars have one of the highest levels of bilingualism, with Hindi virtually universal as a second language, enabling full integration into education, administration, and market networks. At the same time, the minor presence of Kurukh/Oraon suggests localized multilingualism shaped by regional Adivasi proximity.

Gender and Demographic Balance

The female-male ratio (FMR) among the Kharwars is 964, which is lower than the state average for Adivasis; however, the corresponding figure for children under six (983) is significantly higher.

Literacy and Education

Following the general trend of educational deprivation, the Kharwars have a low literacy rate (56 per cent); the situation is even worse for women, who, with a literacy rate of 44 per cent, lag 24 percentage points behind men. The Kharwar tribe's literacy profile reveals that 30 per cent are literate without formal education. The educational attainment levels of remaining literates are: 19 per cent primary, 4 per cent secondary, 2 per cent higher secondary, and 1 per cent graduates. Considering secondary education as the benchmark, only 7 per cent of the Kharwars are educated.

Economy and Livelihoods

The work participation rate among Kharwars is 42 per cent, but only a meagre 33 per cent are main workers. In other words, two-thirds of those engaged in gainful employment have less than six months of employment in a year. Proportion of main workers among females

is even lower. The low proportion of main workers to total workers can partly be explained by the occupational pattern: while half of the workers (46.6 per cent) are enumerated as cultivators, one third (33.3 per cent) of the reported workers depend upon agricultural labour hiring. Limited employability in agriculture results in a reduction in the number of days of employment for the working population.

Cultural Life

The Kharwars maintain their cultural heritage, characterized by vibrant folk music and dance, often performed during festivals. They worship various deities associated with nature and agriculture, reflecting their deep connection with the environment. During festivals like Sarhul and Karam, rituals are performed by either their own priests or Munda priests, while Brahmin priests and barbers are involved in other occasions. Their social structure is based on strong community organization, with village councils playing a vital role in decision-making. Family and kinship ties are essential to their social structure, fostering a sense of solidarity and cooperation. The group has various endogamous divisions (clans) and totemic clans, including Surajbanshi, Daulatbandi, Parabandi, Kharia Bhogti, Maujihia, and others like Kansi, Nilkanth, and Tirkey.

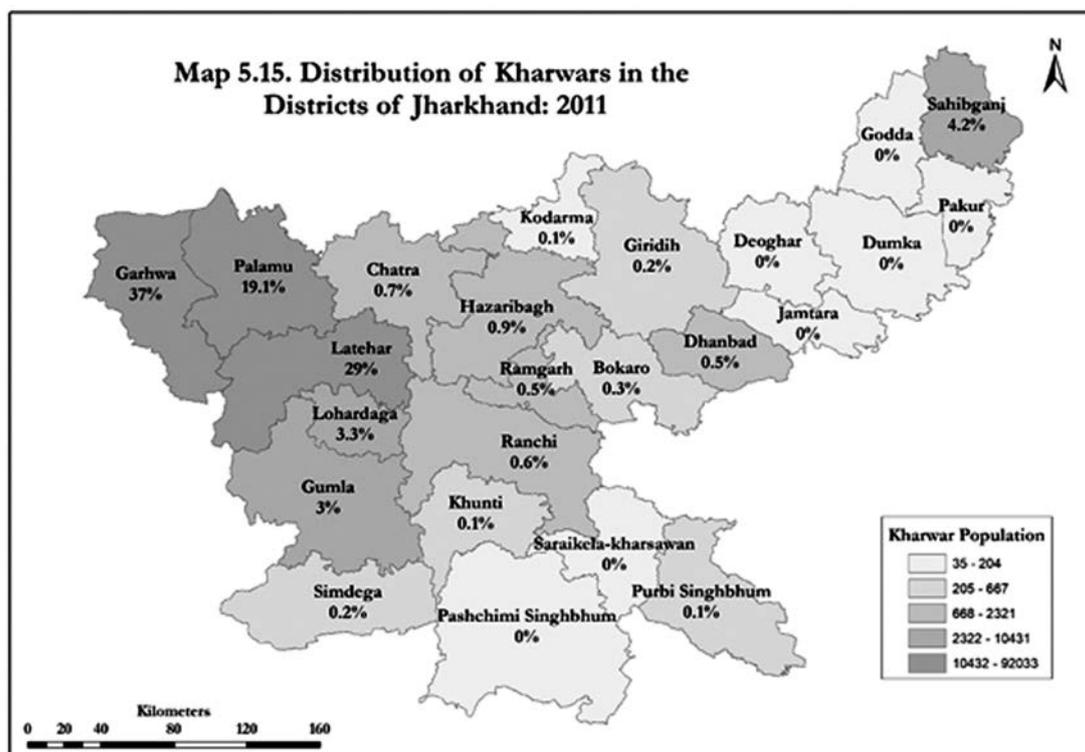
Historical Resistance

The Kharwar movement played a historically significant role in resisting British colonial policies, particularly the exploitative revenue systems and attempts to undermine Adivasi cultural identity. Their assertion of identity sparked widespread agitation in 1881 and demonstrated the community's determination to protect their autonomy and cultural heritage. The Kharwar movement also actively participated in India's struggle for independence, with leaders like Bhagirathi Singh contributing to the Quit India Movement of 1942. This movement highlighted the widespread resistance to British rule among Adivasi communities, underscoring their struggle for autonomy, dignity, and self-determination. The Kharwars also fought for forest rights through movements like the Jungle Satyagraha in the 1930s. They formed the Bhagat Party in 1950.

Table 5.15 Select Indicators the Kharwar – 2011 Census*

Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Lit- eracy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Sec- ondary Com- pletion rate (%)
2,48,974	964	983	56.4	44.2	44.2	33.0	46.6	33.3	7

Despite their rich cultural heritage, the Kharwars, like other Adivasi and marginalized groups, face severe socio-economic challenges, including extreme poverty and economic marginalization; limited access to education; poor health due to inadequate healthcare and sanitation; land alienation and indebtedness; cultural erosion; insufficient access to basic amenities such as clean water and electricity; and a range of social, economic, and political disadvantages.



16. THE KHOND



The Khond community has a population of 1,628,501 in India, with a minimal presence of 221 in Jharkhand. Their main concentration is in Odisha (16,27,486). However, they are scantily present in Chhattisgarh (10,991), West Bengal (660), Maharashtra (515), Bihar (134), and Madhya Pradesh (109).

Demography

Despite their limited numbers, the Khonds are dispersed across 17 out of the state's 24 districts. Interestingly, the highest concentration of Khonds is found in Garhwa district, with 47 individuals, while the districts of Khunti and Ramgarh each have a mere 1 Khond individual, (a man and a woman respectively).

Religion and Language

Division of Khonds in Jharkhand by their religious faiths demonstrates that about two thirds of them are Hindu, about 6 per cent are Christian and 17 per cent follow other religion.

Their mother tongue is Kui (also known as Khond), but according to the 2011 Census, bilingualism is quite widespread. Hindi was the most common second language (69.2 per cent of speakers), while smaller groups also reported using Kharia (24 speakers) and other neighbouring Adivasi languages. This reflects both cultural adaptability and the impact of regional interactions with other tribes in Jharkhand and Odisha.

This indicates that while the Khond community is relatively small in Jharkhand (just over 200 speakers), it demonstrates high levels of bilingualism, with Hindi functioning as the primary bridge language for education, administration, and communication. At the same time, the use of Kharia as a secondary link highlights localized multilingualism shaped by Adivasi proximity.

Gender and Demographic Balance

The Khond population grew by 13 per cent between 2001 and 2011 (196 to 221), drawing attention to the challenges of preserving their physical existence and cultural identity in Jharkhand. According to the 2011 Census, the Female to Male Sex Ratio (FMR) among the Gond tribes of Jharkhand is low at 939, indicating a significant gender imbalance. Furthermore, the child sex ratio (0-6 years) is even more alarming at 778.

Literacy and Education

The Khond tribe in Jharkhand saw a negligible improvement in literacy, rising from 61 per cent in 2001 to 62 per cent in 2011 (men 76 per cent, women 49 per cent). Distribution of literates by educational level reveals that 32 per cent are merely literates without achieving any formal educational level. The breakdown of literate Khond tribe populations of Jharkhand by educational attainment is as follows: 18 per cent have reached primary level, 7 per cent have reached secondary level, 4 per cent have reached higher secondary level, and only 1 per cent have attained graduation. If we consider those who have completed secondary level education as educated, then only 12.1 per cent of Khond tribe population can be classified as educated,

while the remaining 87.9 per cent are uneducated.

Economy and Livelihoods

The work participation rate among the Khonds is 47 per cent, indicating that a significant proportion of the community is engaged in economic activities. Notably, the work participation rate is higher among women (48 per cent) as compared to men (46 per cent), a reverse phenomenon. However, only 45 per cent of the working Khond population are classified as main workers, with a significant disparity between males (52 per cent) and females (37 per cent). This suggests that while Khond females have a slightly higher work participation rate, they are less likely to be engaged in primary work activities compared to their male counterparts.

A significant proportion of the community is engaged in agriculture, with 41 per cent working as cultivators and 15 per cent as agricultural labourers. Notably, the occupational distribution shows that both males and females participate equally in economic activities to sustain their livelihoods.

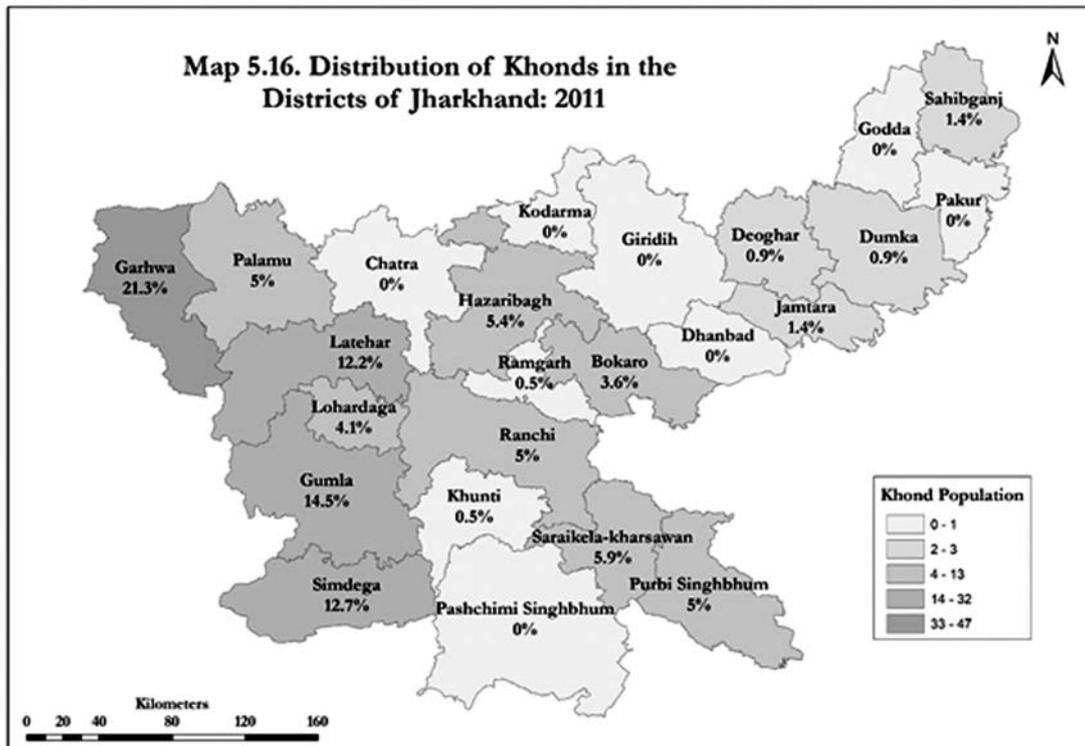
The Khonds traditionally lived in forests and were hunter-gatherers. They adapted well to forest environments and knew how to use natural resources. The Khond livelihood has changed over time. Some still practice slash-and-burn agriculture, but most have shifted to rice cultivation. This change has helped them sustain.

Social and Cultural Life

Khond society in Jharkhand is structured around geographically defined clans, each with a common surname and led by an elder male. They practice clan exogamy, and their system is both patriarchal and subsistence-based, though now changing under external influences. Their cultural identity is marked by embroidery, crafts, and clan-based organisation. The Dongria Khond, a well-known subgroup, is especially noted for resisting industrial and mining projects in Odisha to protect their sacred Niyamgiri Hills.

Table 5.16 Select Indicators the Khond – 2011 Census*

Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Workers	Agri- cultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Sec- ondary Comple- tion rate (%)
221	939	778	62.4	48.4	46.6	44.7	41.3	15.2	12.1



17. THE KISAN-NAGESIA



The Kisans live in several Indian states, including Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Bihar. With a total population of 496,219 according to the 2011 Census, their distribution varies across these states. In Odisha, where they have the highest presence (3,31,589), they are referred to as Kisan Nagesia. In West Bengal (population 98,434), they are known simply as Kisan. In Jharkhand (population 27,965) and Bihar (population 28,931), they are referred to as Kisan Nagesia.

Demography

In Jharkhand, the Kisan Nagesias are present in 22 out of 24 districts, but their main concentration is in Latehar and Gumla. Traditionally, they are farmers and food gatherers, speaking Kisan, a dialect of Kurukh, which preserves their traditions.

The Kisan Nagesia tribe in Jharkhand had a decadal growth rate of 20 per cent between 2001 and 2011 (from 31,568 to 37,264).

Religion and Language

The Kisan-Nagesia community exhibits a unique religious profile, with approximately 60 per cent adhering to traditional faiths, categorized as “other religions” in the 2011 Census. Meanwhile, 37 per cent identify as Hindu, and a smaller proportion, 3 per cent, follow Christianity.

Bilingualism

Bilingualism plays a vital role in the lives of the Kisan-Nagesias. At the household and community level, Kisan/Kurukh is the language of identity, rituals, and oral traditions. However, Sadri and Hindi are widely used for interactions outside the community, especially in markets, schools, and workplaces.

Their mother tongue is Sadri/Nagpuri, but according to the 2011 Census, an overwhelming 93.5 per cent of Kisan speakers reported Hindi as their most common second language, reflecting its dominance in education, administration, and socio-economic integration. Additionally, a smaller group reported Bengali (1,373 speakers) as a second language, especially in areas closer to the West Bengal border.

This shows that nearly all Kisan (Nagesia) community members are bilingual, with Hindi serving as the overwhelmingly dominant second language, enabling upward mobility and integration into wider networks. The use of Bengali, even if to a lesser extent, reflects regional cultural contact and highlights the community’s linguistic adaptability.

Generational differences are clear:

- Older members rely primarily on Kisan, turning to Sadri only in inter-community spaces.
- Younger generations, particularly those exposed to formal education, are more fluent in Hindi, often shifting comfortably between Kisan, Sadri, and Hindi depending on the context.

This multilingual adaptability has allowed the community to preserve its heritage while navigating wider social and economic networks.

Gender and Demographics

The Kisan Nagesias in Jharkhand have a sex ratio of 974, and for children under 6, it's 989. Compared to Jharkhand's overall Adivasi population, the sex ratio in this community is less balanced, but the child sex ratio is relatively higher than the state average.

Literacy and Education

The literacy rate among the Kisan Nagesias is 50 per cent, which is lower than Jharkhand's average literacy rate for Adivasis. There's a significant gender disparity, with female literacy at 39 per cent compared to male literacy at 60 per cent. The Kharwar tribe's literacy profile reveals that 30 per cent are literate without formal education. The educational attainment levels for the other literate populace are 19 per cent up to primary, 4 per cent secondary, 2 per cent higher secondary, and 1 per cent graduates. If secondary education is considered the benchmark, only 7 per cent of the Kisan Nagesia population is educated.

Economy and Livelihoods

The Work Participation Rate (54 per cent) among the Kisan Nagesias is higher than the state average for Adivasis. The share of the population working for a living is higher for both men (56 per cent) and women (52 per cent). However, only 41 per cent are main workers, indicating a severe irregularity in the availability of work. The higher proportion of marginal workers among Kisan Nagesia women suggests they are often limited to unpaid household work or lack access to job opportunities.

Of the main workers among the Kisan Nagesias of Jharkhand, 64 per cent are cultivators, and 24 per cent are agricultural labourers. Though the community's economic activities primarily revolve around agriculture, they are also engaged in forest product gathering, rope making, and casual labour.

Social and Cultural Life

Their history and culture are deeply rooted in agriculture. They have a distinct social structure, with various myths and beliefs surrounding their origins. They are organized around joint families, land ownership, and agricultural practices, following a patrilineal clan system where descent and lineage are traced through the father's side. Their marriage customs involve both endogamy and exogamy. Traditional practices include the Sarna religion, music, and dance, which are integral to their culture.

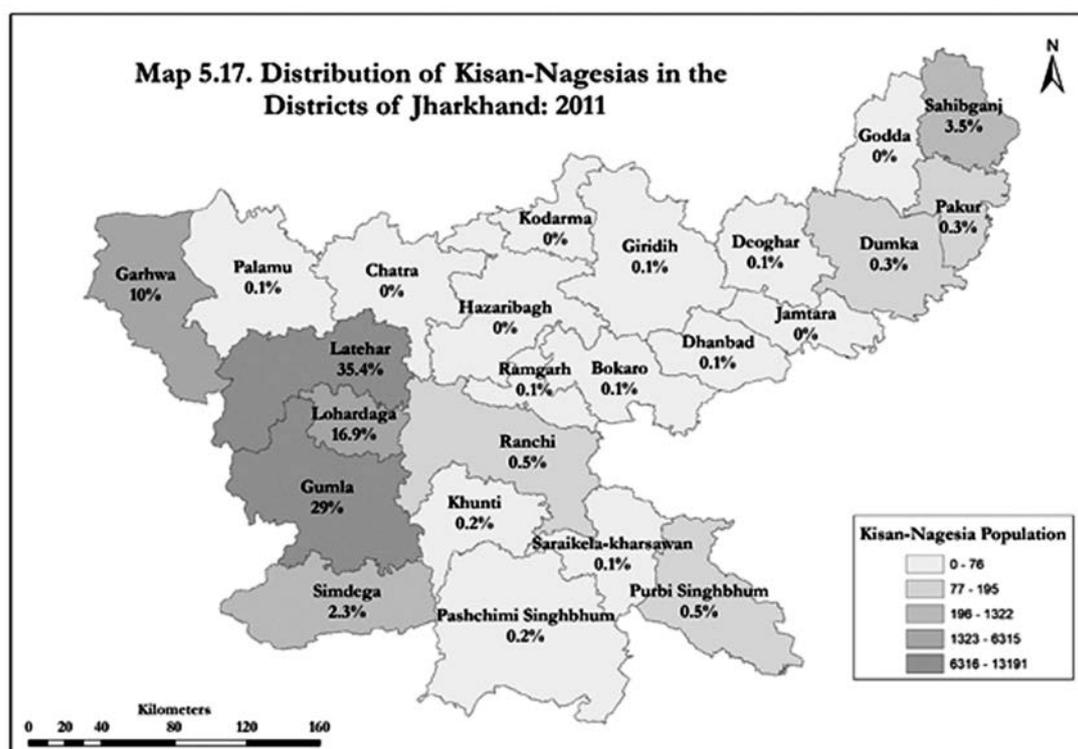
Historical Context

The Kisan Nagesias went through a series of struggles, including forced migration and name changes for protection during the Mughal period. They resisted British colonial rule and suffered exploitation and land alienation due to new revenue systems and resource extraction. Post-independence, they faced challenges in asserting their identity and securing rights amidst rapid industrialization and urbanization, leading to displacement and encroachment on Adivasi

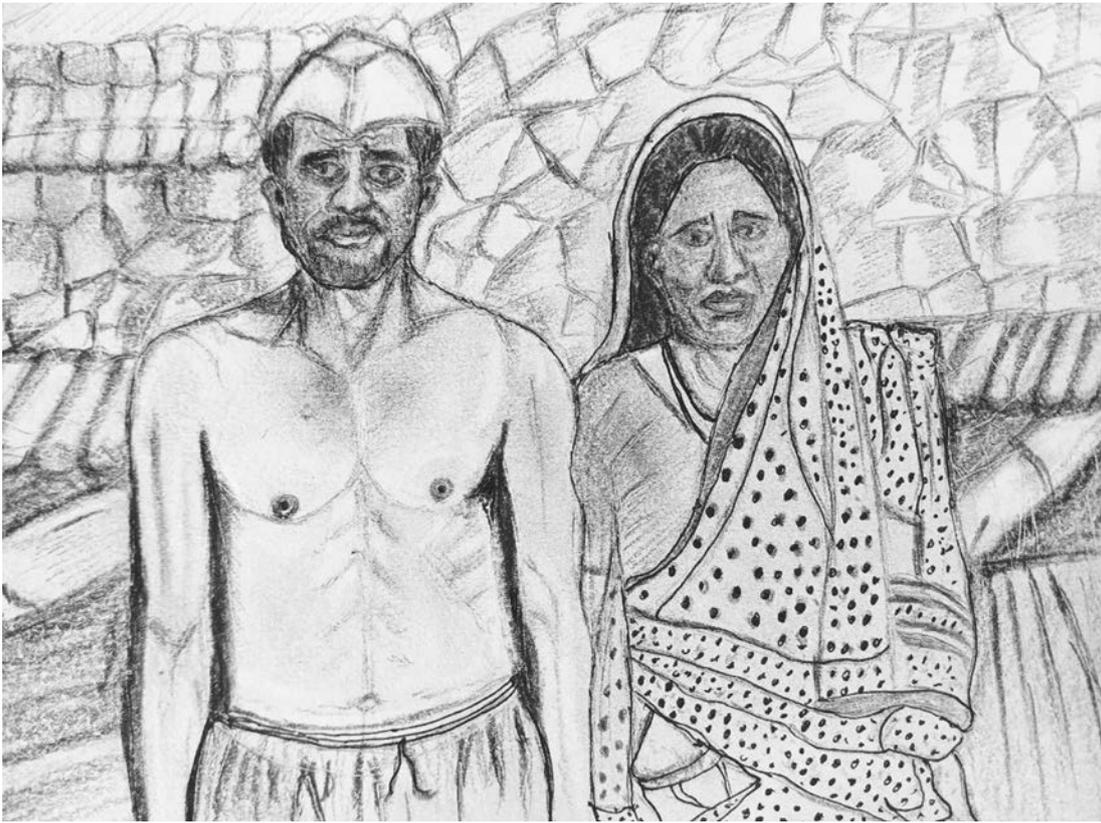
lands. Promoting sustainable livelihoods, improving access to education and healthcare, and addressing these challenges could enhance their overall quality of life.

Table 5.17 Select Indicators the Kisan Nagesia – 2011 Census*

Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Workers	Agri- cultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Secondary Comple- tion rate (%)
37,265	974	989	49.5	38.5	53.8	40.9	64.3	23.9	7



18. THE KOL



According to the 2011 Census, the total Kol population in India is 12,63,818. The Kols are settled in the states of Madhya Pradesh (11,67,918, called Kola and Kolam), Odisha (6,38,625; called Kolha, Kolha Lohara, and Kol), Maharashtra (2,01,545, called Kol and Kolam), Jharkhand (53,584, called Kol), Andhra Pradesh (44,012, called Kolam), Chhattisgarh (21,275, called Kola and Kolam), and Bihar (10,735, called Kola).

Traditionally, they have lived in harmony with nature and depend on forests for their livelihood.

Religion and Language

The 2011 census enumerated 89 per cent of the Kols of Jharkhand as Hindu, while 8 per cent reportedly practice Other religions including Sarna and a small minority (1 per cent) follow Christianity.

Bilingualism

Their mother tongue is from the Kol linguistic group, but the Census 2011 data show a more fragmented bilingualism pattern compared to many other tribes. Only 36.6 per cent of Kol speakers reported Santali as their most common second language while significant numbers also reported Munda (14,285 speakers), reflecting their cultural and geographic linkages with neighbouring Munda and Santhal populations.

This indicates that unlike many other tribes where Hindi dominates bilingualism, the Kols show a regional multilingual pattern, with Santali and Munda both serving as strong secondary languages. This suggests a bilingualism rooted in Adivasi interconnections rather than state-driven assimilation into Hindi, though Hindi is also present in smaller proportions.

- Elders prefer Kol and use Hindi sparingly, mainly in markets or official dealings.
 - Younger Kols, particularly those exposed to formal education, are increasingly fluent in Hindi and may also acquire knowledge of Sadri or regional dialects depending on settlement patterns.
 - This bilingualism strengthens their ability to interact with wider society, but it also places pressure on the Kol language, raising concerns about its intergenerational transmission.

Thus, the Kols balance cultural preservation with linguistic adaptation in everyday life.

Gender and Demographics

The female-male ratio (FMR) among the Kols of Jharkhand is 982, which is lower than the state Adivasi average. However, the child FMR (1013) is higher than the overall Adivasi figure. Compared to state and national averages, these figures indicate a relatively better gender balance among the Kols.

In Jharkhand, they have significant concentrations in Giridih, Deoghar, Dumka, and Jamtara districts, where they have lived for generations.

The Kols have been included in the Scheduled Tribe list in 2003. Therefore, it is not possible to measure their decadal growth rate, since they were not enumerated in the 2001 Census.

Literacy and Education

The literacy rate among the Kol in Jharkhand is 48 per cent, with a significant gender gap (men 60 per cent, women 35 per cent). The Kol tribe's literacy profile shows that 28 per cent are literate without formal education. The educational attainment levels are 16 per cent primary, 2 per cent secondary, 1 per cent higher secondary, and 0.3 per cent graduates. Based on secondary education, only 4 per cent of the Kol population is educated, and 96.1 per cent are uneducated.

Economy and Livelihoods

The work participation rate among the Kols is 45 per cent (men 52 per cent, women 36 per cent). However, only 36 per cent of the total workers (men 44 per cent, women 24 per cent) are main workers. Of the main workers, 23 per cent are cultivators and 38 per cent are agricultural labourers. The Kols rely partly on the forest and other natural resources for their livelihood. They also participate in traditional occupations like weaving and pastoral farming, with some individuals involved in domestic work and mining activities.

Social and Cultural Life

The Kols' social structure is based on customary rights, with totemic clans (killi) and a hierarchical organization. They practice exogamy within their clans, each associated with a sacred totem. Customary law governs various aspects of their social life, including marriage, where bride price is common, and land ownership, which historically emphasized community-based ownership and sustainable resource management. Community solidarity is a hallmark of Kol society, where music, dance, and storytelling are integral to the cultural fabric.

The Kols are renowned for their exquisite handicrafts, including baskets, pottery, textiles, and jewelry crafted from locally sourced materials. These artisanal skills have been passed down through generations, showcasing their creativity and resourcefulness.

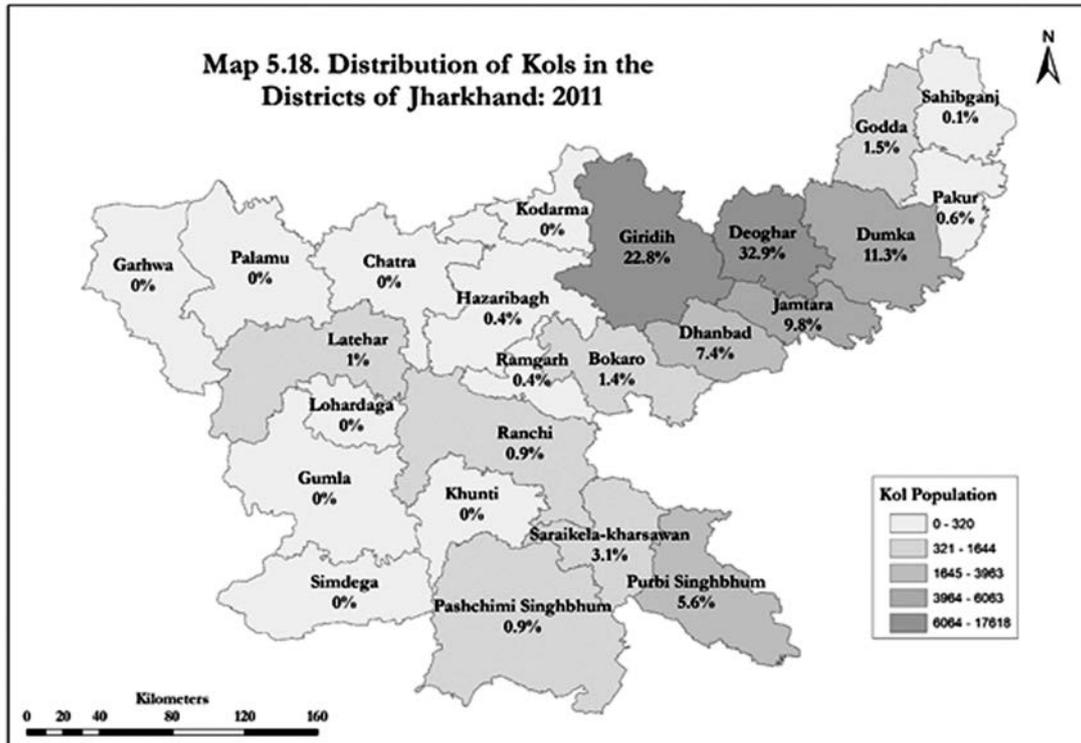
History and Resistance

Historically, the Kol tribe has fought against dispossession and exploitation, especially through the famous Kol Rebellion of the 19th century. This spirit of resistance reflects their determination to preserve their way of life and protect their rights.

In modern times, the Kols face myriad deprivations of opportunities, especially in education, health, and employment.

Table 5.18 Select Indicators the Kol - 2011 Census*

Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Lit- eracy Rate (per cent)	Female Litera- cy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Work- ers (per cent)	Second- ary Com- pletion rate (%)
53,584	982	1013	47.7	34.8	44.6	36.2	22.7	38.2	4



19. THE KORA



The Koras are believed to be a Mundari group . They reside in several Indian states, including West Bengal (1,59,404), Odisha (54,408), Jharkhand (32,786), Bihar (16,580), and parts of Bangladesh. In Odisha, they are also known as Khaira or Khayara, while in Jharkhand and Bihar, they are referred to as Mudi-Kora. As per the 2011 Census, the total Kora population in India is 2,63,178, with the majority (61 per cent) residing in West Bengal, followed by Odisha (21 per cent), Jharkhand (13 per cent), and Bihar (6 per cent).

Religion and Identity

The Kora tribe is predominantly enumerated as Hindu (86 per cent), with 1 per cent Christian and 13 per cent following other religions, mainly Sarna. Few Kora people speak their native Koda language, which belongs to the Munda family and is considered endangered, as most have shifted to speaking Bengali.

Language and Bilingualism

Their mother tongue belongs to the Kora group, but bilingualism patterns indicate strong regional influence. According to the 2011 Census, 47.6 per cent of Kora speakers reported Bengali as their most common second language, reflecting their proximity to West Bengal and long-standing cultural interactions. In addition, Hindi (10,721 speakers) was also widely reported as a second language, underscoring its role in administration and education.

This shows that the Kora demonstrate a dual bilingualism pattern: Bengali as the dominant regional second language due to cultural and geographical ties, and Hindi as an administrative and socio-economic necessity. This duality highlights how the community navigates both regional cultural integration and state-wide linguistic demands.

In Jharkhand:

- Older generations retain knowledge of Koda, but use Bengali and Hindi for wider communication.
- Younger generations, especially those in school, are more comfortable in Bengali and Hindi, often with limited or no fluency in Koda.
- Women are more likely to preserve oral traditions in Koda, particularly songs, folktales, and rituals, though the language's use is rapidly shrinking.

Thus, bilingualism in Bengali and Hindi provides access to education, administration, and economic opportunities, but simultaneously accelerates the erosion of Koda, threatening intergenerational language preservation.

Demography and Growth

In Jharkhand, the Koras have a population of 32,786, with a female-male ratio of 989 females per 1,000 males, indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution. Notably, the sex ratio for children under 6 is 955, slightly lower than the overall ratio. The Kora population rose by a high 41 per cent between 2001 and 2011 (from 23,192 to 32,786).

Literacy and Education

The Koras of Jharkhand have a literacy rate of 56 per cent (Male 69 per cent, Female 42 per cent). Among the Koras, 29.8 per cent are literate without formal education; 18 per cent have reached primary level, 5 per cent have reached secondary level, 2 per cent have reached higher secondary level, and 1 per cent have attained graduation level of education. Considering secondary level completion as the benchmark, only 8 per cent of the Koras can be classified as educated.

Economy and Livelihoods

The work participation rate among the Koras of Jharkhand is 42 per cent. Out of the total workers, 41 per cent are main workers and the rest are marginal workers. This shows that Koras face challenges in accessing employment throughout the year, which affects their economic health. Notably, 76 per cent of Kora females are marginal workers.

Social and Cultural Organization

The Koras preserve their unique customs and traditions while assimilating into local Brahminical practices, reflecting a dynamic cultural identity. They worship spirits and goddesses, believing these deities ensure their prosperity and well-being, and participate in Hindu rituals like Pūjā, demonstrating a syncretic approach to faith.

The Kora social organization is rooted in a village-based system, where village councils play a pivotal role in managing social and religious matters, serving as governing bodies that oversee various aspects of community life and ensure the preservation of traditional practices. Strong family and kinship ties are at the heart of Kora society, reinforced by strict marriage customs such as clan exogamy, which requires individuals to marry outside their clan, promoting social cohesion and strengthening bonds between different clans. Additionally, the community adheres to tribe endogamy, dictating that individuals must marry within the Kora tribe itself, preserving their cultural identity and maintaining the integrity of their social structure.

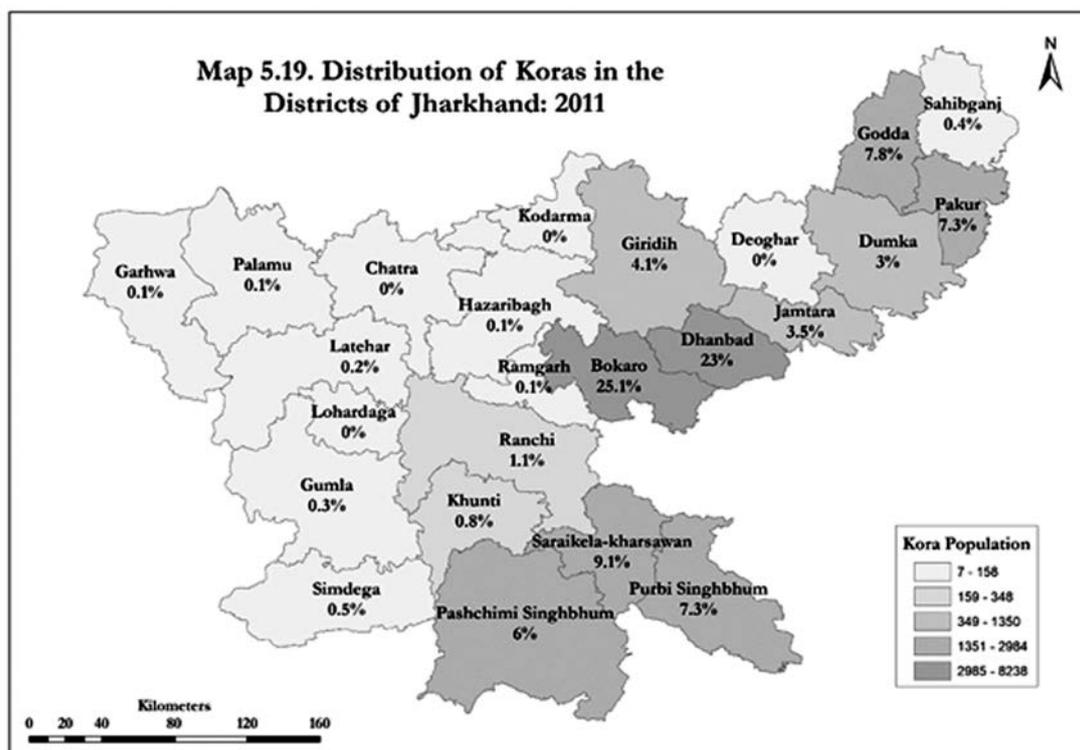
History and Resistance

The Koras of Jharkhand participated in the Indian freedom struggle through revolts and movements aimed at protecting their land, traditions, and way of life against British colonial influence. They were part of the broader resistance, contributing to localized uprisings and collective actions against land dispossession and resource exploitation, demonstrating their shared resistance against colonial rule. Although not central figures in prominent movements like the Munda Rebellion, their efforts were significant in the regional context.

The Kora face significant challenges, including poverty, economic backwardness, and loss of cultural identity and traditional livelihoods.

Table 5.19 Select Indicators the Kora - 2011 Census*

Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Lit- eracy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Work- ers	Agricultural labourers among Main Work- ers (per cent)	Secondary Comple- tion rate (%)
32,786	989	955	55.5	42.4	42	42.7	22.9	23.6	8



20. THE LOHRA



The Lohra community is considered an integral part of the larger Munda ethnic group. Their name “Lohra” is derived from “loha,” meaning iron in Hindi, reflecting their historical expertise in metalworking. This skill has been passed down through generations, demonstrating their technical expertise and significant contributions to the region’s crafts and industries.

Historically, the Chotanagpur region of Jharkhand, where the majority of the Lohra communities reside, saw a significant spread of iron tools and pottery between 1400 and 800 BCE. During this period, iron played a crucial role in agriculture, hunting, and daily life, highlighting the Lohras’ integral role in the local economy and society. Their involvement in ironworking signifies their importance in shaping the region’s development.

Population and Distribution

Jharkhand is the primary home of the Lohras, with a total population of 2,16,226. They also have some concentration in West Bengal (24,783) and Bihar (7,718). In Jharkhand, the Lohras live in hilly and forested areas, specifically in the districts of Ranchi, Gumla, and Simdega. They constitute 2.5 per cent of the total Adivasi population of Jharkhand.

The decadal increase of Lohra populations of Jharkhand between 2001 and 2011 is 17 per cent (from 1,85,004 to 2,16,226).

Religion and Belief System

The religious composition among the Lohras is 56 per cent Hindus, 40 per cent Sarna, and 3 per cent Christian. Sadri is the main language, with Mundari and Hindi also being spoken.

Language and Bilingualism

Although the Lohras’ mother tongue is Sadri/Nagpuri, the 2011 Census shows widespread bilingualism. 86.7 per cent of Lohra speakers reported Hindi as their most common second language, while Mundari (10,190 speakers) appeared as a significant secondary choice, reflecting strong Adivasi linkages and geographic interactions with the Munda population.

This indicates that the vast majority of Lohra are bilingual, positioning them well for access to education, employment, and markets. At the same time, the presence of Mundari as a significant second language highlights regional Adivasi solidarity and cultural interaction, showing that their bilingualism is both pragmatic (Hindi for socio-economic integration) and cultural (Mundari for intra-Adivasi networks).

- Generational patterns: Older members rely heavily on Sadri and Mundari, while younger Lohras in schools and workplaces increasingly use Hindi.
- Functional bilingualism: Sadri and Mundari retain cultural and ritual functions, but Hindi dominates in literacy, government programs, and formal employment.
- Cultural preservation: Songs, dances, and folktales continue to be performed in Mundari, keeping the language alive even as bilingualism with Hindi expands.

This interplay of languages reflects both adaptation to wider society and efforts to preserve their unique cultural-linguistic heritage.

Demography

The female-male ratio among the Lohras is 977; the corresponding figure for the children under six is 962. Both figures appear lower when compared to the state average of the Adivasis.

Literacy and Education

Like most of the Adivasis groups of Jharkhand, the literacy rate among the Lohras is quite low (56 per cent). Lohra women with a literacy rate of 45 per cent are 22 per centage points behind their male counterparts. However, the Lohra tribe has witnessed a slight increase in literacy rate, which was 39 per cent in 2001. Further, among the Lohras' literate population, 30 per cent have basic literacy without formal education. The educational attainment breakdown is 18 per cent primary level, 5 per cent secondary, 2 per cent higher secondary, and 1 per cent graduation. Considering secondary completion as the benchmark, only 9 per cent of the Lohra population are educated.

Economy and Occupation

The work participation rate among the Lohras is 46 per cent. Among the total workers, 59 per cent were main workers (employed for six months of the year or more). Though Lohra Adivasis are recognized by the Supreme Court of India as a professional group due to their traditional expertise in Luhari (ironworking), agriculture-related works seems to be their primary occupation. While one third of the main workers are enumerated as cultivators, another one fourth are engaged in agricultural wage earning. The remaining 42 per cent are engaged in various occupations, including their traditional craft of skillfully shaping tools and items made from iron, showcasing their technical expertise.

Culture and Social Life

The Lohra community in Jharkhand has a rich cultural heritage, deeply rooted in ironworking, complemented by a strong social structure based on kinship ties and village organization. Generally, they speak the Sadri or Nagpuri language. Their social hierarchy is led by village elders, who play pivotal roles in guiding the community and preserving its traditions.

There are several totem-based groups or clans among the Lohras, such as the Kachua, Ser, Bail and Suwar. Married Lohra women wear vermilion on their heads and glass bangles on their hands. In addition to worshipping their ancestors, they participate in festivals such as Jitiya, Phagua, Vishwakarma Puja, and Diwali. Almost all of them are identified as Hindus in the 2011 census, with a very small section following Christianity.

History of Resistance

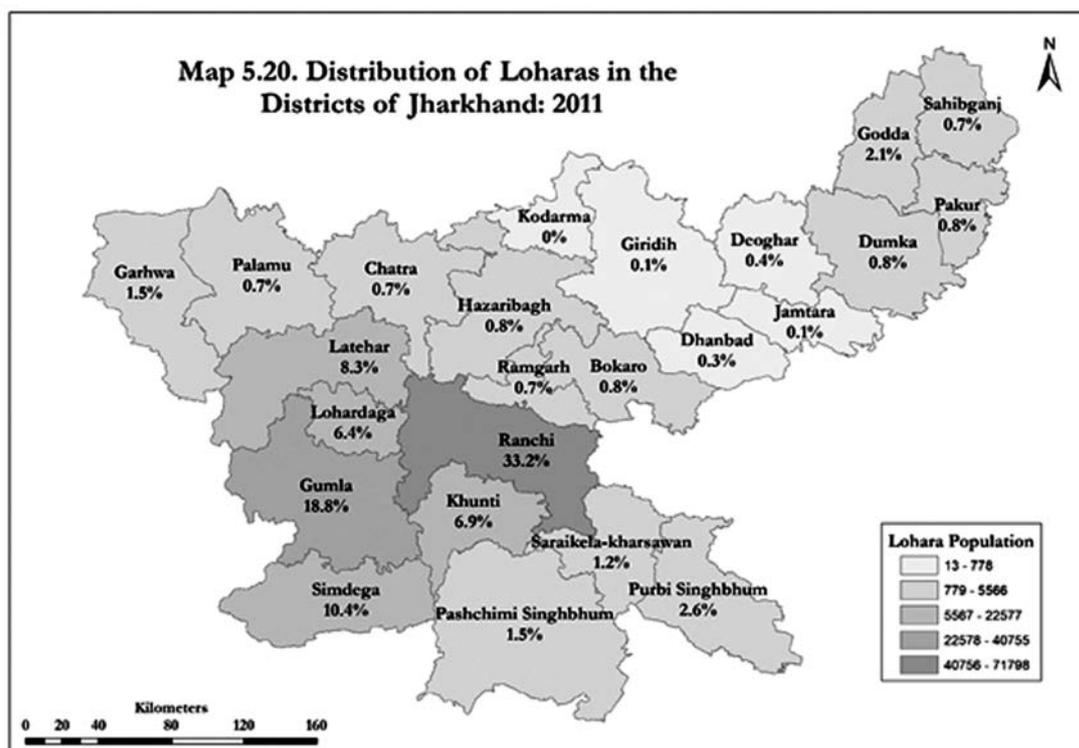
During British rule, the Lohra communities, along with other Adivasi groups, faced displacement due to exploitation of Jharkhand's resources. They resisted colonial rule through revolts and uprisings to protect their land and way of life. Notably, the Lohra revolutionary Konka Kamar Karmali played a key role in mobilizing his community against the British, drawing inspiration

from Birsa Munda's Ulgulan revolt. The Lohras actively supported the independence struggle by crafting and supplying weapons to freedom fighters.

Disputes over land rights, limited access to quality education and healthcare services, and economic marginalization that hinders their financial stability are all challenges that impact the overall well-being of the Lohras. Despite these difficulties, there are promising opportunities for growth and development.

Tale 5.20 Select Indicators the Lohra – 2011 Census*

Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Sec- ondary Com- pletion rate (%)
216226	977	962	56.2	45.1	46.0	49.8	33.7	25.4	9



21. THE MAHLI



According to the 2011 census, the Mahili tribe in India has a population of 159,404. However, they are settled in the states of Jharkhand (1,52,663), West Bengal (84,103, called Mahlis and Mahalis), and Odisha (18,625, called Mahali). In Jharkhand, they form nearly 2 per cent of the total Adivasi population. About 61.6 per cent Mahli tribe populations, as per Census 2011, are Hindus, 5.7 per cent Christians and the remaining 32.3 per cent are in Other religions. Their native language, Mahli, belongs to the Mundari family, but many have adopted languages like Bangla, Odia, Khortha, and Hindi due to cultural influences.

Population and Distribution

The Mahli population of Jharkhand increased from 1,21,174 in 2001 to 1,52,663 in 2011 (decadal growth 26 per cent).

Religion

Among the Mahlis, 62 per cent reportedly follow Hinduism, 32 per cent Sarna, and 6 per cent Christianity. Majority of the Mahlis speak Mundari, Hindi and Sadri.

Language and Bilingualism

Their mother tongue is Sadri/Nagpuri, but the 2011 Census reveals a more divided bilingualism profile than many other tribes. 55.1 per cent of Mahli speakers reported Hindi as their most common second language, while a large share also reported Santali (53,807 speakers), reflecting close cultural and geographic ties with the Santhal population.

However, bilingualism and even language shifts are common:

- Many speak Mundari, Hindi, and Santali, depending on the region.
- In West Bengal and Odisha, significant sections have adopted Bangla or Odia.
- Younger generations, especially in Jharkhand towns, lean toward Hindi as a medium of education, while Sadri acts as a lingua franca in rural areas.

Thus, while the Mahli language functions as a cultural marker, their bilingualism reflects adaptation to different socio-linguistic contexts. This duality helps preserve cultural identity while easing integration with mainstream society.

This shows that the Mahlis are characterized by dual bilingualism, with both Hindi and Santali functioning as strong secondary languages. While Hindi provides wider communication and access to state structures, Santali highlights deep inter-Adivasi interaction and cultural blending. This duality makes the Mahlis an example of how regional cultural connections and state integration pressures can coexist in shaping linguistic practices.

Demography

The female-male ratio (FMR) among Mahlis is 992 overall and 983 among children under six.

Literacy and Education

The Mahali community's literacy rate stands at 54 per cent (66 per cent for men, 42 per cent for women), which is substantially higher as compared to the 2001 figure (36 per cent). However,

among the literate population, 29 per cent have basic literacy without formal education. The educational attainment breakdown is 17 per cent primary level, 5 per cent secondary, 3 per cent higher secondary, and 1 per cent graduation. Considering secondary completion as the benchmark, only 9 per cent of the Mahli population is educated.

Economy and Occupation

The work participation rate among Mahalis is 48 per cent (men 53 per cent and women 43 per cent). Of the total workers, 56 per cent are enumerated as main workers, indicating that a significant portion of the workforce may be engaged in marginal or seasonal activities. A high 44 per cent of the main workers' involvement in household industries points to the Mahali people continuing their traditional occupation of basket weaving and bamboo craftwork. Only 17 per cent and 13 per cent, respectively, are engaged in cultivation and agricultural labour.

Social and Cultural Life

The Mahalis have a rich tradition of folklore, music, and dance, which plays an integral role in their social and cultural life. Their customs and traditions are deeply intertwined with their natural surroundings and the forest resources they depend on. The Mahalis also have a system of totemism, where certain clans are associated with specific animals or plants, reflecting their deep connection with nature. This connection is evident in their reverence for nature and efforts to live in harmony with the environment.

History of Resistance

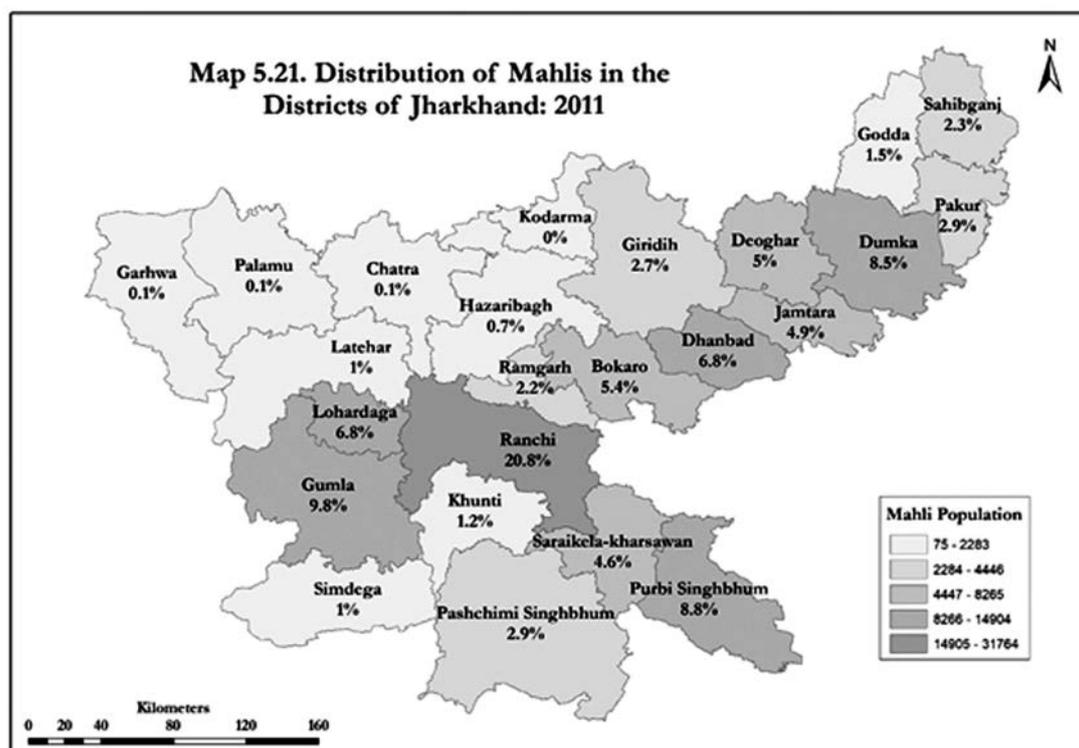
The Mahalis participated in the anti-colonial movement. Mahali Bhagat, a leader of the community, took part in the Quit India Movement.

Their religious practices often include Brahminical elements as well as traditional beliefs. They worship nature spirits and deities like Marang Buru, the supreme deity. Common customs include nature-related festivals like Karam, Tusu, and Bangri. They also have unique marriage rituals and burial practices, including a purification bath after birth and the practice of not cremating the deceased. These customs and traditions are an integral part of their cultural identity and play a significant role in their social life.

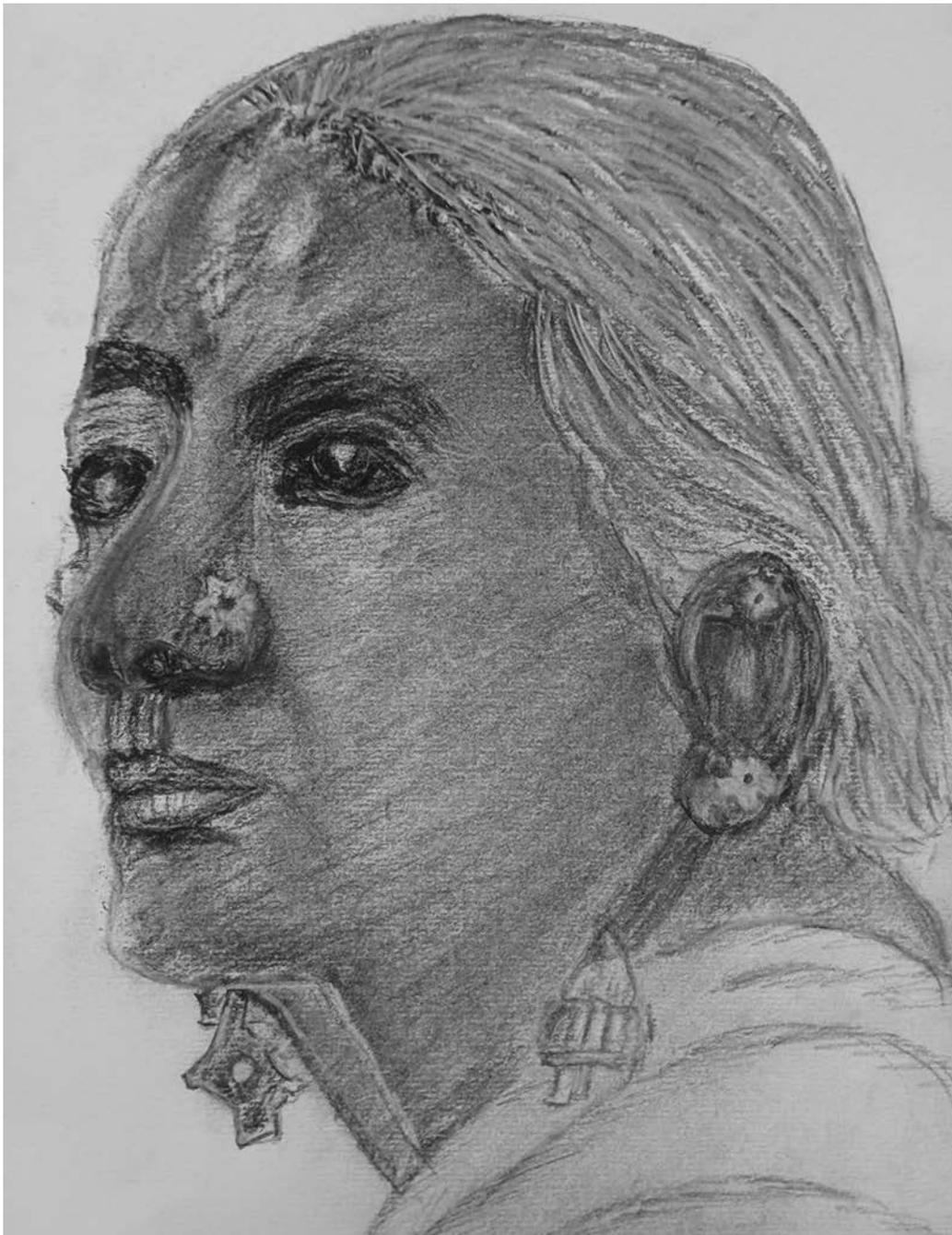
Today, the Mahalis continue to struggle with poverty, low literacy, lack of basic amenities, and threats to their culture and survival. Developmental projects have sometimes displaced them, exacerbating their situation. The community requires better education, skill development, and access to markets for their crafts. Initiatives that promote sustainable development and protect their rights could help address these challenges and improve their quality of life.

Table 5.21 Select Indicators the Mahli – 2011 Census*

Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Lit- eracy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Secondary Comple- tion rate (%)
152663	992	983	54.2	42.4	48.0	56.1	16.9	12.8	9



22. THE MUNDA



The Munda, one of the largest indigenous Adivasi communities found primarily residing in Jharkhand's Chotanagpur plateau region, is recognised as a Scheduled Tribe by the Indian Constitution. According to some linguists, Mundas migrated from Southeast Asia to eastern India around 4000–3500 years ago, eventually settling in Jharkhand's forested plateau region and spreading to other parts of India. Their presence is noted in ancient Vedic texts, highlighting their historical significance in the Gangetic basin. Today, the Munda community is spread across multiple states, including West Bengal (3,66,386), Odisha (25,655), Chhattisgarh (15,095), Tripura (14,544), Bihar (14,028), and Madhya Pradesh (5,041). They also have settlements in Bangladesh and Nepal.

Population and Growth

According to the 2011 Census, the Munda population in Jharkhand is substantial, numbering 12,29,221 individuals. This accounts for approximately 4 per cent of the state's total population and about 14 per cent of Jharkhand's total Adivasi population, highlighting their significant presence in the state. The population is distributed across Jharkhand, with significant concentrations in Khunti, Ranchi, Simdega, Paschimi Singhbhum, and Gumla districts. The Munda population in Jharkhand grew by 17 per cent in the decade of 2001–2011 (from 10,49,767 to 12,29,221).

Religion

The Mundas of Jharkhand are religiously diverse, with 33 per cent identifying as Christian, 17 per cent as Hindu, and a larger percentage following other faiths, primarily Sarna.

Language and Bilingualism

Their mother tongue is Mundari, which continues to enjoy strong vitality. According to the 2011 Census, 67.2 per cent of Munda speakers reported Mundari itself as their dominant language, reflecting cultural resilience and loyalty to their linguistic heritage. At the same time, Hindi (348,421 speakers) emerged as the most common second language, highlighting the growing role of Hindi in education, administration, and inter-community communication.

However, multilingualism is a defining feature of their identity:

- Sadri serves as a lingua franca across Adivasi groups.
- Nagpuri, Bangla, and Hindi are spoken widely depending on the region.
- Younger generations, especially those in schools and towns, increasingly use Hindi and English, leading to a gradual shift in everyday communication.

Thus, bilingualism among Mundas reflects both preservation of cultural heritage through Mundari and integration with wider society through Hindi and Sadri.

This indicates that the Mundas remain strongly attached to their mother tongue, with Mundari serving as a vibrant marker of identity. At the same time, widespread adoption of Hindi reflects the community's adaptive bilingualism, balancing cultural preservation with integration into broader socio-economic systems.

Demography

The Female Male Ratio among Mundas is 1001 females as against 1000 males, which is nearly at par with the FMR of other prominent Adivasi groups of Jharkhand like Santal, Oraon and Ho. The FMR among the Munda children below six years is 967 (against the corresponding figure for the average of the Adivasis of Jharkhand, which is 948).

Literacy and Education

The Munda community's literacy rate, as per the 2011 Census, stood at 63 per cent (Male 73 per cent, Female 52 per cent). In other words, over one-third of the Munda population remains illiterate, highlighting a significant educational challenge. Notably, female literacy among Mundas is relatively better. Among literate Mundas in Jharkhand, 31 per cent have no formal education, while 18 per cent have primary, 7 per cent secondary, 4 per cent higher secondary, and 3 per cent graduation-level education. Considering secondary completion as the benchmark, only 14 per cent are educated.

Economy and Occupation

The work participation rate among the Mundas of Jharkhand is 48 per cent (Male 53 per cent, Female 43 per cent). Nearly half (53 per cent) of the workforce are engaged as main workers (working for more than six months in a year). The rest are marginal workers. Work participation rates, both as main and marginal workers among Munda females, are lower than those of their male counterparts.

Farming has been the mainstay of Mundas. However, in want of modern farm technology and a package of farm practices, Mundas still follow the traditional method of cultivation. They also rear cattle to supplement their farm incomes. While 62 per cent of Munda main workers are engaged as cultivators, 16 are recorded as agricultural labourers.

Social Structure

The Munda society is structured around exogamous clans known as "kilis", which are believed to have originated from totemic affiliations with animals, plants, or natural features. These clans are organised around common ancestors and prohibit marriage within their sub-clan to prevent inbreeding. Common totems include animals like tigers, hyenas, and cobras, as well as plants and natural elements like fish and birds. This totemic system is integral to Munda cultural identity, influencing social norms and community practices.

Historical Resistance

Under the leadership of Birsa Munda, the Munda tribe played a pivotal role in India's freedom movement, fiercely resisting British colonial rule in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Munda Rebellion (1899-1900), also known as the Ulgulan or "Great Tumult," was a landmark Adivasi uprising against British oppression and exploitative land policies. Driven by a desire to safeguard their ancestral lands and cultural heritage, the Mundas fought courageously for their

rights and identity. Birsa Munda's legacy as a freedom fighter and champion of Adivasi rights continues to inspire generations, symbolizing the resilience and spirit of India's indigenous communities.

Culture and Identity

The Munda social structure in Jharkhand is a hierarchical system built around kinship ties, communal land ownership, and indigenous religious practices. At its core is the village-level Munda-Manki system, consisting of key roles such as the Munda (village head), Pahan (priest), and Dakuwa (informant). The community is organized into clans, known as Killi, which follow patrilineal descent and have totemic origins. Governance is typically managed through a council of elders, or Panchayat, which ensures the preservation of traditional practices and social harmony. This structure reflects the community's strong connection to their land, culture, and heritage.

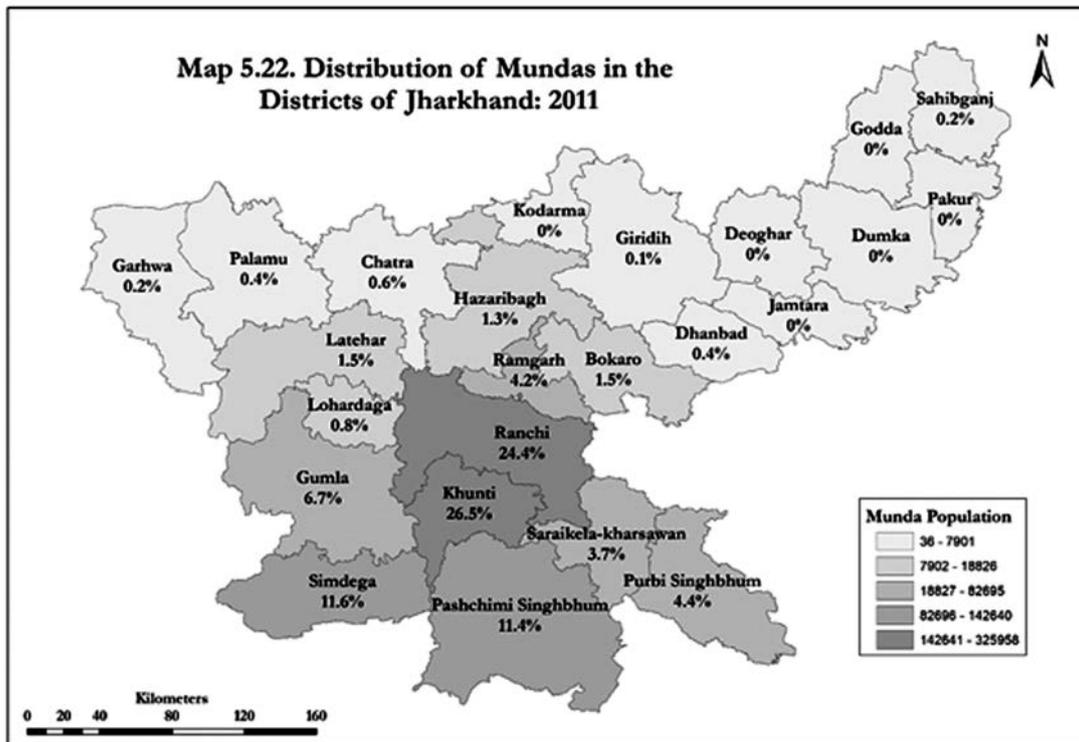
The Munda people in Jharkhand follow the "Mundari Khuntkatti" system, where families own forest land they cleared and cultivated. This system gives them the authority to decide who can settle in their villages. Land is passed down through generations, typically to sons, while daughters receive family support only until their marriage. These customs shape the Munda's identity, community bonds, and self-governance.

The Mundas of Jharkhand have a rich culture deeply connected to nature. They express themselves through traditional songs, dances, and art forms like Paitkar paintings and Dokra crafts. Their art reflects their life, including farming, hunting, and spiritual practices centered around deities like Singbonga. This cultural heritage exhibits their strong community bonds and traditions.

The Mundas of Jharkhand face challenges in accessing basic government services. Many struggle to get quality education, healthcare, and proper infrastructure. Despite a few government initiatives, the benefits often don't reach everyone equally. This is especially true for education, where Munda communities tend to lag behind other groups. As a result, they face difficulties in improving their lives and opportunities. Besides, they face significant challenges, including cultural and linguistic barriers in education, widespread poverty, historical land dispossession, water scarcity impacting their livelihoods, and the struggle to preserve their unique cultural identity in an imbalanced world.

Table 5.22 Select Indicators the Munda - 2011 Census*

Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Lit- eracy Rate (per cent)	Female Litera- cy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Work- ers	Agricultur- al labour- ers among Main Workers (per cent)	Second- ary Com- pletion rate (%)
12,29,221	1001	973	62.6	52.4	48.0	53.2	61.9	15.8	14



23. THE ORAON



The Oraon are a population majorly concentrated in Jharkhand, but with small numbers also inhabit Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, and Arunachal Pradesh in India, and also the neighboring countries of Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. Like all the Jharkhandi Adivasi groups living in Assam, Oraons are not considered in the state as Scheduled Tribes, and this has made it difficult to estimate the exact population of the Oraons in the country. Identified with their language, Kurukh, they are sometimes called the Kurukh people.

Demographics

In Jharkhand, they primarily inhabit the Chhotanagpur Plateau region. The anthropologist Sarat Chandra Roy traces Oraon's emigration from the Konkan region to Rohtasgarh around 100 CE (driven by Aryan invasion) and from Rohtasgarh to the Chhotanagpur plateau region during the Mughal period. The history of forced migration never let the Oraon people settle down—during the colonial period, they were again pushed out of their homeland in Jharkhand to survive in the tea gardens of the northern part of Bengal and Assam.

With a population of 17,166,18, according to the 2011 Census, Oraons, the second largest Adivasi group in Jharkhand, form one-fifth of the total Adivasi population of the state. When considered within the total population of the state, every twentieth person is found to be an Oraon. They primarily inhabit the districts of Ranchi, Gumla, Lohardaga, Latehar, Simdega, Garhwa, and Palamu. The Oraons of Jharkhand registered a decadal growth of 23 per cent between 2001 and 2011 (from 13,90,459 to 17,16,618).

Religion

The Oraon community in Jharkhand exhibits a diverse religious division. According to the 2011 Census data, 10 per cent of them are identified as Hindus and 27 per cent as Christians. Notably, the majority, 62 per cent, follow Other religions, mainly Sarna.

Language and Bilingualism

Their mother tongue is Kurukh (Oraon), which continues to hold strong vitality. According to the 2011 Census, 53.2 per cent of Oraon speakers reported Kurukh/Oraon as their dominant language, while a very large section also reported Hindi (762,862 speakers) as a second language.

This profile shows that the Oraons maintain strong cultural attachment to Kurukh, while also demonstrating extensive bilingualism with Hindi. The coexistence of Kurukh as a mother tongue and Hindi as a practical lingua franca underlines the community's dual orientation—preserving their identity while ensuring access to education, administration, and wider economic opportunities.

Gender

The female-male ratio (FMR) among the Oraons is 1009, which aligns with the state's average figure for Adivasis, which is 1003.). As is found among most other Adivasi groups, the FMR

among the Oraons is far higher than what is found in the total population of the state. The FMR among the Oraon children below six years (967) underscores that the group has resisted the engulfing son-preference tradition among most of the non-Adivasi populations.

Literacy and Education

The literacy rate among the Oraons, as per the 2011 Census, was 67 per cent, which was just above the state average (66 per cent) but much higher than the literacy rate of the average figure for the Adivasis of Jharkhand (57 per cent). The literacy figure indicates that about one-third of the Oraon population was still bound by the chain of illiteracy. Though female literacy among the Oraons was relatively better (58 per cent) as compared to the average female literacy among the Adivasis of the state (42 per cent), the fact that more than 40 per cent of the Oraon females above six years of age were illiterate was a disturbing fact in itself. The Oraon tribe's literacy profile indicates that 31 per cent are literate without formal schooling. In terms of formal education, 17 per cent have completed primary level, 9 per cent secondary level, 6 per cent higher secondary level, and 4 per cent have graduated. Considering secondary education as the benchmark, only 19 per cent of the Oraon population is educated.

Livelihood

The primary source of livelihood among the Oraon is agriculture. According to the 2011 Census, 57 per cent of the main workers in the community were cultivators, while another 23 per cent were agricultural laborers. The corresponding figures for the state average of the Adivasis were 49 per cent and 42 per cent respectively, indicating a relatively better economic footing of the Oraons. They cultivate rice, maize, and pulses, often using traditional farming methods. Besides agriculture, the Oraons have diversified their livelihoods by engaging in trade, commerce, and various professional jobs, adapting to changing socio-economic conditions. This shift has helped them sustain their lives and communities in a rapidly evolving world.

Social Organization

The Oraons of Jharkhand are divided into numerous exogamous clans with totemic associations to plants, animals, and objects. Those clans include Aind (a fish), Bakula (heron), Bara (banyan), Barwa (wild dog), Beck (salt), Chidra (squirrel), Dhan (paddy), Edgodgo (mouse), Ekka (turtle), Gede (duck), Halman (langur), Khoya (wild dog), Kiro (a fruit), Kachhap (tortoise), Kerketta (hedge sparrow), Kujur (a medicinal plant), Lakra (tiger), and Minz (a fish).

The Oraons have a self-governing system known as Parha Pratha, where village councils are led by Pahan, Panibharwa, and Chowkidar. Community spaces like Dhumkuria and Akhra play vital roles. A Parha council consisted of 12-30 villages, each with its separate council and designated roles like Raja, Dewan, and Praja. This system helped the Oraons preserve their social and cultural heritage. The Oraon society is patrilineal and patrilocal, with clan names passing from father to son and notable lineages like Bhuinhari Khunt.

Cultural Heritage

The Oraons possess a rich cultural heritage, marked by distinctive art forms, vibrant festivals, and a unique language. Their art, such as intricate wall paintings and traditional crafts, showcases their profound connection to nature and reflects their worldview. The Oraons celebrate various festivals, often tied to agricultural cycles, which play a significant role in their cultural and social lives.

Aside from being homemakers, the Oraon women contribute significantly to the household economy. While they play crucial roles in family matters, their involvement in community decision-making and religious affairs is often limited. However, the status of Oraon women is evolving, with many now enjoying greater freedom and agency.

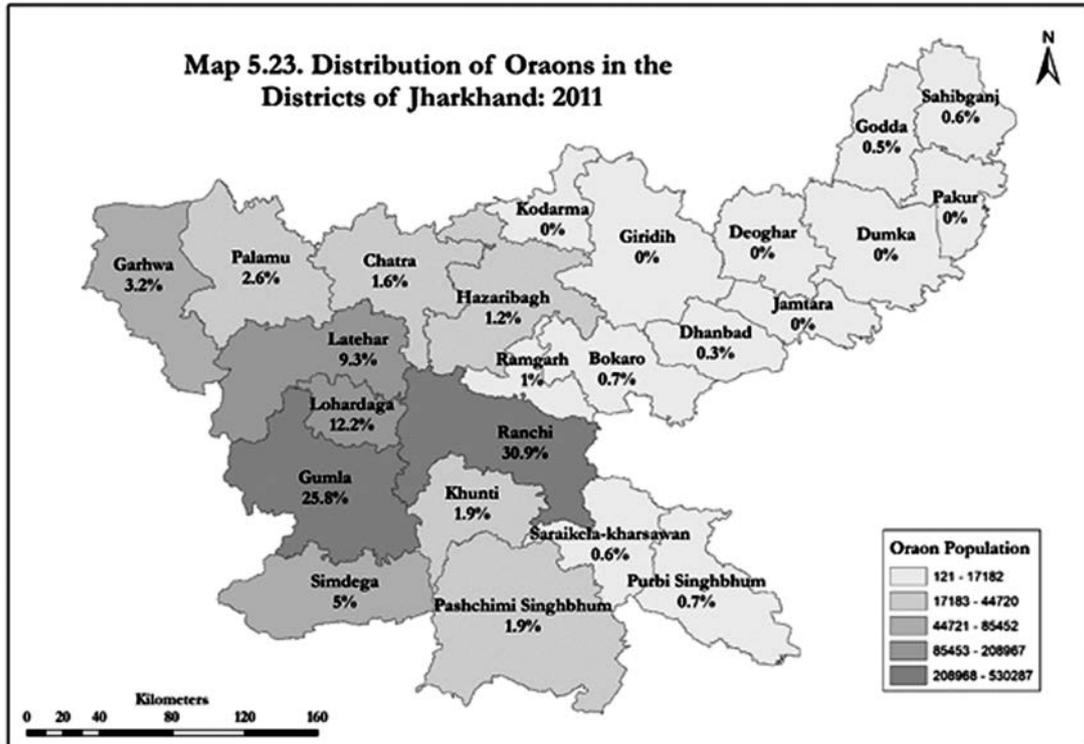
Historical Contribution

The Oraons of Jharkhand played a major role in India's freedom struggle, notably through the Tana Bhagat Movement. Led by the visionary Jatra Bhagat in the early 20th century, this movement embodied a powerful act of defiance against the oppressive British Raj. As the movement gained momentum, it gradually aligned with the broader Indian nationalist movement, contributing significantly to the country's collective fight for independence and self-determination.

However, the Oraon community in Jharkhand encounters various socio-economic challenges, including poverty, limited access to quality education and healthcare, and threats to traditional livelihoods. Food insecurity, malnutrition, and vulnerability to exploitation further exacerbate these issues. Additionally, migration and the erosion of cultural traditions pose significant hurdles, impacting the community's social fabric and identity. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that balances modern development with the preservation of their cultural heritage.

Table 5.23 Select Indicators the Oraon – 2011 Census

Population	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Participation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Cultivators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Secondary Completion rate (%)
1,71,6618	1007	967	67.0	58.1	45.4	53.3	57.0	15.8	19



24. THE SANTAL



The latest Census of India (2011) recorded above six million people as members of the Santal Adivasi (Scheduled Tribe in the language of the constitution) community, the third largest among all the Adivasi communities. Although they are spread across the states of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Bihar, and Tripura, owing to politico-technical reasons, in Assam they are denied Scheduled Tribe status. Therefore, the number recorded in the Census tended to be lower than the actual. In Jharkhand, with a population of 2,754,723, Santals form the largest Adivasi group. They account for a little above eight per cent of the state's total population and nearly one third (31.9 per cent to be exact) of the state's total Adivasi population.

The Santal tribe's decadal growth rate in Jharkhand was 14 per cent between 2001 and 2011 (from 24,10,509 to 27,54,723).

Religion

As per the 2011 Census, 54 per cent of the Santals are enumerated as Hindu, 9 per cent of them accepted Christianity and the rest 37 per cent are in Other religious categories, mainly Sarna.

Language and Bilingualism

Their mother tongue is Santali, which has very high retention. According to the 2011 Census, 98.1 per cent of Santal speakers reported Santali as their primary language, reflecting exceptional linguistic loyalty. At the same time, Hindi (32,959 speakers) was reported as a second language, used for education, administration, and inter-community contact.

The Santals speak Santali, a rich language included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India. Many Santals are bilingual, also fluent in Hindi, Bengali, or Odia to communicate outside their community. Santali has a well-documented tradition, including a five-volume dictionary compiled by Paul Olaf Bodding.

This shows that the Santals are one of the strongest cases of linguistic resilience in Jharkhand, with Santali overwhelmingly retained as a mother tongue. However, the presence of Hindi as a second language reflects their adaptive bilingualism, ensuring participation in education, markets, and governance while preserving their cultural-linguistic heritage.

Demographics

Although Santals are found in all 24 districts with varying numbers, the population is concentrated mainly in the districts of Dumka, East Singhbhum, Pakur, Sahebganj, Godda, Jamtara, Giridih, Dhanbad, Bokaro, Deoghar, and Seraikela-Kharsawan (see the distribution in the map below) In tandem with most of the Adivasi groups in India, the Santals of Jharkhand have a normal female-male ratio of 1009, while the state average is found to be highly unfavourable for the women (947 women per 1000 men). The female-to-male ratio among the children below six also takes a similar route: while the ratio among the Adivasis is 975, for the average it stands at 948.

Literacy and Education

The Literacy rate among the Santals was just above 50 per cent, which was much below the state

average (66 per cent) as well as the average of the Adivasis (57 per cent). That nearly half of the population had not had the opportunity to read and write was in itself a blight on society. This was further exacerbated by the regrettably higher level of female illiteracy – more than 60 per cent of the females above six years of age had never been introduced to the alphabets. The Santal tribe's literacy profile shows that 27 per cent are literate without formal education. Among the remaining Santhal literates, 16 per cent have completed primary education, 5 per cent secondary education, 3 per cent higher secondary, and 1 per cent have graduated. Using secondary education as the benchmark, only 8 per cent of the Santhal population meets the criteria for being educated.

Livelihood

The livelihood of the Santal primarily revolves around agriculture and allied activities. Of the total population of the Santals, nearly half (48.1 per cent) were found to be in the workforce. This was much higher than the state average (39 per cent), indicating the economic vulnerability leading to the involvement of the children and elderly population in some or other kind of gainful employment. Their economic vulnerability is further manifested in the lower rate of availability of work: only 49 per cent of the workers were reported to be main workers (working for more than six months in a year). Of the main workers, 43 per cent were reported to be cultivators and another 29 per cent were recorded as agricultural labourers.

Being agriculturalists, both Santal men and women workers focus on cultivation of crops like rice, maize, and pulses. As they cultivate their lands primarily to produce food grains and vegetables for self-consumption, traditional packages of agricultural practices still dominate in crop cultivation of Santals. Secondary occupations pursued by Santals include forest-based activities, craft-making (like basketry and wood carvings), hunting, fishing, labor work, and small-scale trade, exhibiting their resourcefulness and connection to nature.

Social Organization

There are twelve patriarchal clans among Santals: Hansda, Murmu, Kisku, Hembrom, Soren, Marandi, Tudu, Baske, Besra, Pauria, Chande, and Bedia. They follow exogamy.

Culture

Community participation and consensus-building have been an essential part of decision-making in the Santal community. The Santals of Jharkhand have a three-tier traditional system of self-rule that involves various roles of designated authorities like Pradhan or Manjhi Hadam at the village council level, Parganait, at intermediate level comprising several villages and Dehri at the top level, comprising vast areas under Shikar Parisad that work together to maintain social order, resolve disputes, and govern community affairs. In a word, the Santals' social system is one of the best forms of democratic governance that the world has ever seen. Nevertheless, there have appeared many signs of erosion in the system, owing mainly to several external factors, including the non-implementation of the constitutionally provided safeguards like Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act 1996.

Santal culture is a vibrant tapestry of traditional art, music, and dance, deeply rooted in their interconnectedness with nature and community life. Their folk art includes intricate designs and storytelling through paintings and crafts. Traditional songs and dances, often performed during festivals like Sohrai (harvest festival) and Baha (spring festival), showcase their rich cultural heritage and communal spirit. These events emphasize community bonding, cultural identity, and a deep respect for nature and tradition. The Santals' cultural practices are a testament to their strong community ties and rich heritage.

Santals are worshippers of nature. They worship at Jaher Than, which is a pavilion surrounded by trees. Every Santal village in Jharkhand has a Jaher Than. Many Santals identify themselves as followers of Sarna Dharam, but the Union Government is yet to assign a separate code for Sarna religion.

Santals have an immensely rich language, known as Santali. A dictionary of the Santali language compiled by Paul Olaf Bodding runs through five volumes. The

Santal women play a vital role in the community's social, economic, and cultural fabric. They contribute significantly to agriculture, manage household responsibilities, and participate in traditional rituals and ceremonies. Women are also involved in craft-making, such as basketry and weaving, and pass down cultural traditions, songs, and dances to younger generations. Their roles are crucial in preserving the community's heritage and identity, and they often hold important positions in decision-making processes within the household, although at the larger community level their status is found to be marginalized.

History and Migration

The Santals' exact date of arrival in Jharkhand or the places they came from is unclear. However, their settlement history in Jharkhand can be traced from around the 1830s when the British invited them to settle in the area, which was then designated as Damin-i-Koh, later named as Santal Pargana.

Santals have a historical role in the Indian independence movement. Clashes between the Santals and the British interests began with the growing unrest among the formers concerning the terribly exploitative mode of British rule. They fought a battle to defend their self-rule and make the society free from external forces that threatened their autonomy and way of life. Beginning with the resistance led by Tilka Manjhi, who led an uprising against foreign rulers in Santal dominated region of Sahebganj, followed by the great Santal insurrection of 1855, famously called Hul, to the movement for the Jharkhand state, the Santals have time and again organized themselves to fight against injustice and protect human values.

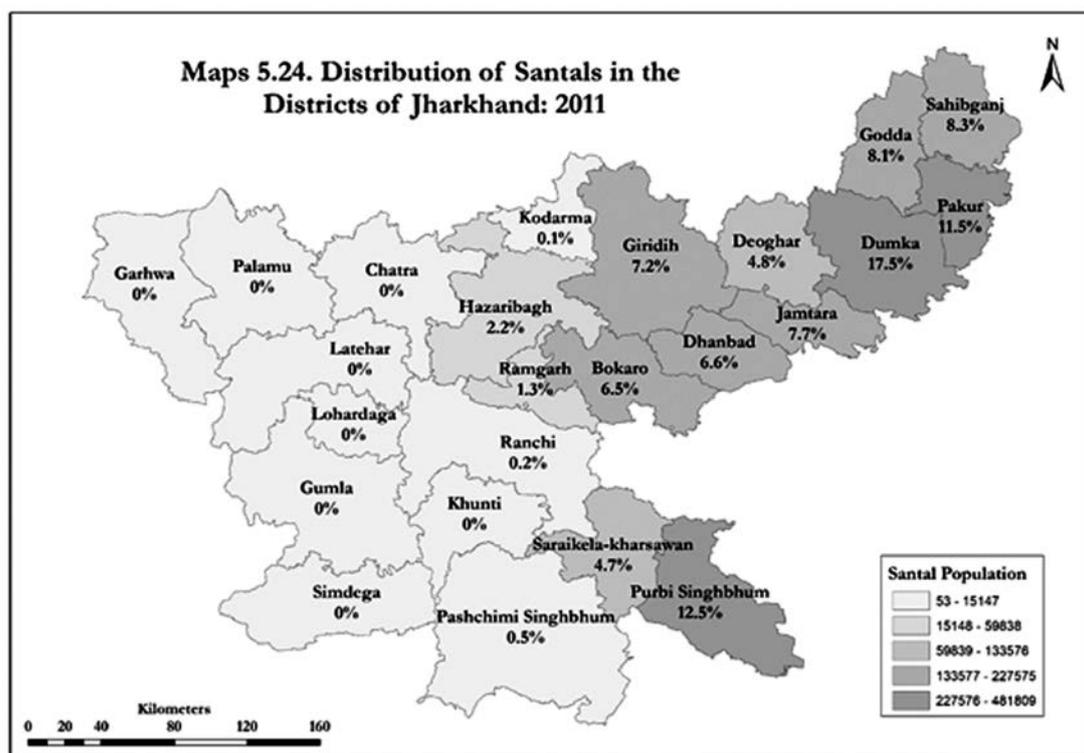
The Santals in Jharkhand face significant challenges, including land alienation, poverty, exploitation, and displacement due to mining and industrial projects, which threaten their way of life and cultural identity. They also struggle with limited access to quality education, healthcare, and basic amenities needed for enjoying a minimum level of decent living. Additionally, cultural erosion and social exclusion further marginalize the community, affecting their overall well-being and development.

Moreover, prevalence of forced migration among Santals, especially among youths in

Jharkhand disrupts their normal living, leading to social and cultural erosion, and increased vulnerability to exploitation and health risks. Despite these challenges, the Santals continue to preserve their unique traditions and cultural practices, including their rich oral storytelling tradition and traditional medicine.

Table 5.24 Select Indicators the Santal – 2011 Census*

Popula-tion	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Lit-eracy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic-ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Culti-vators among Main Work-ers	Agri-cultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)	Secondary Comple-tion rate (%)
27,54,723	1009	975	50.8	39.0	48.1	39.6	43.1	29.1	8



Chapter 6

THE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE ADIVASI GROUPS (PVTGS) OF JHARKHAND

The Government of India has recognized 75 Adivasi communities as Particularly Vulnerable Adivasi Groups (PVTGs). This recognition is based on the recommendations of the *Report of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission*, which was established in 1960 under the chairmanship of Uchharangrai Navalshankar Dhebar, popularly known as U. N. Dhebar (1905–1977). The commission submitted its report in 1961. In addition to documenting the poor socio-economic conditions of the Adivasis, the commission identified significant inter-community variations among the Adivasi populations of India.

Based on these findings, the Government of India created, during the Fourth Five-Year Plan, a subcategory within the Scheduled Tribes and designated it as the “Primitive Adivasi Groups” (PTGs). These groups were characterized by certain basic features, including homogeneity, small population size, relative physical isolation, low literacy levels, and reliance on primitive agricultural practices.

In 2006, the Government of India renamed the PTGs as “Particularly Vulnerable Adivasi Groups” (PVTGs) and formally listed 75 communities under this category. These groups are distributed across various states and union territories: Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (12), Bihar and Jharkhand (9), Gujarat (5), Karnataka (2), Kerala (5), Madhya Pradesh (7), Maharashtra (3), Manipur (1), Odisha (13), Rajasthan (1), Tamil Nadu (6), Tripura (1), Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand (2), West Bengal (3), and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (5).

Although the Government of India’s list records nine groups under “Bihar, including Jharkhand,” one of these groups, since the *Hill Kharia*, is not included by the Census, and clubbed the community together with Savars, the effective number of PVTGs in Jharkhand is eight. Furthermore, the official PVTG Jharkhand portal (https://gis.jharkhand.gov.in/pvtg_portal/, accessed 31 July 2025) reports ten PVTG groups. This list includes two additional groups: one (*Baiga*) is included in the Scheduled Tribes list of Jharkhand, while the other (*Pokhariya*) is not recognized as a Scheduled Tribe. The recognized PVTGs in Jharkhand are Asur, Birhor, Birjia, Korwa, Mal Paharia, Parhaiya, Sauria Paharia, and Savar.

According to the 2011 Census, the total population of PVTGs in Jharkhand was 292,359, constituting 3.4 per cent of the total Adivasi population. However, data from the Government of India’s Open Government Data Platform indicate that the PVTG population had increased to 370,010 by 31 January 2024 (<https://www.data.gov.in/resource/stateut-wise-details-estimate->

[particularly-vulnerable-Adivasi-groups-pvtgs-population-based](#)). By 21 November 2024, the same portal reported 398,952 PVTG beneficiaries under the *Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyaan* (PM JANMAN) (<https://www.data.gov.in/resource/stateut-wise-number-primitive-vulnerable-Adivasi-groups-pvtgs-population-and-districts>). Between 2011 and January 2024, the PVTG population of Jharkhand increased by 52 per cent. Moreover, within a ten-month interval, between 31 January 2024 and 21 November 2024, there was an additional eight per cent increase. Finally, the PVTG Jharkhand portal (https://gis.jharkhand.gov.in/pvtg_portal/, accessed 31 July 2025) reported a total population of 258,756 PVTGs in the state.

While the problem of counting the PVTGs must be remedied, and we may expect a clearer picture of their numerical size from the forthcoming Census, which the Government of India has scheduled for 2026, it may be useful for general readers to have an introduction to the PVTG groups of the state. With this objective in mind, we present the socio-economic profiles of the PVTGs of Jharkhand, based on data from the 2011 Census.⁷⁷

77 For detailed anthropological discussion readers may consult, Prasad et al (2024)

1. THE ASUR



The Asurs, also known as Agarias, are a small Adivasi group in India known for traditional iron smelting and shifting agriculture. The Asur community has a total population of approximately 30,452 (as per the 2011 Census), with the majority residing in Jharkhand (22,459) and smaller populations in Bihar (4,164) and West Bengal (3,129). They are classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Adivasi Group (PVTG) due to their limited access to resources and opportunities.

Demographics

The Asur population is distributed across all 24 districts of Jharkhand. Gumla district has the highest concentration, accounting for more than half of the total Asur population. Other districts with significant Asur populations include Latehar, Lohardaga, Hazaribagh, Garhwa, and Ramgarh, highlighting their presence across the state (see map).

During the 2001-2011 decade, the Asur population in Jharkhand has surged by 117 per cent (from 10,347 to 22,459), outpacing the overall decadal growth rates of both the state's population and the total Adivasi population.

Language and Bilingualism

Their mother tongue is Asuri, but bilingualism patterns reveal heavy dependence on other languages. According to the 2011 Census, 53.2 per cent of Asur speakers reported Hindi as their most common second language, while a substantial number also reported "Others" (9,540 speakers), reflecting a fragmented linguistic landscape shaped by diverse regional influences.

This indicates that the Asurs are heavily bilingual, with Hindi serving as the primary medium of wider communication. At the same time, the large "Others" category suggests significant local multilingualism through contact with neighbouring Adivasi and regional languages. This reflects both cultural adaptability and the pressures of being a smaller linguistic community, making Asuri particularly vulnerable to erosion.

Religion

According to the 2011 Census, the Asur community exhibits a mix of religious beliefs. About 33 per cent follow Hinduism, 9 per cent practice Christianity, and a significant 57 per cent adhere to their traditional Sarna faith or other indigenous beliefs.

Demography

The Asurs have a female-to-male ratio (FMR) of 958, and the corresponding figure for children under six is 956. Both figures are lower than the average for Adivasis in the state, pointing toward a higher degree of Brahminical influence.

Literacy and Education

The Asur community has made considerable strides in literacy over the past decade, with literacy rates improving from 29 per cent in 2001 to 47 per cent in 2011. Yet, it is lower than

the overall Adivasi literacy rate. There is a significant gender disparity in literacy, with males having a higher rate of 58 per cent as compared to females at 35 per cent. This highlights the significant educational disadvantage faced by Asur women, underscoring the need for improved access to education within the community.

Among the literate Asur population, 28 per cent have basic literacy without formal education, while the educational attainment breakdown is: 14 per cent primary level, 3 per cent secondary level, 1 per cent higher secondary level, and 0.4 per cent graduation level. Considering secondary level completion as the benchmark for being educated, merely 4.4 per cent of the Asur population qualifies as educated, leaving 95.6 per cent uneducated.

Livelihood

The Asur tribe in Jharkhand has a work participation rate (WPR) of 48 per cent, with a relatively narrow gender gap. Of the total workers, 51 per cent are main workers, primarily engaged in agriculture, forestry, and fishing. Both figures are slightly higher than the state average for all Adivasi populations, indicating the Asurs' significant involvement in these primary sectors.

The Asurs of Jharkhand traditionally engage in occupations such as iron smelting, agriculture, hunting, and gathering forest produce. While iron smelting was once a prominent skill, many Asurs have shifted to agriculture, with 61 per cent being recorded as cultivators and 15 per cent as agricultural laborers. The rest continue in their traditional occupations, such as iron smelting and craftsmanship, or pursue other jobs.

Society and Culture

The Asurs of Jharkhand have a rich cultural heritage. They are divided into 12 clans, named after animals, birds, and food grains. They maintain inter-Adivasi kinship ties with neighboring tribes and have a distinct cultural identity. Thus, they are characterized by a unique social structure organized into clans, traditional marriage practices that typically adhere to endogamy and monogamy with allowance for polygamy in specific cases, and a deep connection to the local ecosystem.

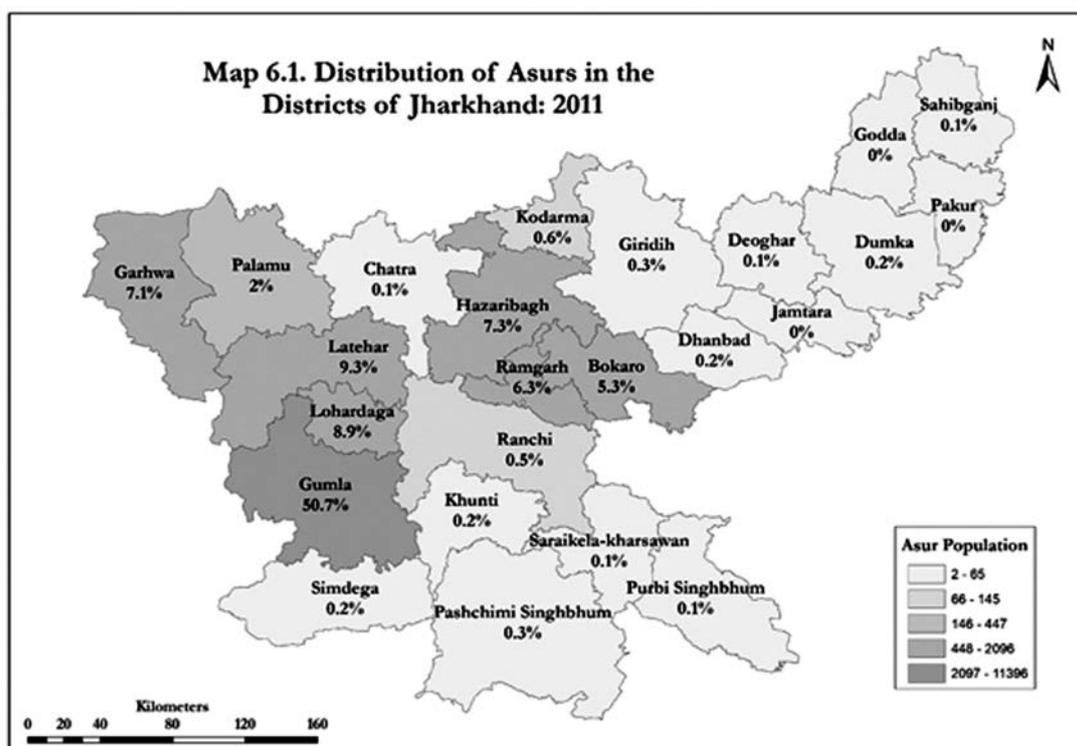
Historical Challenges

The Asurs have gone through several challenges under British rule, including exploitative practices, arbitrary taxes, and loss of traditional lands, prompting them to join resistance movements and uprisings against the British authorities. Moreover, they confront multiple challenges to their traditional way of life. Decline in iron smelting practices, land alienation, and increasing reliance on agriculture threaten their cultural and economic stability.

Table 6.1 Select Indicators the Asur – 2011 Census*

Community	Population	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Participation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Cultivators among Main Workers	Agri-cultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)
Asur, Agaria	2459	958	956	46.9	35.4	47.5	50.5	60.9	15.3

Today, the Asurs face multiple challenges. The decline of iron smelting, increasing dependence on agriculture, land insecurity, limited educational attainment—especially for women—and restricted access to development opportunities have placed pressure on their cultural and economic stability. Despite these struggles, they preserve their cultural heritage and adapt to changing circumstances through bilingualism, agriculture, and community resilience.



2. THE BIRHOR



The Birhor are a thinly populated semi-nomadic Adivasi group. According to the 2011 Census, the majority of the community live in Jharkhand (10,726). The rest are located in Chhattisgarh (3,104), West Bengal (2,241), Odisha (596), Bihar (377), Maharashtra (145), and Madhya Pradesh (52). In Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh, they are also called Birhul. Owing to their rapidly dwindling numbers and the challenges associated with their forest-dwelling lifestyle, the Birhor tribe has been officially classified as a Primitive Adivasi Group (PTG) by the Government of India. This classification underscores their vulnerability and highlights the need for targeted support and protection to preserve their identity and way of life.

Religion and Beliefs

Majority of the Birhors (76 per cent) identify themselves as Hindus, while a small proportion is followers of Christianity (7 per cent) and Sarna and other beliefs (17 per cent).

Language and Bilingualism

Their mother tongue is Birhor, but the Census 2011 shows a fragile linguistic profile. Only 37.3 per cent of Birhor speakers reported Hindi as their most common second language, while a substantial number reported “Others” (2,655 speakers), indicating fragmented linguistic influences from neighbouring tribes and regional languages.

This reveals that the Birhors have much lower levels of bilingualism compared to most other tribes in Jharkhand. While Hindi is emerging as the primary second language, the relatively small share and the large “Others” category suggest linguistic vulnerability, with Birhor caught between maintaining its endangered mother tongue and adopting dominant regional languages for survival.

Demography

In Jharkhand, the Birhor community is predominantly found in Chatra, Hazaribagh, and Koderma districts. Notably, their population grew by 43 per cent between 2001 and 2011, indicating robust demographic dynamics within the community.

The Birhor tribe has a female-male ratio (FMR) of 960, while the child FMR (for children under 6) stands at 968.

Literacy and Education

The literacy rate among the Birhor tribe is alarmingly low (35 per cent), with a stark difference between male (41 per cent) and female (27 per cent) literacy rates. Among the literate Birhors, 23 per cent can read and write but don't have formal education. Only a few have completed higher levels: 10 per cent have finished primary, 1 per cent secondary, and less than 1 per cent higher secondary and graduation. If completing secondary level is the benchmark, just 1 per cent are considered educated, and 99 per cent are not.

Livelihoods

The Birhor tribe has a work participation rate of 47 per cent, similar to the state's Adivasi average. Nevertheless, only 43 per cent (50 per cent male and 34 per cent female) are main workers, engaged in gainful work for six months or more in a year, with 49.6 per cent male and 33.9 per cent female workers. Of the main workers, only 7 per cent are engaged as cultivators, while 21 per cent work as agricultural labourers. Notably, a significant majority, approximately 72 per cent, are involved in household industrial activities and other traditional or modern occupations. This occupational distribution underscores the vulnerability of the Birhor tribe, indicating a high dependence on diverse and often precarious livelihood sources, exacerbating their socio-economic challenges.

Society and Culture

The Birhors are divided into *Uthlus* (wandering) and *Janghis* (settled). Their society is organized around nuclear families within larger clan-based groups, with strong kinship ties and hereditary religious positions like *Naya* and *Mati*. Each settlement is headed by a *Mukhia* or *Mukhia Baba*, who resolves disputes and manages community affairs. This reflects their distinct social organisation and cultural practices.

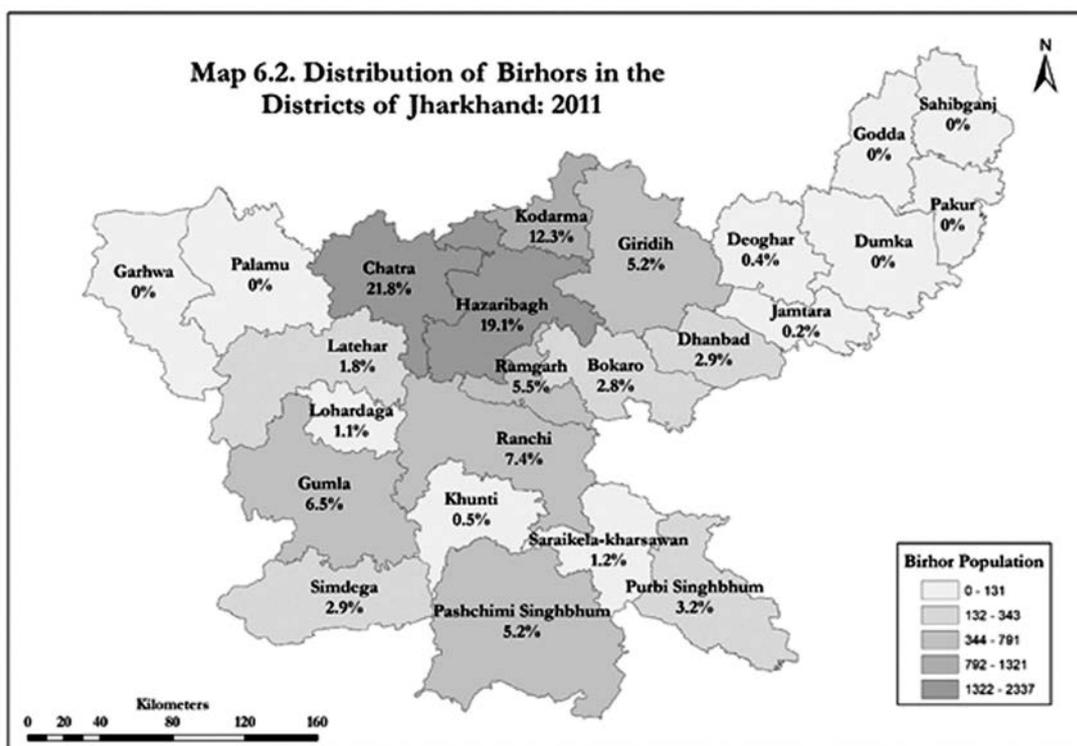
The Birhors of Jharkhand have a rich cultural heritage, blending art, craft, religion, language, and customs. They are skilled in traditional crafts like basketry and weaving, using natural materials, and their art includes rock paintings and pre-Harappan pottery. Their religion combines animism and Hinduism, worshipping nature spirits and ancestors. Birhors live in harmony with nature, following a semi-nomadic lifestyle, and their culture is marked by vibrant music, dance, and traditional clothing.

The Birhors are one of the most precarious groups, facing a double blow: first, the increasing danger of extinction; and second, opportunity deprivation in education, health, and employment.

Table 6.2 Select Indicators the Birhor- 2011 Census*

Com- munity	Popula- tion	Female- Male Ratio	Female- Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Lit- eracy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic- ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work- ers (per cent)	Culti- vators among Main Workers	Agricultur- al labourers among Main Workers (per cent)
Birhor	10,726	960	968	34.5	27.4	47.4	42.6	6.9	21.4

The Birhors face some of the most serious challenges among India's Adivasi communities. Their small numbers place them at risk of extinction, while lack of access to education, health services, and stable employment perpetuates cycles of poverty. The decline of forest resources and increasing pressures of modernization further threaten their way of life. As a result, they confront a double burden: demographic decline and severe socio-economic deprivation.



3. THE BIRJIA



The attribution of the Birjias as PVTG underlines the community's susceptibility to various socio-economic challenges. According to the 2011 Census, the total number of Birjias in India is 7,607, of which the majority (6,276) live in Jharkhand. The rest are settled in West Bengal (1,123) and Bihar (208).

In Jharkhand, the Birjias are primarily concentrated in the districts of Latehar and Gumla. For generations, the Birjia community has been intricately linked to the land, adhering to their traditional ways of life and fostering a deep connection with their natural surroundings. The Birjia tribe population experienced a relatively modest increase of 17 per cent between 2001 and 2011 (from 5,365 to 6,276).

Religion and Beliefs

Of the Birjias of Jharkhand, 48 per cent are followers of Sarna, 32 per cent of Christianity, and 20 per cent follow Hinduism.

Language and Bilingualism

Although the mother tongue is Birjia, according to the 2011 Census, bilingualism is widespread. 65.2 per cent of Birjia speakers reported Munda as their most common second language, while Hindi (1,961 speakers) also served as an important secondary language for communication, education, and administration.

This shows that the Birjia community is strongly bilingual, with a distinct pattern: unlike most other Jharkhand tribes where Hindi dominates, the Birjia have adopted Munda as their primary secondary language due to close inter-Adivasi contact. However, the significant presence of Hindi also reflects the pressures of integration into the wider socio-economic and administrative framework.

Demography

The female-to-male ratio among the Birjias of Jharkhand is 977. For children under six, the figure is 997. While the overall FMR for the Birjia tribe is lower than the state average for Adivasi communities, the child sex ratio indicates a relatively more balanced gender distribution compared to the state average.

Literacy and Education

The literacy rate among the Birjias of Jharkhand is 50 per cent, indicating that nearly half of the group's population lacks access to basic education. There is a significant gender difference in literacy (men 62 per cent, women 38 per cent). The gap underscores the educational challenges faced by the Birjia community, particularly the women. Further, an analysis of the literate population in Birjia community reflects that 30 per cent of the Birjias are literate without formal education, 15 per cent have primary level education, 3 per cent secondary, 2 per cent higher secondary, and 0.4 per cent graduation level of education. Considering secondary level as the benchmark, only 5 per cent are educated.

Livelihoods

The work participation rate in the community is 50 per cent, which indicates that nearly half of the population is engaged in economic activities, without much difference between men (52 per cent) and women (48 per cent). However, the share of main workers among the total workers is low (45 per cent), with a difference between men (52 per cent) and women (37 per cent). In other words, although half of the population is engaged in some form of paid activity, there is a lack of regular availability of work, adding to the number of marginal workers.

The occupational distribution of the Birjia demonstrates that 48 per cent are agricultural labourers, while 41 per cent are engaged in other occupations. This pattern highlights the tribe's significant dependence on agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood. Additionally, to supplement their limited income from subsistence farming, the Birjias rely on traditional forest-based economic activities, reflecting their multifaceted approach to sustenance and economic stability.

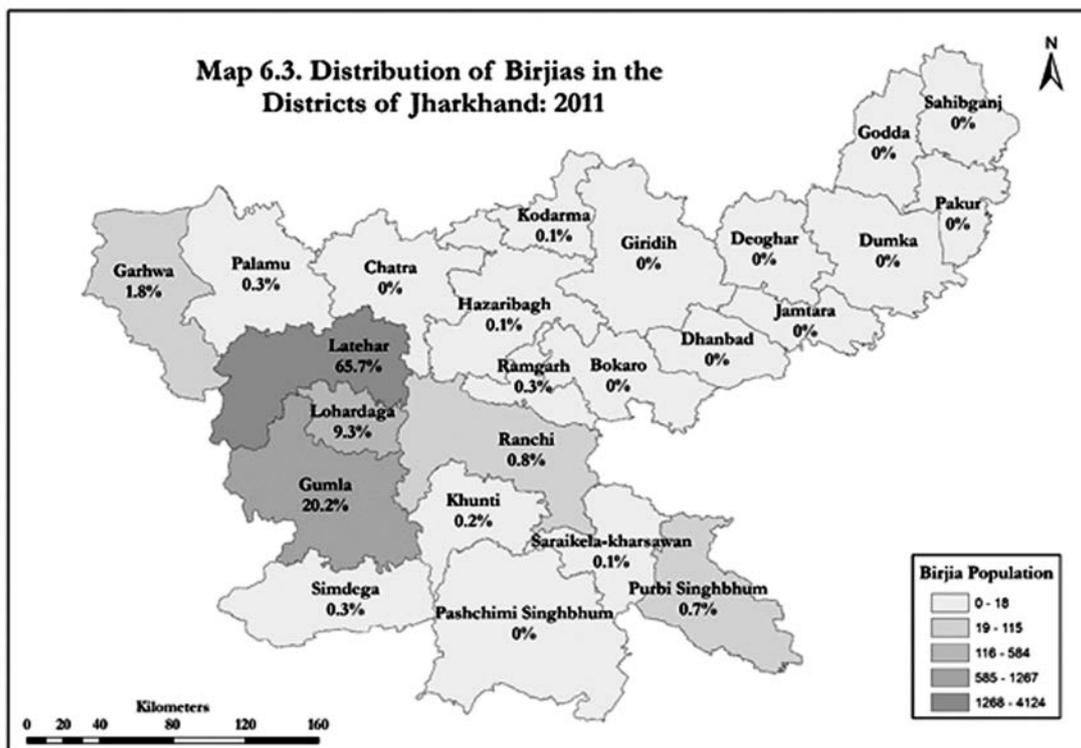
Society and Culture

The Birjia social structure is defined by a clan system, traditional leadership, and a deep connection with nature. Organised into clans with shared ancestry, they are led by the Baiga (village head) and Devar (traditional mediator), who maintain social order and resolve disputes. The Birjias have a rich cultural heritage, marked by unique customs, the distinctive Birjia language, and traditional crafts. They are also experts in puppetry, creating puppets from intricately painted palm leaves, crafting toys from jute, and making traditional jewellery. With huge socio-economic challenges, including limited access to education and infrastructure, poverty, and reliance on natural resources, the Birjias find themselves in a constant struggle for survival.

Table 6.3 Select Indicators the Birjia – 2011 Census*

Community	Population	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Participation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Cultivators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)
Birjia	6,276	977	997	50.2	38.4	49.6	45.0	40.8	47.5

Despite their cultural richness, the Birjias face numerous challenges. Low literacy, limited infrastructure, and high dependence on subsistence agriculture and forest resources contribute to persistent poverty. Their status as a PVTG reflects both demographic vulnerability and socio-economic marginalization, with survival often requiring a balance between traditional practices and adaptation to external pressures.



4. THE KORWA



The Korwas belong to the Munda ethnic group. They are one of the Particularly Vulnerable Adivasi Groups (PVTGs) in Jharkhand, where, according to the 2011 Census, they have a population of 25,606. They are mainly concentrated in the state of Chhattisgarh (1,29,429). Nevertheless, they have some presence in West Bengal (2,912), Madhya Pradesh (920), and Bihar (452). In Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, they are also identified as Kodaku. Traditionally hunter-gatherers, they're divided into subgroups like Agaria, Dandh, Dil, and Pahari Korwa.

Demographics

In Jharkhand, they are concentrated mainly in Garhwa, Palamu, Latehar, and Gumla. The Pahari Korwa subgroup specifically inhabits the hilly regions.

Between 2001 and 2011, the Korwa population growth was 31 per cent (27,177 to 35,606).

Religion and Beliefs

As per Census 2011, the Korwa tribe is predominantly enumerated as Hindu, with 84 per cent following Hinduism, about 13 per cent practicing other religions including Sarnaism and 2 per cent of them are following Christianity.

Language and Bilingualism

Their mother tongue is Korwa, but the Census 2011 data show widespread bilingualism. 95.3 per cent of Korwa speakers reported Hindi as their most common second language, reflecting its dominance in education, administration, and inter-community contact. A smaller group (832 speakers) continued to use Korwa alongside Hindi, reflecting attempts to retain their own linguistic identity.

This indicates that the Korwa community has among the highest levels of Hindi bilingualism, ensuring integration into state systems and markets. However, the strong tilt toward Hindi also underscores the linguistic vulnerability of Korwa, with the mother tongue at risk of erosion as younger generations increasingly prioritize Hindi.

Demography

In Jharkhand, the Korwas have a female-male ratio (FMR) of 978 overall and 1,002 among children under six.

Literacy and Education

While the overall literacy rate of the Korwas is very low (38 per cent) compared to the state average of the Adivasis, the gap between the literacy rates of men (46 per cent) and women (30 per cent) is much narrower than the corresponding state figure (22 per cent). Among the Korwas, 24 per cent are literate without formal education. Besides this, 12 per cent have reached primary level, 1 per cent secondary, 1 per cent higher secondary, and there are nearly no graduates. Considering secondary education as the benchmark, only 2 per cent are educated, while 98.2 per cent remain uneducated.

Livelihoods

Work participation rate among the Korwas is 51 per cent (men 54 per cent, and women 45 per cent). However, only a minuscule 26 per cent are enumerated as main workers, indicating limited access to year-round employment opportunities available to them. The occupational structure of the community is primarily based on agriculture. Among the main workers, 33 per cent are cultivators, and 45 per cent are agricultural labourers. They also have substantial dependence on forest resources for livelihood.

Society and Culture

The Korwas have a rich cultural heritage, with unique art, craft, and social norms reflecting their close relationship with nature. Their art includes Paitkar paintings, Kohvar paintings, and bamboo and wood crafts, often using natural materials and pigments. Their culture is also characterised by oral traditions, festivals, songs, dances, and rituals, with a strong emphasis on community and kinship ties. They celebrate the Sarhul festival, a spring festival related to Saal trees.

Their social structure is rooted in kinship, traditional beliefs, and principles of egalitarianism, with a strong emphasis on community and shared resources. Kinship plays a vital role in their social organisation, with families and clans forming the basic units of society. Totems are considered sacred and represent a connection to ancestry, the natural world, and spiritual beliefs. Specific animals, plants, or natural elements serve as symbols of a clan's identity and are often associated with specific stories or beliefs.

As evident from the above discussion, human flourishing among the Korwas, like many other Adivasi groups, is tremendously hindered by the lack of social and economic opportunities.

Table 6.4 Select Indicators the Korwa – 2011 Census*

Community	Population	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Participation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Cultivators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)
Korwa	35,606	978	1002	37.9	29.7	51.0	25.6	32.9	44.6

Like many other PVTGs, the Korwas face serious barriers to social and economic development. Low literacy rates, lack of higher education, limited year-round employment, and dependence on subsistence agriculture and forest resources hinder their socio-economic advancement. Despite their rich cultural heritage, the Korwas remain marginalized and struggle to secure basic opportunities for human flourishing.



5. THE MAL PAHARIA



The Mal Paharias are a numerically small group. According to the 2011 Census, they have a total population of 1,82,560. The majority of them (1,35,797) reside in Jharkhand. They form a little less than 2 per cent of the total Adivasi population of the state. Aside from Jharkhand, Mal Pahariyas are located in West Bengal (44,538) and Bihar (2,225). In Jharkhand, they are settled mainly in the Santal Pargana region. They are considered the original inhabitants of this region. In this state, the Mal Paharias are classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Adivasi Group (PVTG) and are provided with special treatment and support for their survival, development, and integration into the mainstream development process.

The Mal Paharia population in Jharkhand grew by 18 per cent between 2001 and 2011 (1,15,093 to 1,35,797).

Religion and Beliefs

The Mal Paharias have been largely Hinduised. Religious division of Mal Paharia as per the Census 2011 is 79 per cent Hindu, 18 per cent Christians and 3 per cent Others.

Language and Bilingualism

Their mother tongue is Malto (a Dravidian language), which still shows strong retention. According to the 2011 Census, 73.1 per cent of Mal Paharia speakers reported Malto as their primary language, while Hindi (24,333 speakers) was the most common second language, reflecting pressures of education, administration, and market participation.

This indicates that the Mal Paharias continue to demonstrate strong loyalty to their mother tongue, while also displaying widespread bilingualism with Hindi. This duality reflects their efforts to balance cultural preservation with socio-economic integration. However, the increasing shift toward Hindi, especially among younger generations, raises concerns about the long-term vitality of Malto.

Demography

The female-to-male ratio among the Mal Paharias is 1003 (2011 Census). Among children under six years of age, the ratio is 997.

Literacy and Education

The Mal Paharias' literacy rate in 2011 stands at 40 per cent, roughly doubling from the previous decade's level of 21 per cent. Female literacy among Mal Paharias is significantly lower, at 30 per cent. Distribution of literates by educational level reveals that 25 per cent are merely literates without achieving any formal educational level. The breakdown of literate Mal Paharia tribe populations of Jharkhand by educational attainment is as follows: 13 per cent have reached primary level, 2 per cent have reached secondary level, 1 per cent have reached higher secondary level, and almost none has attained graduation. When the bar of 'educated' is set after secondary education, only a negligible 2.3 per cent are found to reach the standard, while the remaining 98 per cent are deprived of education.

Livelihoods

The work participation rate among the Mal Paharias is 49 per cent (male at 53 per cent and female 45 per cent). Their primary occupations include kuram (shift cultivation), wage earning, and collecting forest products. Their cultivation pattern is altogether different and not necessarily associated with individual land ownership. In contrast, settled agricultural practices have been associated with individual land ownership, regardless of whether cultivation is done by the owner or a sharecropper. Nevertheless, since the Census definition does not distinguish between the two types of cultivation, Mal Paharia shift cultivators have been recorded as cultivators. Thus, 41 per cent of the main workers among them are recorded as cultivators. The shift in their occupational pattern is evident from the high proportion of agricultural labourers (41 per cent) among main workers. This indicates a substantial erosion of their traditional livelihood options, such as shift cultivation, and a gradual shift towards a new vocation, namely agricultural labour.

Social Structure

The Mal Paharias of Jharkhand have a traditional, patriarchal social structure with the husband or senior male as the family head. They practice endogamy, marrying within their community. They allow cross-cousin marriages, as well as marriage to the elder brother's widow (junior levirate) and the wife's sister following the wife's death (junior sororate).

Historical Experiences

Historically, the Mal Paharias have been victims of land alienation and lack of access to resources. They have been marginalized by the dominant socio-economic system, leading to poverty and limited opportunities. This marginalization has had a profound impact on their quality of life and ability to access basic services.

The Mal Paharias, like many other Jharkhandi Adivasis, played a significant role in India's freedom struggle under the leadership of Raja Jagannath, initially resisting British expansion to protect their autonomy and way of life in the Rajmahal Hills. They later joined the nationalist movement, participating actively from 1919 onwards. Their resistance was driven by a desire to preserve their Adivasi identity, culture, and land. Through their struggles, the Mal Paharias demonstrated their spirit to fight for independence and autonomy, contributing to the broader narrative of India's freedom struggle.

Culture and Identity

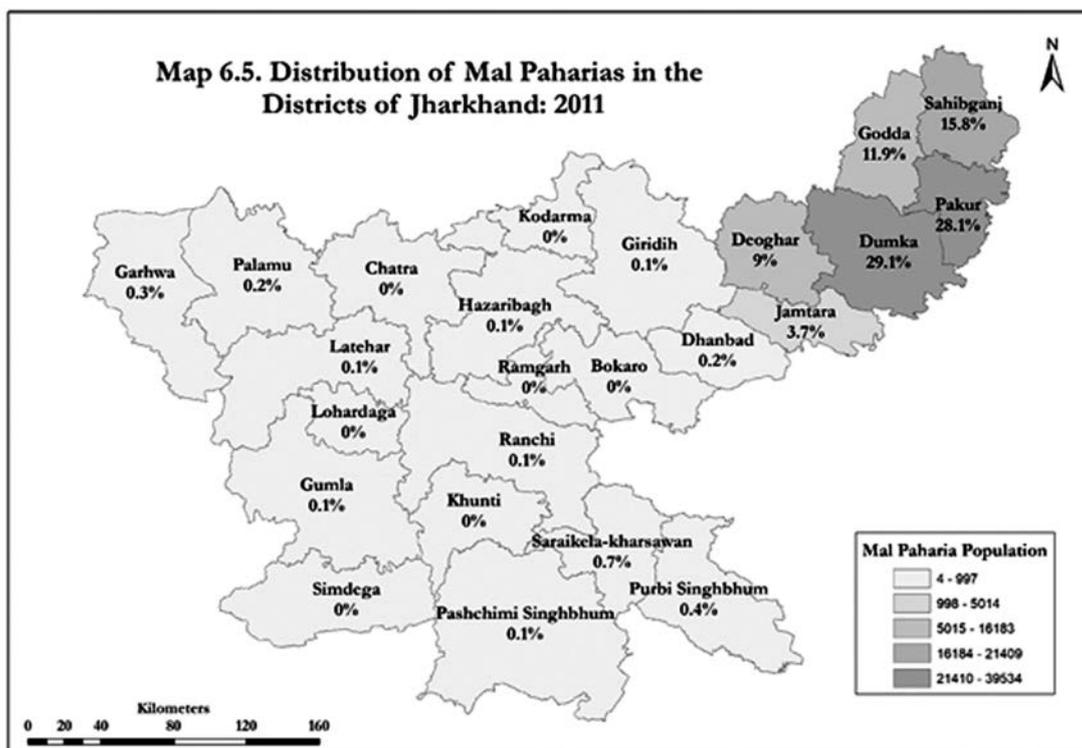
The Mal Paharias' connection to their land and natural resources is a vital aspect of their identity and livelihood. Efforts to promote sustainable land use and protect their rights to natural resources are essential for their development and well-being. In addition to government initiatives, community-led development projects can play a crucial role in empowering the Mal Paharias. By involving the community in decision-making processes and supporting their initiatives, it is possible to promote sustainable development that is tailored to their specific

needs and context. Some Mal Paharias are participating in education and seeking better employment opportunities, which can help improve their socio-economic status. The Mal Paharias also have a strong sense of community and cultural identity, which can serve as a basis for future development.

Table 6.5 Select Indicators the Mal Paharia – 2011 Census*

Community	Popula-tion	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic-ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work-ers (per cent)	Culti-vators among Main Work-ers	Agri-cultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)
Mal Paharia	1,35,797	1003	997	39.6	30.2	49.3	45.0	41.6	41.2

The Mal Paharias maintain a strong cultural identity rooted in community solidarity, connection to land, and traditional practices. Their customs, oral traditions, and social organization remain central to their way of life. Enduring land-based practices and ties to forests are key to their cultural and economic resilience.



6. THE PARHAIYA



The Parhaiya tribe is a small indigenous group in India with a population of 27,153 (Census 2011). Though mainly residents in Jharkhand (25,585), they have some presence in West Bengal (921) and Bihar (647). Traditionally, they practice shifting cultivation and collect minor forest products, leading to their classification as a Particularly Vulnerable Adivasi Group (PVTG), mainly due to socio-economic challenges and limited access to basic services.

Demographics

The decadal population growth rate among the Parhaiyas is 23 per cent (20,786 in 2001 to 25,585 in 2011), reflecting steady population growth. In Jharkhand, the Parhaiya population is distributed across 21 districts, with notable concentrations in Palamu, Latehar, and Garhwa, indicating regional clustering.

Religion and Beliefs

Among the Parhaiyas, 89 per cent are enumerated as Hindu. Of the remaining 11 per cent, 2 per cent follow Christianity, and 9 per cent are from Other religions.

Language and Bilingualism

Their mother tongue is Parhaiya, but the 2011 Census shows that 96.1 per cent of Parhaiya speakers reported Hindi as their most common second language, highlighting its dominance in education, administration, and inter-community communication. A smaller group (859 speakers) also reported Malto as a secondary language, reflecting cultural contact with the Paharia communities.

This indicates that the Parhaiyas are almost universally bilingual in Hindi, which provides them socio-economic access but also creates strong pressures on the survival of their own mother tongue. The presence of Malto as a smaller second language demonstrates localized multilingualism shaped by regional Adivasi contact.

Demography

The Parhaiya tribe has a sex ratio of 958 females per 1000 males. For children under 6 years, the sex ratio is 988. Compared to Jharkhand's Adivasi average, the overall sex ratio is lower, while the child sex ratio is slightly higher than the state average.

Literacy and Education

The Parhaiyas in Jharkhand have a literacy rate of 33 per cent. In other words, two-thirds of the population lack access to basic education. Male literacy is slightly higher at 41 per cent, while female literacy is significantly lower at 24 per cent. A total of 21 per cent of the Parhaiyas are literate without formal education. The breakdown for the remaining literate population shows 11 per cent primary level education, with nearly non-existent attainment of secondary and higher secondary education. With secondary education as the standard, more than 99 per cent are found to be uneducated.

Livelihoods

The Parhaiya work participation rate is 46 per cent, comparable with the state average of the Adivasis but higher than state and national averages for the general population. Among workers, only 26 per cent are main workers, with a significant gap between males (33 per cent) and females (18 per cent).

While one-fourth of the main workers are cultivators, half of them are agricultural labourers. The rest rely on traditional and forest resources for their livelihood. They engage in basket making, hunting, and fishing. However, forest laws have reduced their dependence on hunting and fishing. Now, they focus more on basket-making and traditional agriculture.

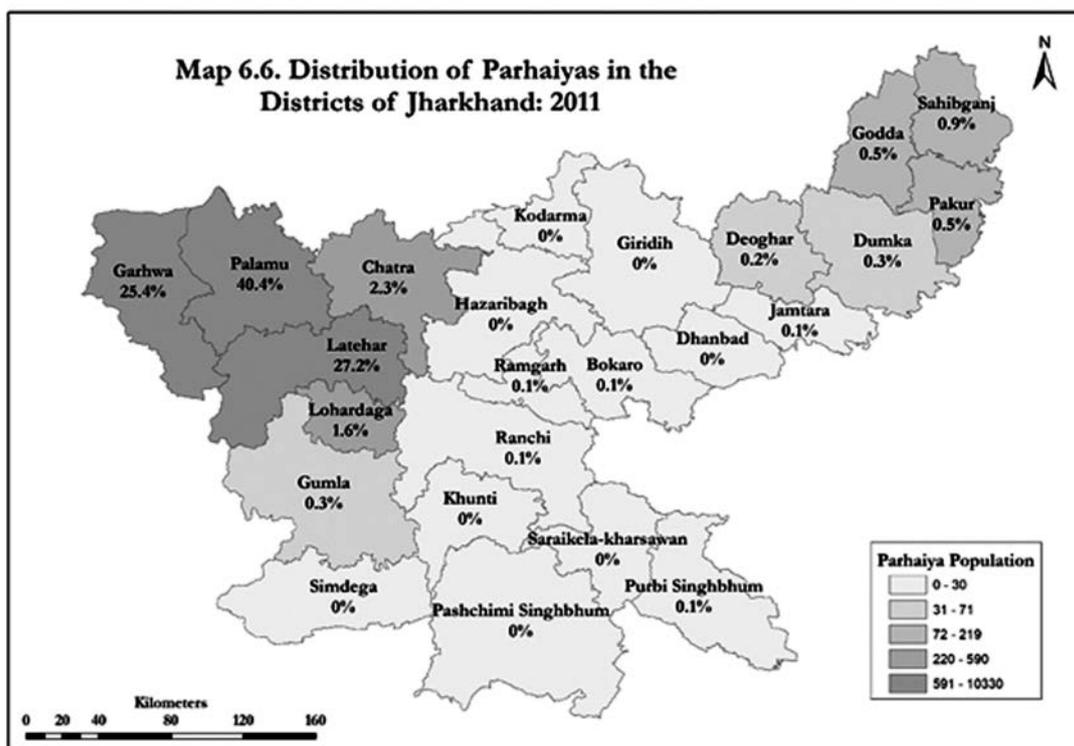
Social and Cultural Life

The Parhaiya social structure in Jharkhand is a blend of traditional Adivasi organization and Brahminical influences, with kinship ties and village administration playing key roles. Residing in multi-ethnic villages, the Parhaiyas of Jharkhand primarily speak Hindi and practice both Brahmanical and Adivasi beliefs, worshipping deities like Jawalamukhi Devi and Dharti Mata. They engage in agriculture, gathering, and hunting. Women are particularly skilled in weaving clothes and baskets. Their cultural practices include celebrating festivals like the Magahī Parab. The group has limited access to education and healthcare, and their livelihoods have been disrupted by deforestation and climate change.

Table 6.6 Select Indicators the Parhaiya – 2011 Census*

Community	Population	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Participation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Cultivators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)
Parhaiya	25,585	958	988	33.1	24.3	45.7	26.2	24.5	50.1

The Parhaiya community continues to face pressing challenges in education, healthcare, and livelihoods. With extremely low literacy levels, especially among women, and heavy dependence on insecure agricultural labour, their socio-economic vulnerabilities are stark. Environmental pressures such as deforestation have further limited access to traditional livelihoods like hunting and gathering.



7. THE SAURIA PAHARIA



The Sauria Paharias primarily reside in the Rajmahal Hills of Jharkhand, with smaller populations in West Bengal and Bihar. According to the 2011 Census, out of their total population of 51,643 in the country, the majority (46,222) live in Jharkhand. The rest are located in West Bengal (3,480) and Bihar (1,932). The Sauria Paharias make up less than 1 per cent of Jharkhand's Adivasi population and are classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Scheduled Tribe Group (PVTG). As a PVTG, they receive special attention from the government to protect their culture and way of life.

Demographics

The Sauria Paharia tribe in Jharkhand witnessed a substantial demographic expansion, with a decadal growth rate of 49 per cent between 2001 and 2011 (from 31,050 to 46,222). Whether the abnormal growth rate is due to some problems in the process of enumeration or related to other factors makes a case for further inquiry.

Religion and Beliefs

The Sauria Paharia tribe in Jharkhand exhibits a unique religious demographic pattern, with Christianity being the predominant faith, embraced by 53 per cent of their population. Hinduism is followed by 44 per cent, while a smaller segment, 3 per cent, adheres to other religions, showing thereby the community's diverse spiritual diversity. They speak the Malto language.

Language and Bilingualism

Their mother tongue is Malto, which remains robustly spoken. According to the 2011 Census, 97.6 per cent of Sauria Paharia speakers reported Malto as their dominant language, reflecting strong linguistic continuity. At the same time, 711 speakers reported knowledge of Hindi as a second language, used primarily for education, administration, and inter-community communication.

This shows that the Sauria Paharias remain highly loyal to their mother tongue, with Malto functioning as a strong identity marker. However, the gradual spread of Hindi as a second language indicates pressures of integration into education and administration. Their profile highlights a classic case of linguistic resilience under external pressures, but also a need for cultural preservation efforts to ensure Malto's vitality among younger generations.

Demography

The Sauria Paharia tribe in Jharkhand has a sex ratio of 1012 females per 1000 males. For children under 6, the sex ratio is 1034. These numbers show a favourable gender balance in the community.

Literacy and Education

The literacy rate among the Sauria Paharias is 40 per cent, with a significant gap between males (49 per cent) and females (31 per cent). Compared to the overall Adivasi literacy rate in

Jharkhand, the Sauria Paharias are placed highly unfavorably. Their educational profile shows that 25 per cent are literate without formal education. The educational attainment levels are 12 per cent primary, 2 per cent secondary, and 1 per cent higher secondary. There are nearly no graduates. When secondary education is used as the benchmark, as high as 87 per cent are found to be uneducated.

Livelihoods

Of the total population, 52 per cent are workers with some amount of income. However, among the working population, only 40 per cent are main workers, implying a narrower scope of regular employment. There is a significant dominance of male main workers (53.6 per cent) over female main workers (6.7 per cent). Of the main workers, 54 per cent are cultivators and 31 per cent are agricultural labourers. The rest are in other occupations.

The Sauria Paharias live mainly in hilly areas, relying on kuram or shifting cultivation, stepped land farming, forest resources for their livelihood, and working as agricultural labourers due to limited access to land and resources. This limited access often leads to economic insecurity. In addition to cultivation, they engage in various occupations such as bamboo crafts, collecting non-timber forest products (NTFPs), and daily wage labour.

Social and Cultural Life

The Sauria Paharias of Jharkhand have unique social customs and beliefs, practicing ancestral worship with a focus on Jiwe Urkya (the departed spirit) and worshipping a group of spirits called Gosain, associated with natural phenomena. They have a strong connection to nature, incorporating totems and sacred trees into their beliefs, and observe significant rituals like the Bandana festival, led by the village priest (Demano), where feasts and offerings are given to appease ancestral spirits, particularly during harvest season. They are divided into several lineages, ignoring parental lineage at marriage, and follow a traditional religion, worshipping the earth, sun, and the Shakua or Sal (*Shorea robusta*) tree at the village level, with community priests.

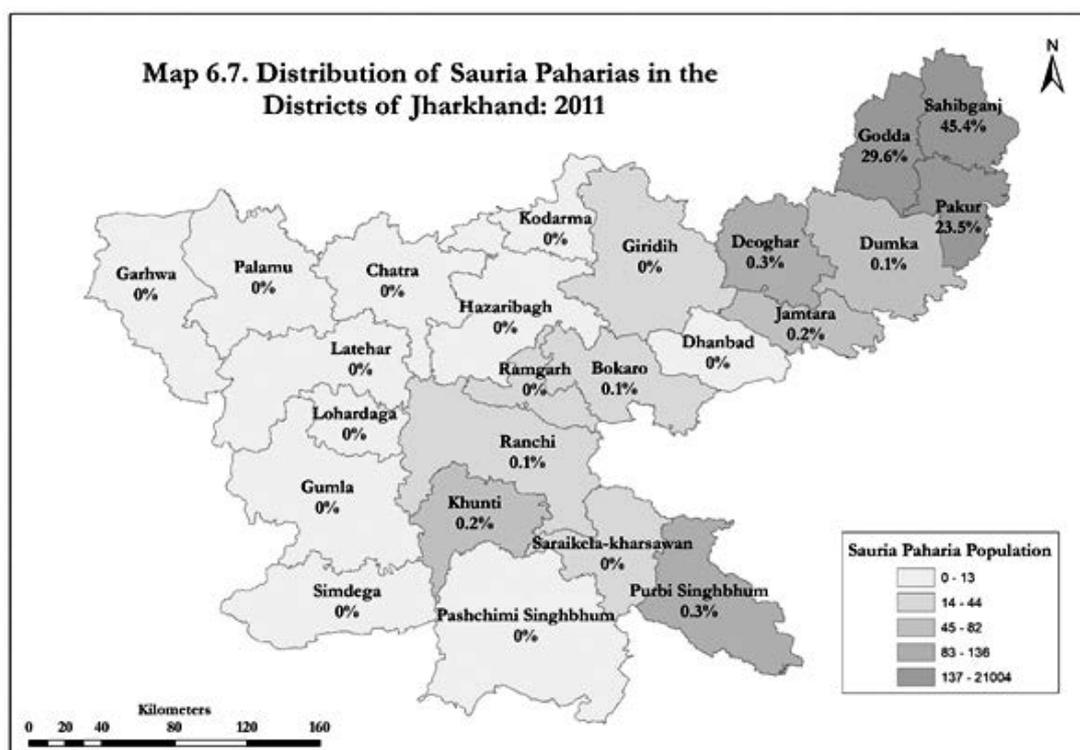
Historical Struggles

The Sauria Paharias of Jharkhand have gone through historical struggles due to conflicts with the British, displacement from their lands, and marginalization. They fought against British rule in the 1770s and 1780s but were further marginalized by the arrival of the Santals, who were encouraged by the British to settle in Paharia territories.

They lack representation and political power, face economic hardships due to limited access to land and resources, and experience social and cultural challenges such as cultural erosion and identity crises. They also suffer inadequate access to basic healthcare, education and livelihood, contributing to their overall disadvantage.

Table 6.7 Select Indicators the Sauria Paharia – 2011 Census*

Community	Population	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Participation Rate (per cent)	Main Workers (per cent)	Cultivators among Main Workers	Agricultural labourers among Main Workers (per cent)
Sauria Paharia	46,222	1012	1034	39.7	30.6	51.6	40.4	54.1	30.7



8. THE SAVAR



The Savars are recognized as a Particularly Vulnerable Adivasi Group (PVTG). According to the 2011 Census, the Savars have a total population of 7,24,317, distributed across the states of Odisha (5,34,751), Andhra Pradesh (1,39,424), West Bengal (40,374), Jharkhand (9,688), and Bihar (80). They are, however, identified as Saora, Saura, and Savara, in Odisha, Savara, Kapu Savara in Andhra Pradesh, and Savar in West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Bihar.

Demographics

The Savar tribe in Jharkhand experienced a remarkable demographic shift, registering a decadal growth rate of 61 per cent between 2001 and 2011 (from 6,004 to 9,688). The decadal growth raises a question and calls for further inquiry as to whether it is due to issues in enumeration or influence by other factors.

Religion and Language

Among the Savars, 73 per cent are enumerated as Hindu. Only 2 per cent of the Savar tribes follow Christianity. The remaining 25 per cent follow other religions including their traditional faiths exhibited through Sarna.

Bilingualism

Their mother tongue is Savara, but the Census 2011 shows that bilingualism among them is shaped strongly by regional influences. 62.7 per cent of Savar speakers reported Bengali as their most common second language, while 1,623 speakers also reported Kharia, reflecting interaction with neighbouring Adivasi groups.

This profile shows that unlike many other Jharkhand tribes where Hindi dominates, the Savar display a regional bilingualism pattern, with Bengali serving as the primary second language due to proximity to West Bengal, and Kharia emerging from inter-Adivasi contact. This highlights the community's cultural adaptability but also indicates the vulnerability of the Savara mother tongue, which risks marginalization as regional languages take precedence.

Demography

In Jharkhand, the female-male ratio (FMR) among the Savars is 992, and the child FMR is 1,019. The figures indicate a highly favourable gender balance within the Savar community.

Literacy and Education

The literacy rate among the Savar tribe in Jharkhand is appallingly low (34 per cent), with a significant gap between male and female literacy (43 per cent and 24 per cent, respectively). Notably, the Savars are one of the least literate groups in Jharkhand. The female literacy rate among the Savars is the lowest among all communities. The Savar tribe's educational profile shows 20 per cent are literate without formal education. Among the literate population, 10 per cent have completed primary education, 2 per cent have attained secondary education, 1 per cent have reached higher secondary level, and 1 per cent have graduated. With secondary education as the benchmark, only 4 per cent of the Savar population meets the criteria for

being educated.

Livelihoods

The Savars of Jharkhand have a work participation rate of 48 per cent (male 54 per cent, and female 42 per cent), which is comparable to the state average among Adivasis. A very low proportion of main and total workers (only 31 per cent; male 37 per cent, female 23 per cent) demonstrates a regrettably poor degree of regular work availability. Only 8 per cent of the main workers are cultivators, while 47 per cent are agricultural labourers. The remaining 43 per cent are involved in other work (hunting, gathering, and crafting). The distribution highlights the community's limited access to land ownership and reliance on labour-intensive and often undefined livelihood sources, underscoring the need for diversified economic opportunities and support.

Most of the Savars depend on hunting, gathering, and crafting, and face challenges such as forest resource depletion and a lack of developmental benefits. Lately, some of the Savars have been engaged in agricultural activities and labour-hiring in non-agricultural sectors. One of the major challenges they face is social stigmatization and ostracism due to their historical labelling by colonial rulers as "criminal tribes".

Social Structure and Culture

The Savar tribe in Jharkhand has a patriarchal social structure, typically organised around nuclear families. Marriage is a significant institution, with the practice of monogamy. They also practice widow remarriage. The Savars also have distinct religious practices, worshipping deities like Bhawani and Dulha Deo, and observing local Brahminic festivals such as Navdurga and Shivratri.

The Savara tribe of Jharkhand has a rich cultural heritage, expressed through unique art forms like Saora paintings. They also excel in crafts like bamboo and cane work, creating items like baskets and household goods. Their cultural practices include traditional folk dances.

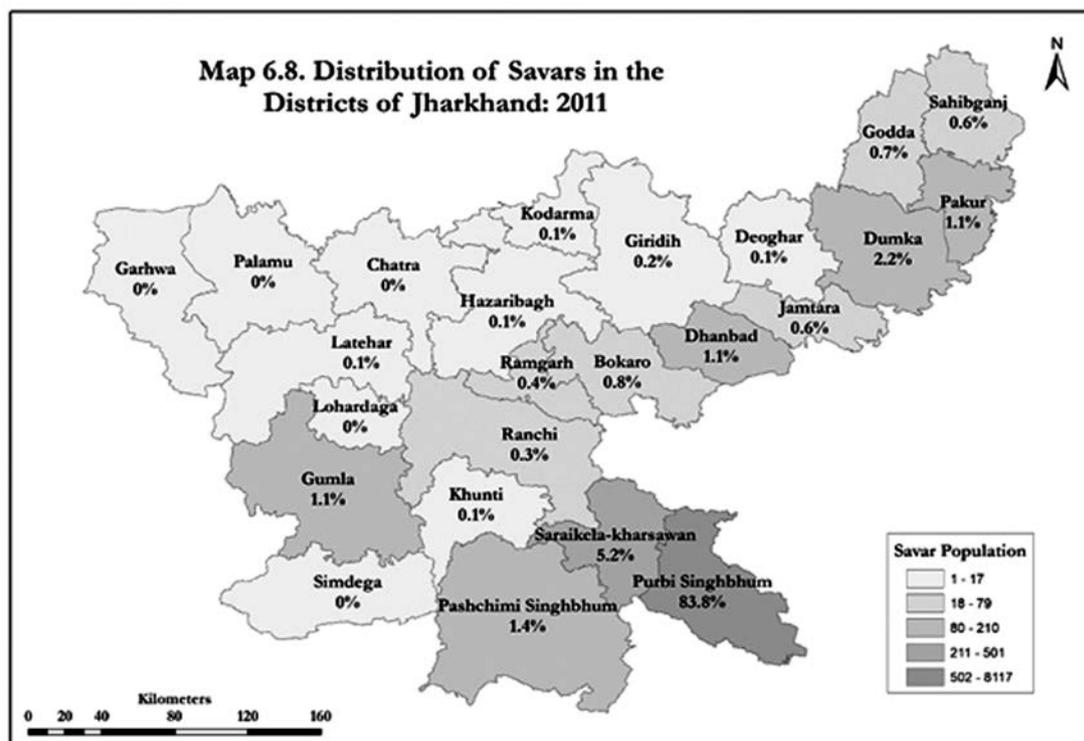
Historical Context and Resistance

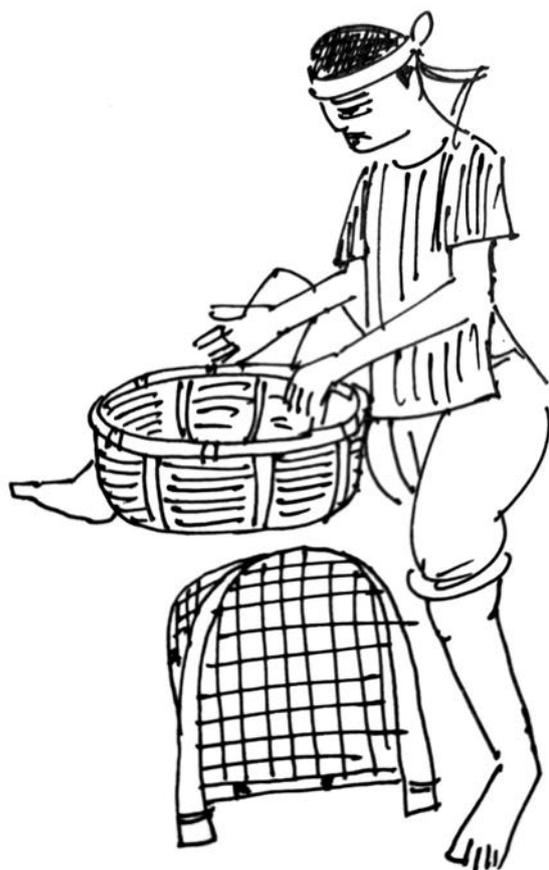
The Savar tribe, like other Adivasi groups, demonstrated resilience and resistance to British colonial rule by preserving their cultural heritage, adhering to traditional governance systems, and opposing British attempts to impose foreign administrative structures. This resistance was a testament to their strong cultural identity and determination to maintain autonomy in the face of external pressures.

Today, the Savars exemplify the severe challenges of poverty, illiteracy, and poor health. Moreover, they are on the verge of losing their cultural identity and livelihood, which calls for immediate public attention.

Table 6.8 Select Indicators the Savar – 2011 Census*

Com-munity	Popu-lation	Female-Male Ratio	Female-Male Ratio (6 years and below)	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	Work Partic-ipation Rate (per cent)	Main Work-ers (per cent)	Culti-vators among Main Workers	Agricultur-al labourers among Main Workers (per cent)
Savar	9,688	992	1019	33.7	24.0	48.2	30.8	54.1	30.7





Part III

THE LESSONS



The history of Adivasis in India, and particularly in Jharkhand, is marked by a simultaneous experience of oppression and resistance. The resistance of the *Atavis* during the Mauryan period finds a clear echo in the struggles of contemporary Adivasis in Jharkhand. Historically, the *Atavis* opposed a state that sought not only territorial expansion but also ideological control over their lives. Today, Adivasi communities face pressures from a state-driven development agenda—mining, industrial projects, and land acquisitions—that displace them and threaten their traditional ways of life.

In both historical and contemporary contexts, resistance goes beyond mere material grievances. It embodies a deeper philosophical and cultural commitment: a refusal to submit to authority that undermines autonomy and communal self-determination. Modern protests, legal battles over land rights, and localized movements against resource exploitation in Jharkhand mirror the same principle that guided the *Atavis*—asserting freedom against domination, defending identity, and safeguarding a way of life grounded in ecological and social balance.

This continuity underscores that Adivasi resistance, both historically and today, is as much about preserving selfhood, culture, and philosophical autonomy as it is about protecting resources. The struggle in Jharkhand is thus part of a long lineage of principled resistance against external control, rooted in an enduring conception of peoplehood and freedom. The deprivations and intrusions on one hand, and the resistance on the other underscores the importance of learning from the Adivasis not only about freedom and justice but also how to prioritise saving the planet Earth and its inhabitants by recognising the common causes of the human species—stepping forward in the search for a shared peoplehood across the globe. The lived experiences that have shaped the communities of the Adivasis of Jharkhand can guide us toward joining the springs of consciousness of culture and peoplehood.

Chapter 7
ECHOES FROM THE PLATEAU
HISTORY OF ADIVASI COURAGE AND RESISTANCE

“There was nothing spontaneous about all this [the peasant revolts] in the sense of being unthinking and wanting in deliberation. The peasant obviously knew what he was doing when he rose in revolt. The fact that this was primarily designed to destroy the authority of the superordinate elite and carried no elaborate blueprint for its replacement, does not put it outside the realm of politics. ...Insurgency affirms its political character precisely by its negative and inversive procedure. By trying to force a mutual substitution of the dominant and the dominated in the power structure it left nothing to doubt about its identity as a project of power.” (Guha, 1983:9)

Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983) provides a crucial theoretical lens for understanding Adivasi revolts as autonomous expressions of collective consciousness rather than spontaneous outbursts. This observation dismantles the colonial and elitist assumption that tribal or peasant revolts were acts of chaos or ignorance. Instead, it recognizes them as deliberate, rational, and politically conscious movements aimed at transforming existing power hierarchies⁷⁸.

Introduction

The Indian Tribal Movement was the result of immense experience of discontent and dissatisfaction against the socio-economic policies structured by the British government that affected the lives of the tribals⁷⁹. The legacy of tribal movements, however, stretches far beyond the colonial period. They highlighted the need for protecting tribal rights, identities, and acknowledging socio-economic disparities, and the state of Jharkhand has been one of the sources of such resistances.

The Chota Nagpur Plateau of Jharkhand is identified as the land of resistance and struggle to protect the Adivasi traditional rights, cultural rights and autonomy. Munda and Mullick (2003) elucidate that even after independence, the tribal autonomy movement of Jharkhand⁸⁰ represents a significant issue of socio-political landscape in one of the largest democracies of the world and thus reflects the struggles of the largest indigenous people in one country. The

78 Sinha (1991)

79 Munda and Bosu Mullick (2003)

80 Jharkhand autonomy movement campaigns were led by Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) in the late 1960s and 1970s.

various uprisings that emerged from this region—the Kol Revolt (1831–1832), the Santhal Hul (1855–1856), and the Ulgulan or Munda Rebellion (1899–1900)—not only protested against exploitative economic structures but also articulated an indigenous political consciousness that questioned the legitimacy of both colonial and postcolonial state power.

In the postcolonial context, Jharkhand's tribal autonomy movements continue to reveal the persistence of what Ranajit Guha⁸¹ (1983) termed the “small voice of history” — the subaltern expression that resists erasure within elite nationalist narratives. Similarly, Munda and Mullick (2003) underscore that even after independence, the struggle for tribal autonomy remains central to India's democratic project, revealing the unfulfilled promises of political inclusion and economic justice.

Resistance

Guha (1983)⁸² elucidates that the Adivasis of Jharkhand demonstrate a clear sense of understanding of historical justice and injustice through their popular resistance and movements over the years. When Adivasi peasant communities rose in revolt, they were clear about their purpose and intent and with no doubt about their rich identity that demonstrated their unity and power. These movements adapted a two-fold approach through which the Adivasi community unravelled their political identity and ideologies. In the first stage they started gathering people and sharing their opinions and thus, they engaged within and across communities to ensure collective decision-making and widespread support. For instance, during the Kol revolt of (1831–1832), or the Hul of 1855, or the Birsait movement (Munda Rebellion also known as *Ulgulan*) of 1899–1900 it took several weeks to come to a consensus at various levels to engage the entire community for mobilised action against the injustice. These movements exemplify Guha's argument.

Later, they pursued an approach which not only involve the Adivasis but also gathered solidarity beyond traditional and cultural boundaries in the rural communities. The idea was to gather all by uniting communities that had maintained separate identities under a common cause. Additionally, tribal rebels and leaders took a remarkable step by deliberately protecting poorer non-tribal populations as well. Such was the case of Santhal Hul Rebellion (1855-1856), which was the most significant tribal revolt led by two brothers Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu. They mobilised people, which was triggered as a response to economic exploitation by moneylenders, traders and zamindars who were charging inflated interest rates and taking over tribal land. This particular approach to struggle revealed their nuanced understanding about dynamics of class and local power structures.

The strength of this unity was highly compelling and overcame historical differences among the tribes. Despite generations of conflict between the Mal Pahariya and Santhal communities, during the Hul uprising both groups unified and that demonstrated the shared experiences of injustice, suppression and a common purpose for justice could bridge traditional differences. This union signified a remarkable transformation of tribal politics, where survival and communal

81 Guha (1983)

82 Ibid

liberation was prioritised over ancestral grievances. These movements, thus, did not emerge impromptu out of antagonism but were carefully framed with political objectives which was a combination of communal wisdom and alliance of community that challenged the governing structures while sustaining their solidarity and keeping their spirit of resistance alive⁸³.

Gendered Resistance: The (Unsung) Legacy of Courage and Resistance

It is also important to understand the role women from Adivasi communities have played as one of the integral pillars to support the very cause of resistance. Several women were either killed or arrested at the time of the Santhal Hul Rebellion of 1885 and at the end of the 19th century, Munda rebellion and also during the Kol uprising (1831-1832) of Singhbhum in the Chotanagpur region. Many women joined the rebellion; they helped in numerous campaigns and keeping supplies and information running⁸⁴. Many women were arrested and imprisoned by British authorities during this struggle⁸⁵.

In India since the early times, Adivasi women have been active participants in various struggles of the community. It has been documented by British officers that during the colonial rule, Adivasi women have shown active participation in revolts and resistance movements, resisting, especially, efforts of forcefully integrating the Adivasi community into the caste-based agricultural system.

Correspondingly, Jharkhand has had a long history of women's involvement and their leadership in many resistances and movements. Women, and especially Adivasi women, have played a significant role during the fights against usurpation of land, mining, displacements and rehabilitation of Adivasi people, all of which was done in the name of development strategy and which has afflicted the rights over *jal, jangal and jameen* of the Adivasi people which is an integral part of their identity, culture and community. In addition to this, they have simultaneously fought against social issues within the community i.e., practice of witch-hunting, alcoholism, trafficking of women and social and political exclusion⁸⁶.

It has been argued by Spivak⁸⁷ (1988) that it is a fact that most of the post-colonial tribal movements focused on men, and they controlled the positions of leadership. The sacrifices and efforts of women have not been recognised or acknowledged, either in regional history or in the context of Indian nationalism. The erasure of women's voices from official and nationalist histories parallels what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) famously critiqued as the silencing of the subaltern – the inability of the colonized woman to “speak” within dominant discourses of power. The question of tribal women and the “consciousness” is still out of the picture. There were several tribal women who played an important role during the national and anti-colonial movements in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar but have still not been recognized in history. The courage, defiance, and resilience of Adivasi women

83 Prasad et al. (2024)

84 Singh (2003)

85 Sharma and Mittal (1998)

86 Purty (2021)

87 Spivak (1988)

through the numerous uprisings and movements of resistance have remained undocumented. Acknowledging the historical trajectory of tribal women's activism is a prerequisite—not just to give them their much-delayed due—but also to understand the perspective of Adivasi women in the contemporary movements of and for Jharkhand.

While Adivasi women's contributions have not found 'mainstream' mention and they have not featured in discourses of resistance, many tribal authors⁸⁸ of tribal folklore have documented the women's struggles and participation. There are tales of tribal women courageously defeating Mughal forces in Rohtasgarh, which is part of Bihar now. There is mention of the heroic role of Singi Dai, Kaili Dai and Champa Dai at the dawn of 13th century about how they protected their land and avenged the honour of tribal women by taking up arms against the Turk military and landlords. During the festival of Sarhul, the men of the village were either away on hunts or drunk on festival celebrations. Taking advantage of this, the Turk forces ambushed the village. Singi Dai took control of the situation, gathering the women to take up arms and face the army. This resistance in Jharkhand is still remembered as *Jani Sikar* which means 'women hunting'⁸⁹. With this there is another story well remembered of the two heroic revolutionary fighters – Phulo Murmu and Jhano Murmu. They were born in Bhogandih village in the region of Santhal Pargana and were the sisters of Sido Murmu and Kanhu Murmu. The two sisters courageously fought and killed 21 British troops, before being martyred in the Santhal Hul (1885). During the *Ulgulan Movement*, the house of one of the leader was set on fire by the police. This is when Gaya Munda, a member of that family, took up traditional weapons and fought against the police troop. During the revolt against Mughals and in the British colonial period, Adivasi women would often wear men's attire and used the bow and arrow, which illustrates that the women were transgressing the patriarchally designed and assigned normative characteristics of gender roles.

Post-Independence Resistances

During the 70s tribal women's issues were rarely discussed. This is the period when the villagers of Netarhat were undergoing state violence by the military and the Koel-Karo people's movement, one of the biggest contemporary tribal movements in the history of Bihar, was taking place. Tribal *Jharkhandi* women activists were active participants in that, as well as in the Jharkhand Autonomy Movement. The Through this period, however, there were no specific organisations of tribal women in Jharkhand that could assume and uphold a stance for the tribal women labourers and forest dwellers who faced innumerable discriminatory practices, social injustice and violence. It is important to mention that despite the lack of organised support, two women leaders raised their voice against such injustices and created history in their struggle for women labourers' rights. Rose Kerketta, who was formerly a professor in Ranchi University, joined the Jharkhand movement at its peak during the 1980s, where she contributed with her intellectual depth and leadership, which the movement was in dire need of. She addressed issues of gender-discriminatory practices against women at the workplace, sexual harassment, and violence. Lado Jonko (also known as Ladu Jokho) was a leader from

88 Barla (2015); Toppo (2018)

89 Kujur (2010); Barla (2015)

the Munda tribe in the Chotanagpur region and was the Secretary of United Mineral Labour Union. Lado Jonko was the first person to acknowledge the issues and problems faced by women mining labourers in the Saranda Forest of West Singhbhum. Despite its significance, the movement never received the popularity and media attention that the cause needed.

Contemporary Resistances: Adivasi Women at the Fore

'Modern' Jharkhand has witnessed Adivasi women continuously resisting against mining activities and corporate (outsiders) exploitative practices. Dayamani Barla, a prominent contemporary leader who is both a journalist and anti-displacement activist, has consistently worked and led resistance against land acquisition by corporates for their profit. She fought against the 'Arcelor Mittal Steel Plant' project that would have displaced as many as 40 Adivasi villages from their ancestral land and destroyed the forest areas. Dayamani ji's organization, *Adivasi-Moolvaasi Astitva Raksha Manch*, the forum for the protection of tribal and indigenous people's identity, has been actively working towards upholding the idea and attributes of *Jal*, *Jangal*, *Jameen*, which is an integral part of the identity and claims of the Adivasi community. Her resistance to forest destruction and fertile land acquisition in Jharkhand has brought a huge change. She has paid for her activism: she has been repeatedly imprisoned for standing up to exploitative forces and has been subjected to state violence for demanding employment rights under The Employment Guarantee Act.

The Pathalgadi Movement (2017–18) is another resistance in the contemporary context that emerged as a form of Adivasi political assertion. During this movement the women played a significant role in asserting their constitutional rights over their lands and protecting it from government intrusion. The reason behind the very term of the movement speaks volume. To demonstrate their protest against the injustice, the Adivasis of the Khunti districts erected stone tablets which asserts their tribal territory and their tribal and constitutional rights which represented a contemporary form of resistance against the state policies (politics).

Coal mining resistance in Jharkhand is another prolonged struggle by the tribal communities and local population where they resisted the forced displacement and usurpation of land with inadequate compensation, loss of livelihoods and environmental degradation and most importantly, tribal rights violation. In the coal belt of contemporary Jharkhand, Adivasi women stood in front of mineworkers and their machinery and bulldozers that were cutting down their *Jangal* (forests and trees) and destroying their *Jameen* (land). They expressed non-cooperation through their rebellious actions (by trying to stop the bulldozers). As a result, the women were subjected to severe physical and sexual harm by the security forces. They demonstrated their resistance by organising long marches and protests to protect their trees and stood up against the violation of their land rights and the land itself. Many activists explain this in the context of Adivasi women rebels that they faced a position of "triple punishment", which was being a tribal, a woman, and a person standing up for the rights of their people against powerful actors.⁹⁰

Although there are now various constitutional provisions and welfare programmes that have been adopted to safeguard the rights of the tribals in the state, the tribal people remain marginalised

90 Purty (2021)

and are repeatedly uprooted from their ancestral lands in the name of development.

During the early 1980s, the Nari Mukti Sangh was established where tribal women jointly expressed their resistance against the state's feudal oppression and exploitative practices. The women from nearly all Adivasi communities, representing the various different tribes, came together in resistance against the state in Giridih district. Women belonging to the Nari Mukti Sangh faced severe economic and sexual abuse while confronting harassment from landlords and officials. The organisation has still, despite the atrocities, been consistently resisting the collective oppression faced by the Adivasis and working towards their just and democratic rights.

Voices from the ground

For Adivasis, an integral part of the community is their unity and their *Jal, Jangal and Jameen*. The unity of the community is identified by the decisions and choices they make as a unit. Since the beginning they have been making decisions for their community through their traditional decision-making bodies according to their traditional norms. With the involvement of the formal constitutional structures, the state authorities tried to empower the voices of the locals through Gram Sabhas.

The Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) 1996, provides extensive powers to Gram Sabhas whose aim is to prevent land alienation and other injustices in tribal dominated areas. Yet, there are several locations in the state's tribal dominated areas where the laws of PESA are not yet fully functional. One of the Adivasi women activists, Munni Hembrom expressed that the voices of the Adivasis are not completely heard. She shared that it is very important to empower our Gram Sabhas so that they could empower 'our people'. She also shared that though it is important to empower our local democratic structure, along with it is also important to unify our voices which at present are segregated. Xaxa⁹¹ (2008) elucidates that during the period when Bihar-Jharkhand were undivided, the non-tribal leaders and politicians dominated most of the state level politics and were socially and economically powerful as compared to the others.

Munni shared that, even today many of the agendas of the tribal community do not come forth or get lost during the negotiations made by the 'local elites' within the community. Tribals residing in interior locations are not well educated and unaware of their rights and requirements. It is the responsibility of the local leader to focus on their people and providing the best possible recourse to them for pressing issues. Unfortunately, that is not what happens. The local elites are governed by their economic and political privileges and are swift to adapt to neglecting their local contexts. Finally, Munni added that it is important and is the very characteristic of the Adivasis that their concerns and voices should be unified, yet, most of the people in the community remain unbothered about the problems of the other and they do not mobilise to resist for their rights. While historically Adivasi society has been characterized by ethos of care and shared concerns, recent times have seen fragmentation creep in into the fabric of Adivasi society much like any other, and causes of care, community, and concern no longer assume priority in the life of the individual Adivasi.

91 Xaxa (2008)

Chapter 8

IN SEARCH OF A PEOPLEHOOD

“We glory in our proud past: when the earth was our nurturing mother,
when the night sky formed our common roof,
when Sun and Moon were our parents,
when all were brothers and sisters,
when our great civilizations grew under the sun,
when our chiefs and elders were great leaders,
when justice ruled the Law and its execution.

Then other peoples arrived:
thirsting for blood, for gold, for land and all its wealth,
carrying the cross and the sword, one in each hand,
without knowing or waiting to learn the ways of our worlds,
they considered us to be lower than the animals,
they stole our lands from us and took us from our lands,
they made slaves of the Sons of the sun. However,

However, they have never been able to eliminate us,
nor to erase our memories of what we were,
because we are the culture of the earth and the sky,
we are of ancient descent and we are millions,
and although our whole universe may be ravaged,
our people will live on
for longer than even the kingdom of death.

Now, we come from the four corners of the earth,
we protest before the concert of nations
that, ‘we are the Indigenous Peoples, we who
have a consciousness of culture and peoplehood
on the edge of each country’s borders and
marginal to each country’s citizenship.’

And rising up after centuries of oppression,
evoking the greatness of our ancestors,
in the memory of our Indigenous martyrs,
and in homage to the counsel of our wise elders:

We vow to control again our own destiny and
recover our complete humanity and
pride in being Indigenous People.”

The words may sound dramatic, yet the announcements made at “one corner of Mother Earth” half a century ago—in 1975, at the Founding Conference of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in Alberni, British Columbia⁹²—resonate with equal vitality in “this corner of Mother Earth,” Jharkhand, as though we were hearing them in any of our neighborhoods. The lives of the Adivasis of Jharkhand have been shaped and reshaped by those who, “without knowing or waiting to learn the ways of our worlds, considered us to be lower than animals, stole our lands and displaced us from them, and made slaves of the Sons of the Sun.” Long before the declaration quoted above, the first Prime Minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru, articulated five principles on the Adivasi question:

1. Adivasi people have the right to live according to their innate conscience. There should be no imposition of any external values on them. They should promote their art, culture and tradition;
2. The rights to land and forest of Adivasi groups must be respected;
3. We should educate and skill Adivasi people for administration and development of their regions;
4. Work should be done through their cultural institutions rather than building a hyper-administrative framework;
5. We should evaluate our results not through capitalist and statistical calculations, but through the quality of pure humanistic standards.⁹³

As the historian Ramachandra Guha observes, “Nehru’s prescriptions have been comprehensively disregarded by the Government of India, as well as by the governments of the different states which have significant Adivasi populations. The quality of schools and hospitals in Adivasi areas is abysmal. There has been little attempt to involve Adivasis in their own administration. Worse, state policies have worked actively to dispossess Adivasis of their land and homes, and to deny them their traditional rights in the forest.”⁹⁴

Similarly, the High-Level Expert Committee on the Socio-Economic, Health, and Educational Status of Adivasi Communities of India—chaired by one of the country’s leading social scientists, Virginius Xaxa—stated unequivocally: “[D]espite the proclamations of protecting the Adivasis from various injustices, the Adivasi communities face disregard for their values and culture, breach of protective legislations, serious material and social deprivation, and aggressive resource alienation.”⁹⁵

These general findings on the lives of the Adivasis of India hold particular relevance in Jharkhand, where material conditions have scarcely changed to their advantage in the past four to five decades. As Nirmal Sengupta and Anjan Ghosh noted in 1982, the “pauperized Jharkhandi peasants... have only become ‘coolie’ labourers who find employment occasionally as agricultural labourers, in the urban informal sector, or through seasonal migration to other places.”⁹⁶

92 Sanders (1977)

93 Cited in Natarajan (2021)

94 Guha (2008)

95 GoI (2014)

96 Sengupta and Ghosh (1982)

Recent studies on the living conditions of the Adivasis of Jharkhand reveal that, even in terms of mere nutritional survival, their situation is dire: “[A]round 43 per cent of Adivasi households in the state had ‘borderline dietary diversity,’”⁹⁷ let alone in areas such as literacy and education, health, employment, and access to public delivery systems.⁹⁸

The statistical analysis presented in the preceding chapters of this study demonstrates that the Adivasis of Jharkhand—the early settlers and makers of this land—continue to face relentless social and economic discrimination. This, in turn, renders their rich linguistic and cultural heritage vulnerable to such effects as monolingualism, individualism and the exclusive pursuit of self-interest, narrowly defined identity assertion, and the patriarchal restructuring of society.

The story, however, does not end with the misfortunes thrust upon the Adivasis; rather, it begins with another dimension—the philosophical and cultural richness they offer to humanity as a whole. In other words, the Adivasi peoplehood is sustained through practices of **deliberative consensus, reciprocal respect, and ecological kinship**. The community is held together not by coercive authority but by dialogue and mutual listening, where even the most marginal voice has value. Respect arises from the acknowledgment of one’s own fallibility and from the willingness to learn from others. Moreover, peoplehood encompasses a non-anthropocentric ethic that includes forests, rivers, hills, and animals as part of the moral community.

To elaborate, first, in the face of the menacing threat of ecological imbalance, many thoughtful observers are turning to the ancient wisdom of the Adivasis for protective solutions (some of which were discussed in Chapter 1). Guided by their philosophical imperatives, their biological and social life is inseparably intertwined with all living and non-living beings of Mother Earth. Their struggles to protect this relationship “have generated debates and discussions over the model of development adopted by the state vis-à-vis Adivasi models of co-existence with nature. From being considered noble savages, they have emerged as ecological warriors.”⁹⁹

Second, beyond this vital recognition, the Adivasis are becoming increasingly significant contributors to the cultivation of democratic culture—especially in a political climate marked by the dangerously expanding “Superman” syndrome, where power is concentrated in the hands of a singular, often self-styled “saviour.” The Adivasi way of life, their socio-political norms, and their broader cultural spectrum offer invaluable lessons and immense hope for humanity as a whole. As philosopher-economist Amartya Sen reminds us, “the cultural traditions” of the Adivasis “are often very rich, with many creative features, the loss of which must be an issue of concern not just for the Adivasis themselves, but for all the people in the wider society who too could benefit from the cultural offerings of Adivasi traditions.”¹⁰⁰

97 Dietary Diversity is defined as “the number of different food groups consumed over a given period of time... dietary diversity score can be a proxy measure of household food security.” Saaka et al (2021)

98 Pradan (2022)

99 Singh (2024)

100 Sen (2019)

Indeed, the democratic practices and institutions at the village and community levels can substantially strengthen the democratic functioning of both institutions and societies, opening possibilities for higher levels of democratic discourse, including those relating to gender. “Strengthening these traditional political institutions,” economist Dev Nathan underscores, “can be a way of establishing people’s power... there have been attempts to emphasise the role of traditional political institutions and to ask people to use these institutions to resolve internal disputes, rather than take these disputes to the thana-court-kacheri system of the Indian State. This approach applies also to questions of man-woman relations.”¹⁰¹

Third, alongside the general lessons regarding the ecological and politico-cultural traditions of Adivasis across the globe, the Adivasis of Jharkhand offer particular insights—especially on the issue of associative identity formation. Traversing a complex trajectory, Jharkhand has experienced multiple socio-cultural and political currents, which have shaped a distinct process of associating multiple identities.

At one level, this process involves the formation and flourishing of a distinct Jharkhandi Adivasi identity, in which Adivasi groups, while preserving their linguistic, cultural, and residential patterns, are woven together so seamlessly that the lines of connection are sometimes difficult to discern. As Adivasi leader Bhagwat Murmu (1928–1998) observed, the Adivasis of Jharkhand “differ on the lines of language and traditions and customs.” Yet, “educationally and economically, with a few exceptions, they are largely similar.” Furthermore, they “are peace-loving and depend primarily on agriculture for their living. They have deep respect for their social traditions, language, and customs and are ready for the greatest sacrifices to protect them.” Even so, they “have never been aggressive... their social organisation is based on a purely republican system and has been extremely strong.” This system, he added, “is still able to keep the entire society united.”¹⁰²

Murmu’s “entire society” encompasses all Adivasi communities in Jharkhand, which—despite their distinctiveness—share numerous common elements that strengthen the motivational bonds of politics. These include surnames (some shared by different groups), languages (some spoken by multiple groups), and religion. Indeed, religion has become a binding force for the Adivasis of Jharkhand in the formation of a Jharkhandi Adivasi identity. Data from the census shows that in 1991, the proportion of Sarna among the Adivasis of Jharkhand was 25 per cent, which increased to 45 per cent in 2001. In 2011, it slightly increased to 46 per cent (the national average is 7 per cent). Although the acceptance of Sarna varies among different indigenous groups (Santal 36%, Oraon 61%, and Munda 49%), the role of upholding Sarna as a Jharkhandi Adivasi religion is undeniable.

The formation and development of this identity, as documented in Amit Prakash’s study, offer lessons on making the process “more inclusive than exclusive.” They also provide insights into how “other grounds for political mobilization” can be successfully utilised—just as the Jharkhandi identity has drawn upon “the declining development profile of the Jharkhand region to tap into the Adivasi and non-Adivasi popular support.”¹⁰³

101 Nathan (2003)

102 Murmu (1992), cited in Prakash (1998)

103 Prakash (1998)

Fourth, there is immense wealth in Adivasi literatures, both oral and written, which reveals to readers an entirely new world. Glimpses of how illuminating that world can be are found in works in English and other dominant languages. Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's novels and short stories are but one example among several that have significantly enriched the current of Indian literature, particularly by opening up "space for subversion and resistance."¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, as G. N. Devy argues, "in order to reduce the gap of knowledge about the Adivasis, it would be desirable to look at the current state of Adivasi languages and the literary creativity that has started blossoming in their languages."¹⁰⁵

Fifth, Adivasis offer important lessons on certain aspects of equality. For instance, in contrast to the average female–male ratio (FMR) in India—particularly in the northern and western states—Adivasi communities across the country demonstrate the prevalence of "survival equality" between boys and girls. Although, due to the lack of multiple opportunities, including food and nutritional security and healthcare, the mortality rate among Adivasi children is much higher than the national average, the notable absence of female feticide, infanticide, and gender-based discrimination in the distribution of survival opportunities means that the female–male ratio follows a normal pattern, with women in the total population either equalling or outnumbering men.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, among certain Adivasi communities in Jharkhand, this pattern appears to have reversed. The causes of this reversal represent an important area for expanding our knowledge of the Adivasis in particular and Indian society in general.

Taking a cue from the general conditions of survival equality and the concepts of egalitarianism among the Adivasis, we must also ask some pressing questions—particularly concerning the educational achievements and health status of Adivasi women. As the figures show, while Adivasis as a whole face educational underachievement, women lag far behind men in literacy, school enrolment, and progression to higher studies. In addition to the gender gap in educational attainment, there are significant disparities among different Adivasi communities. For example, literacy rates range from 67 per cent among the Oraons to only 33 per cent among the Pahariyas.

What accounts for these differences? Are they linked to certain social structures, or to the functioning of the state's education delivery system? Or are there other causes altogether? Answers to these questions will not only enrich the body of knowledge and inform course correction in specialised areas—particularly education—but also deepen our understanding of broader social dynamics.

Lastly, while Adivasis offer important lessons, especially in the sphere of associative living, there remain issues that demand serious inquiry into the possible ways of unlearning certain age-old traditions, including witchcraft and the denial of property rights to women. Exploring how these practices are connected to social norms, and how they have been shaped by state policies and dominant social orders imposed upon Adivasi communities, can open new

104 Carrin and Guzy (2012)

105 Devy (2022)

106 Devy (2022)

avenues for understanding social advancement.

The processes of learning and unlearning, however, depend greatly on adherence to the imperative of globally recognising the Adivasis as fellow citizens who “have suffered from historic injustices as a result of, inter alia, their colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, thus preventing them from exercising, in particular, their right to development in accordance with their own needs and interests.” States must “in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples take specific measures to protect” their interests in various areas, including education, health, livelihood opportunities, and other rights.

The principle that “Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development” and “to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions” must be implemented in full.¹⁰⁷

The constituency of the Adivasis in India, and the conditions that have shaped the discrimination and injustices they face, led the Xaxa Committee (High-Level Expert Committee on the Socio-Economic, Health, and Educational Status of Adivasi Communities of India) to outline for the government a policy path that in many ways parallels the principles enshrined in the UN Declaration mentioned above.

The general guideline—which, to a great extent, echoes the commitments articulated by the early leaders of modern India—includes the following:

1. An empowered citizenry and a functioning, participatory system of self-governance, including the participation of women.
2. A fair share in socio-economic progress for Adivasi people and their habitations, including access to health, education, livelihood opportunities, drinking water, sanitation, roads, electricity, and sustainable in situ income.
3. Protection of the land and forest rights of Adivasi communities.
4. Protection of the right to natural resources in Adivasi lands.
5. Prohibition of the alienation of natural and mineral wealth in Adivasi lands against the will of the communities.
6. Legal assurance of a reasonable share in the wealth and income generated from resources extracted from lands ceded by the communities.
7. Preservation of language, culture, and traditions, along with their recognition, protection, and documentation to prevent loss of identity, enabling them to thrive as a dynamic, living culture.¹⁰⁸

More than a century ago, Rabindranath Tagore warned the privileged Indians:

...He whom you cast down, binds you there below:
He whom you press back, draws you backward too.
He whom you shroud in dense
Mantle of ignorance,

107 United Nations (2007)

108 GoI (2014)

Veils your own good by that obstructing pill:
With all, in your dishonour, equal....

You do not see death's herald at your doors
Branding the pride of your line with curse.
 If yet you cannot speak,
 If yet you should hold back,
By your own pride binding yourself in thrall,
In death, ground down among the charnel-ash,
You shall be one with all.¹⁰⁹

It is time for the non-indigenous world to hear the “death's herald at” its doors and to learn how to prioritise saving the planet Earth and its inhabitants by recognising the common causes of the human species—stepping forward in the search for a shared peoplehood across the globe. The lived experiences that have shaped the communities of the Adivasis of Jharkhand can guide us toward joining the springs of “consciousness of culture and peoplehood” that call “from the four corners of the earth.”

109 Tagore (2010)

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APPENDICES

SELECT STATISTICAL TABLES

1. Adivasis in Indian States: A Demographic and Socio-economic Picture – 2011

Name	Population	Adivasis as Per cent to total Pop-ulation	FMR (Wom-en/Men) * 1000	FMR (0-6) (0-6 Girls/0-6 Boys) *1000	Literacy Rate (Literate Population below 6/Total Population) *100		
					All	Men	Women
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	28530	7.5	937	5497	31.4	76.8	70.0
Andhra Pradesh	5918073	7.0	993	931	49.2	58.3	40.1
Arunachal Pradesh	951821	68.8	1032	977	64.6	71.5	58.0
Assam	3884371	12.4	985	957	72.1	79.0	65.1
Bihar	1336573	1.3	958	969	51.1	61.3	40.4
Chhattisgarh	7822902	30.6	1020	992	59.1	69.7	48.8
Dadra & Nagar haveli	178564	52.0	1010	977	61.9	73.6	50.3
Daman & Diu	15363	6.3	977	925	78.8	86.2	71.2
Goa	149275	10.2	1046	969	79.1	87.2	71.5
Gujarat	8917174	14.8	981	953	62.5	71.7	53.2
Himachal Pradesh	392126	5.7	999	930	73.6	83.2	64.2
India	1.05E+08	8.6	990	957	59.0	68.5	49.4
Jammu & Kashmir	1493299	11.9	924	912	50.6	60.6	39.7
Jharkhand	8645042	26.2	1003	976	57.1	68.2	46.2
Karnataka	4248987	7.0	990	964	62.1	71.1	53.0
Kerala	484839	1.5	1035	949	75.8	80.8	71.1
Lakshadweep	61120	94.8	1003	907	91.7	95.7	87.8
Madhya Pradesh	15316784	21.1	984	952	50.6	59.6	41.5
Maharashtra	10510213	9.4	977	955	65.7	74.3	57.0
Manipur	1167422	40.9	984	920	72.6	77.3	67.8
Meghalaya	2555861	86.1	1013	973	74.5	75.5	73.5
Mizoram	1036115	94.4	1007	971	91.5	93.6	89.5

Nagaland	1710973	86.5	976	942	80.0	83.1	76.9
Odisha	9590756	22.8	1029	980	52.2	63.7	41.2
Rajasthan	9238534	13.5	948	921	52.8	67.6	37.3
Sikkim	206360	33.8	960	961	79.7	85.0	74.3
Tamil Nadu	794697	1.1	981	918	54.3	61.8	46.8
Tripura	1166813	31.8	983	957	79.1	86.4	71.6
Uttar Pradesh	1134273	0.6	952	944	55.7	67.1	43.7
Uttarakhand	291903	2.9	963	929	73.9	83.6	63.9
West Bengal	5296953	5.8	999	974	57.9	68.2	47.7

1.A. Adivasis in Indian States: A Demographic and Socio-economic Picture – 2011 (contd.)

States	Work Participation Rate (Workers/Population) *100			Main Workers as Percent to Total workers		
	All	All	Men	All	Men	Women
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	14.2	31.9	24.5	32.4	1.3	1.1
Andhra Pradesh	54.2	56.1	52.3	80.0	84.9	74.7
Arunachal Pradesh	40.3	42.9	37.8	79.9	83.0	76.6
Assam	44.0	53.1	34.8	65.9	79.9	44.3
Bihar	41.0	49.5	32.2	53.5	61.1	41.3
Chhattisgarh	52.8	57.2	48.5	60.3	72.9	45.6
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	41.5	49.7	33.3	71.6	85.7	50.7
Daman & Diu	43.8	56.7	30.5	88.7	93.7	79.3
Goa	42.6	55.7	30.1	73.5	78.4	64.8
Gujarat	49.7	56.5	42.8	68.8	83.7	48.6
Himachal Pradesh	53.5	59.4	47.7	53.4	64.9	39.0
India	48.7	53.9	43.5	64.8	74.5	52.7
Jammu & Kashmir	35.7	45.5	25.1	45.2	55.6	24.7
Jharkhand	46.9	52.3	41.6	46.2	55.1	35.1
Karnataka	50.3	58.9	41.5	80.7	86.6	72.2
Kerala	47.5	58.3	37.0	70.1	75.8	61.4
Lakshadweep	26.8	42.8	10.9	56.2	58.3	48.0
Madhya Pradesh	49.9	53.2	46.5	63.7	72.1	53.9
Maharashtra	50.6	55.2	46.0	82.3	86.3	77.3
Manipur	47.4	49.5	45.4	75.8	80.2	71.0
Meghalaya	40.3	45.7	34.9	76.5	81.8	69.7
Mizoram	43.8	51.1	36.5	84.8	90.2	77.4
Nagaland	49.3	51.3	47.1	74.7	78.6	70.4
Odisha	49.7	55.7	43.9	48.9	64.5	29.6
Rajasthan	48.3	50.5	46.0	59.2	73.0	43.2
Sikkim	49.7	57.0	42.1	72.4	79.7	62.2
Tamil Nadu	54.5	59.7	49.2	81.8	84.1	78.9
Tripura	43.8	51.3	36.1	64.5	81.6	39.8
Uttar Pradesh	37.0	46.5	27.0	50.6	57.8	37.6
Uttarakhand	45.4	54.1	36.3	68.2	78.0	53.1
West Bengal	47.4	55.5	39.2	57.9	67.3	44.4

I.B. Adivasis in Indian States: A Demographic and Socio-economic Picture – 2011 (contd.)

States	% Cult	% Cult-M	%Cult-F	%AGL	%AGL-M	%AGL-F
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	1.9	39.3	52.8	0.4	785.2	775.0
Andhra Pradesh	29.7	33.4	25.2	52.8	45.2	62.1
Arunachal Pradesh	68.2	62.8	74.6	2.1	1.9	2.3
Assam	65.9	68.4	58.8	8.1	6.7	11.9
Bihar	18.3	20.2	13.7	65.0	62.5	71.0
Chhattisgarh	52.7	55.6	47.4	31.5	26.9	40.0
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	41.4	41.9	40.2	11.1	7.7	19.7
Daman & Diu	2.4	2.8	1.5	2.4	2.5	2.2
Goa	17.5	16.3	20.3	8.2	6.3	12.2
Gujarat	34.2	40.4	19.9	44.7	37.7	61.0
Himachal Pradesh	49.9	42.0	66.3	3.0	2.7	3.4
India	40.9	43.3	36.6	36.2	31.3	44.9
Jammu & Kashmir	40.5	40.4	40.6	9.2	10.0	5.5
Jharkhand	49.1	50.1	47.2	22.5	19.9	27.6
Karnataka	29.0	33.7	20.8	38.3	30.0	52.6
Kerala	10.1	11.2	8.1	40.6	37.4	46.5
Lakshadweep	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Madhya Pradesh	41.5	43.5	38.2	45.4	41.4	51.6
Maharashtra	26.4	27.4	25.1	54.9	49.1	62.9
Manipur	73.4	70.1	77.4	3.2	2.8	3.8
Meghalaya	50.0	48.6	52.0	13.4	13.4	13.4
Mizoram	51.3	49.7	54.0	6.4	6.4	6.3
Nagaland	64.7	57.4	73.9	2.5	2.5	2.6
Odisha	40.5	46.2	25.2	32.5	27.5	46.1
Rajasthan	65.3	64.0	67.7	14.3	11.0	20.8
Sikkim	44.1	41.6	48.8	6.2	5.9	6.7
Tamil Nadu	29.9	29.7	30.2	41.1	36.7	47.0
Tripura	40.0	41.4	35.7	28.9	27.1	34.2
Uttar Pradesh	26.8	28.7	21.7	39.9	36.3	49.9
Uttarakhand	57.7	56.5	60.4	14.0	13.7	14.6
West Bengal	15.4	19.2	7.2	49.4	46.3	56.0

2. Adivasis in Jharkhand: A Demographic and Socio-economic Picture – 2011

District	ST Population	Per centage of ST to Total	Per cent of Urban ST population	FMR (Women/Men) * 1000	FMR (0-6) (Girls0-6/Boys0-6) *1000	Literacy Rate (Literate Population below 6/ Total Population) *100		
						All	Men	Women
Bokaro	255626	12.4	28.7	978	973	56.3	68.1	44.2
Chatra	45563	4.4	2.8	969	970	57.2	65.6	48.4
Deoghar	180962	12.1	2.7	988	1008	48.3	61.9	34.4
Dhanbad	233119	8.7	15.0	988	977	56.2	69.4	42.8
Dumka	571077	43.2	1.0	1024	979	52.9	64.6	41.5
Garhwa	205874	15.6	1.0	970	983	52.1	62.7	41.2
Giridih	238188	9.7	1.3	974	971	46.1	58.5	33.3
Godda	279208	21.3	0.9	1016	981	43.7	55.3	32.3
Gumla	706754	68.9	3.4	1005	969	63.8	73.4	54.3
Hazaribagh	121768	7.0	11.7	1003	970	58.7	68.7	48.9
Jamtara	240489	30.4	1.5	1003	978	55.1	67.9	42.4
Jharkhand	8645042	26.2	9.0	1003	976	57.1	68.2	46.2
Khunti	389626	73.3	4.7	1011	975	61.3	71.6	51.2
Kodarma	6903	1.0	10.9	921	1017	39.4	49.4	28.3
Latehar	331096	45.5	2.1	989	966	57.4	68.1	46.7
Lohardaga	262734	56.9	5.4	1008	974	63.0	73.3	52.8
Pakur	379054	42.1	0.7	1027	982	41.7	51.4	32.3
Palamu	181208	9.3	1.9	957	966	55.8	67.1	43.9
Pashchimi Singhbhum	1011296	67.3	5.8	1019	992	53.4	66.4	40.8
Purbi Singhbhum	653923	28.5	21.2	1006	968	59.7	71.9	47.6
Ramgarh	201166	21.2	28.2	974	972	60.4	71.0	49.4
Ranchi	1042016	35.8	24.2	1002	966	67.9	77.5	58.4
Sahibganj	308343	26.8	2.1	1010	982	40.0	48.8	31.2
Saraike-la-Kharsawan	374642	35.2	7.9	1002	964	57.3	70.9	43.8
Simdega	424407	70.8	4.7	1006	969	68.8	76.0	61.6

2.A. Adivasis in Jharkhand: A Demographic and Socio-economic Picture – 2011 (Contd.)

District	Work Participation Rate (Workers/ Population) *100			Main Workers as Per cent to Total workers		
	All	Men	women	All	Men	women
Bokaro	40.8	50.5	30.9	41.9	52.0	25.1
Chatra	42.5	46.9	38.0	42.6	49.1	34.4
Deoghar	43.8	53.1	34.4	38.3	45.6	26.8
Dhanbad	42.2	51.1	33.3	42.3	52.2	26.7
Dumka	52.5	57.3	47.8	31.7	38.0	24.4
Garhwa	48.1	50.6	45.6	25.2	32.6	16.7
Giridih	47.5	52.3	42.6	29.2	38.1	18.0
Godda	51.2	56.1	46.5	38.0	47.7	26.6
Gumla	48.5	51.2	45.7	56.9	65.5	47.2
Hazaribagh	41.1	48.2	33.9	40.0	48.5	28.0
Jamtara	48.4	55.9	41.0	34.3	40.9	25.3
JHARKHAND	46.9	52.3	41.6	46.2	55.1	35.1
Khunti	50.2	53.0	47.5	57.8	65.1	49.8
Kodarma	43.2	52.2	33.3	57.4	69.0	37.6
Latehar	45.3	48.6	41.9	35.0	41.4	27.6
Lohardaga	51.0	52.6	49.5	44.6	55.0	33.7
Pakur	51.0	55.2	46.9	49.5	63.4	33.6
Palamu	39.1	46.0	32.0	32.8	38.8	23.8
Pashchimi Singhbhum	47.8	51.8	43.9	45.8	56.6	33.2
Purbi Singhbhum	44.1	53.4	34.8	42.6	51.4	29.1
Ramgarh	36.8	48.8	24.6	59.6	67.2	44.3
Ranchi	44.5	50.5	38.5	59.1	66.2	49.8
Sahibganj	51.6	54.9	48.3	60.1	71.9	46.9
Saraikela-Kharsawan	45.0	52.3	37.8	43.7	52.9	31.0
Simdega	49.1	53.4	44.8	53.2	65.1	39.1

2.B. Adivasis in Jharkhand: A Demographic and Socio-economic Picture - 2011 (Contd.)

District	Cultivators as Per cent to Main Workers			Agri-laborers as Per cent to Main Workers		
	All	Men	women	All	Men	women
Bokaro	23.8	24.0	22.9	12.0	10.9	15.5
Chatra	50.0	49.7	50.7	25.6	24.0	28.5
Deoghar	30.5	32.0	26.4	38.6	36.4	44.3
Dhanbad	19.2	18.8	20.3	16.5	15.4	19.9
Dumka	43.3	46.5	37.4	35.0	33.0	38.8
Garhwa	35.0	36.8	31.1	40.4	37.9	46.0
Giridih	29.8	30.8	27.3	32.0	31.4	33.8
Godda	45.5	51.2	33.4	40.8	35.7	51.6
Gumla	76.8	77.7	75.3	11.7	10.4	13.7
Hazaribagh	33.7	34.5	31.7	20.2	18.4	24.6
Jamtara	46.8	48.6	42.7	28.6	27.2	31.7
JHARKHAND	49.1	50.1	47.2	22.5	19.9	27.6
Khunti	78.5	79.5	77.0	9.7	8.4	11.5
Kodarma	23.9	27.7	11.8	24.7	23.1	30.0
Latehar	48.4	49.7	46.2	30.7	28.4	34.9
Lohardaga	62.7	66.2	56.6	22.8	19.0	29.5
Pakur	52.4	58.4	39.5	30.1	24.3	42.6
Palamu	31.4	31.8	30.2	39.2	38.4	41.1
Pashchimi Singhbhum	51.6	53.7	47.4	24.4	19.7	33.6
Purbi Singhbhum	23.4	25.3	18.3	17.9	15.4	24.5
Ramgarh	30.4	28.9	35.1	18.9	17.9	22.2
Ranchi	41.6	41.7	41.6	18.1	16.4	21.2
Sahibganj	48.6	53.5	40.2	34.1	28.9	43.0
Saraikela-Kharsawan	38.3	40.3	33.4	20.2	16.1	29.7
Simdega	67.9	71.4	61.0	19.3	16.6	24.7

3. Achieved Level of Education of the Different Adivasi Communities of Jharkhand – 2011

Communities	Per cent of Total Population Achieved the Levels of		
	Primary	Higher Secondary	Graduation
All	13.73	2.97	1.67
Asur, Agaria	11.40	1.09	0.34
Baiga	7.62	0.64	0.39
Banjara	8.42	2.67	1.44
Bathudi	13.89	1.96	0.55
Bedia	16.20	2.60	0.80
Bhumij	16.03	2.00	0.71
Binjhia	15.16	2.03	0.50
Birhor	7.67	0.24	0.08
Birjia	12.11	1.39	0.30
Chero	18.08	2.87	0.85
Chik Baraik	15.09	3.74	2.30
Gond	13.44	3.04	2.14
Gorait	14.80	3.96	1.59
Ho	12.43	2.48	1.37
Karmali	16.64	2.98	1.04
Kawar	15.72	2.37	1.51
Kharia, Dhelki Kharia, Dudh Kharia, Hill Kharia	13.66	4.39	2.91
Kharwar	15.44	1.73	0.74
Khond	15.38	3.62	0.45
Kisan, Nagesia	13.75	1.38	0.63
Kol	12.86	0.85	0.27
Kora, Mudi -Kora	14.71	1.86	0.57
Korwa	9.01	0.45	0.10
Lohra	14.39	1.97	0.88
Mahli	13.74	2.22	0.99
Mal Paharia, Kumarbhag Paharia	10.03	0.51	0.16
Munda, Patar	14.77	3.52	2.09
Oraon, Dhangar (Oraon)	14.18	5.18	3.51
Parhaiya	8.72	0.16	0.06

Santal	13.16	2.09	0.88
Sauria Paharia	9.63	0.66	0.15
Savar	8.18	0.95	0.47

4. Speakers of Different Adivasis Languages in Jharkhand - 2011

	Population	Per centage
Bhumij	8462	0.1
Ho	992197	11.7
Kisan	57	0.0
Koda/Kora	21261	0.3
Kurukh/Oraon	933076	11.0
Munda	2435	0.0
Mundari	941965	11.1
Nagpuria	757726	9.0
Pahariya	151444	1.8
Panch Pargania	244290	2.9
Santali	2930972	34.6
Korwa	2341	0.0
Malto	155254	1.8
Others (including Khorta, Sadri, etc.)	1322354	15.6
All	8463834	100.0

5. Per centage Distribution of Adivasi Population of Jharkhand According to Religious Beliefs - 2011

Community	Hinduism	Christianity	Other Institutional Religions	Tribal Religions
All Communities	36.3	15.8	0.6	47.3
Asur, Agaria	33	9.4	0.6	57
Baiga	85.2	0.7	0.6	13.5
Banjara	94.9	1	1.6	2.5
Bathudi	99.2	0.1	0.4	0.3
Bedia	69.5	0.1	0.6	29.8

Bhumij	62	0.3	0.4	37.3
Binjhia	48.3	0.4	0.4	50.9
Birhor	75.5	6.4	0.9	17.2
Birjia	20	32	0.4	47.6
Chero	94.5	0.3	0.5	4.7
Chik Baraik	61.5	3.6	0.5	34.4
Gond	57.7	0.6	0.3	41.4
Gorait	67.1	0.9	0.4	31.6
Ho	3.9	2.1	0.3	93.7
Karmali	91	0.2	0.3	8.5
Kawar	92.2	0.8	0.4	6.6
Kharia	9.2	68	0.7	22.1
Kharwar	89.4	0.2	0.3	10.1
Khond	66.7	15.7	0.5	17.1
Kisan, Nagesia	36.5	3	0.5	60
Kol	89.4	1.1	1.5	8
Kora, Mudi -Kora	86.1	1.4	0.3	12.2
Korwa	84	2.3	0.5	13.2
Lohra	56	3.4	0.8	39.8
Mahli	61.6	5.7	0.4	32.3
Mal Paharia, Kumarbhadg Paharia	78.7	18.1	0.6	2.6
Munda, Patar	17.3	32.7	0.6	49.4
Oraon, Dhangar (Oraon)	10.2	26.8	0.6	62.4
Parhaiya	88.9	1.5	0.5	9.1
Santal	54.3	8.6	0.5	36.6
Sauria Paharia	43.8	52.7	0.6	2.9
Savar	72.8	1.5	1	24.7

6. Bilingualism among Adivasis of Jharkhand

Community/Tribes	Total Speakers	Most Common Second Language	Bilinguals (Per centage of second most common language to total speakers)
Banjara	487	Hindi	75.8
Bathudi	3464	Bengali	74.6
Bedia	100161	Hindi	85.4
Bhumij	209448	Bengali	67.3
Biaga	3582	Hindi	95.6
Binjhia	14404	Hindi	92.8
Chero	95575	Hindi	99.7
Chik Baraik	54163	Hindi	96.7
Gond	53676	Hindi	67.4
Gorait	4973	Hindi	75.8
Ho	928289	Ho, Hindi	98.0
Karmali	64154	Hindi	97
Kawar	8145	Hindi	91.8
Kharia	196135	Kharia	67.5
Kharwar	248974	Hindi	99.5
Khond	221	Hindi	69.2
Kisan Nagesia	37265	Hindi	93.5
Kol	53586	Santali	36.6
Kora, Mudi Kora	32786	Bengali	47.6
Lohra	216256	Hindi	86.7
Mahli	152663	Hindi	55.1
Munda	1229221	Mundari	67.2
Oraon	1716618	Kuruk/Oraon	53.2
Santal	2754723	Santali	98.1
PVTGs			
Asur	22459	Hindi	53.2
Birhor	10726	Hindi	37.3
Birjia	6276	Mundari	65.2
Korwa	35606	Hindi	95.3
Mal Paharia	135797	Malto	73.1
Parhaiya	25585	Hindi	96.1
Sauria Paharia	46222	Malto	97.6
Savar	9688	Bengali	62.7

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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Ashwani Kumar, a PhD in Economics, works extensively in the fields of public policy, poverty and inequality and rural development.

Madan Sarkar, a PhD in economics, has been involved in socio-economic and demographic studies for the last four decades.

B. K. N. Singh, is trained in history, and has been involved especially in field-level researches for nearly three decades.

Divya Singh, studied and focuses on gender, livelihoods and education in Adivasi areas.

The Adivasi civilization of Chhotanagpur and Santhal Pargana is a treasure, not only for India but for the entire world. This engaging report will help us all to value that civilization and learn from it.

—*Jean Dreze*

This book highlights the deep-rooted values of democracy, equality and ecological sustainability amongst the Adivasis of Jharkhand, while at the same time pointing to the persistent disadvantages they confront in modern India.

—*Nitya Rao*

Being an Adivasi and having been working in the community for more than three decades, I can visualize the realities of the report presented.

—*Boro Baski*

A well written document which is easy to read and understand. I highly recommend this book to those seeking to understand the current thinking of the Adivasi.

—*Jayant Jaypal Singh*

The present volume would be of immense help to the tribal social movements and the policy makers as well.

—*Samar Bosu Mullick*

This book is a rare feat of comprehensive and systematic engagement with each Adivasi community in Jharkhand.

—*Virginus Xaxa*

This is a landmark scholarly volume that re-examines the historical, cultural, and developmental journeys of Jharkhand's Adivasi communities. The book combines empirical rigour with deep interpretive insight to present a nuanced understanding of Adivasi life, identity, and struggle. Moving beyond welfare-oriented or assimilationist perspectives, it introduces the transformative idea of "peoplehood" —highlighting Adivasi moral, ecological, and spiritual frameworks as vital alternatives for rethinking development and democracy. Rich in data yet sensitive to lived realities, this work serves as both an academic intervention and a moral call to recognise Adivasis as co-citizens, knowledge-keepers, and essential partners in shaping a more just and sustainable future.

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