



DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF SOCIO AND ECONOMIC STATUS OF BAIGA TRIBE: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CHHATTISGARH

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Abstract

India's multicultural landscape is enriched by the presence of Scheduled Tribes (STs), including the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), known for their distinct cultural identities and challenging socioeconomic conditions. The Baiga community, a prominent PVTG in Chhattisgarh, exemplifies this intersection of cultural heritage and vulnerability. Characterized by their close association with forests, the Baigas practice subsistence activities such as shifting cultivation, hunting, and gathering forest produce. However, geographic isolation, limited access to education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities exacerbate their socioeconomic challenges.

This paper explores the cultural characteristics, demographic distribution, and socioeconomic conditions of the Baiga community while linking these aspects to two Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Goal 1: No Poverty and Goal 15: Life on Land. Efforts to alleviate poverty among the Baigas must prioritize culturally sensitive development interventions that respect their traditional knowledge and practices. Additionally, the Baigas' deep ecological understanding contributes to sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation, underscoring their role in achieving Goal 15. This study emphasizes the need for inclusive policies that integrate the Baigas into development frameworks while preserving their cultural identity and promoting environmental sustainability. Balancing development with cultural and ecological preservation is crucial for the holistic empowerment of this vulnerable yet invaluable community.

Keywords- SDGs Goal 1: No Poverty, SDGs Goal 15: Life on Land, cultural characteristics, issues and challenges for Baiga tribes.

INTRODUCTION

India is home to a vast array of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups, with its tribal population forming an integral part of this diversity. Among these, the Scheduled Tribes (STs), commonly referred to as Adivasis, represent the indigenous communities of the nation. According to the 2011 Census, more than 705 groups are officially recognized as STs, constituting 8.6% of the total population. These communities predominantly inhabit rural areas, showcasing distinct cultural traditions, languages, and geographic spread. However, within the broader tribal population, a segment known as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) faces significant challenges due to their marginalized status. These communities are characterized by their primitive traits, unique cultural practices, geographic isolation, and limited contact with mainstream society. Unlike other tribal groups, PVTGs are particularly disadvantaged, often relying on traditional subsistence activities such as hunting, fishing, and gathering forest products for survival. Among these PVTGs, the Baiga community of Chhattisgarh stands out due to its distinct cultural identity and traditional way of life known for their close connection with nature, the Baiga have historically

been forest dwellers, relying on the surrounding environment for their livelihood. However, the community faces numerous socioeconomic challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. This paper seeks to delve into the cultural characteristics, demographic distribution, and socioeconomic conditions of the Baiga community, highlighting the unique challenges they face in contemporary India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mal, P., & Saikia, N. (2024) the study explored women's empowerment within matrilineal and patrilineal societies, highlighting the influence of lineage, tradition, geography, and socio-economic factors. While matrilineal systems offer better decision-making power and socio-economic opportunities, they do not ensure empowerment in all aspects of life. Patrilineal societies may limit women's opportunities but provide less justification for domestic violence. The study emphasizes the need for cultural-specific analyses of empowerment and the impact of factors like religion, wealth, and modern ideas. It suggests targeted programs, such as community awareness campaigns and skill-building initiatives, to challenge traditional gender roles and promote gender equality in both societal structures.

Ahmed, M., & Mushtaq, M. (2023) the study examined the challenges faced by the Gujjar Bakarwal tribal community in Poonch district, Jammu and Kashmir, particularly regarding access to healthcare. Tribal populations in India, dispersed across remote areas, struggle with poor infrastructure, limited medical staff, and lack of awareness about government schemes. Cultural beliefs, like restricting food intake during pregnancy to ease delivery, further complicate health outcomes. Traditional customs and superstitions often outweigh modern medical practices. The study highlights the urgent need for improved healthcare facilities, education, and awareness to address these issues in the region.

Rupavath, R. (2023) the study highlighted the critical role of education in the development and welfare of marginalized tribal communities in India. Despite some progress, tribal children's participation in education remains low, and the pace of development is slow. The current "banking system" of education needs to be replaced with more engaging methods that align with tribal aspirations. Acknowledging and integrating tribal culture into the curriculum can enhance learning experiences and retention. Sensitizing educational institutions to tribal needs is crucial for inclusive growth. By doing so, schools can serve as catalysts for change, promoting the social, economic, and political empowerment of tribal communities.

Das, S., & Mohapatra, S. S. (2023) the study examined the relationship between socioeconomic and psychological factors and tribal farmers' information-seeking behaviour. It finds that age negatively correlates with information-seeking, while gender, education, income, family size, outward orientation, training, and social participation positively influence it. These factors shape how tribal farmers manage information, impacting their farming practices and well-being. Recognizing this interplay is crucial for creating targeted policies that address the challenges faced by tribal farmers, promoting sustainable agriculture, and preserving indigenous traditions. The study underscores the need for tailored interventions to support rural development and agricultural sustainability within tribal communities.

Chandrakar, K., Chandrakar, D. K., & Das, D. (2023) the study revealed that the NSSO (2009–10) reports that India's Scheduled Tribe population is 806.49 lakh, with 68.28 lakh in Chhattisgarh, constituting 38.34% of the state's population. The Hill Korwa tribe, one of Chhattisgarh's five primordial tribes, predominantly resides in rural, hilly, and forested regions. This tribe faces significant challenges, including poverty, high infant mortality, severe malnutrition, infectious diseases, and low literacy rates, resulting in extremely slow development. The study emphasizes the need for a distinct policy and administrative framework to effectively address these issues and promote sustainable development within the Hill Korwa communities.

Babu, R., & Panda, A. N. (2016) authors have found in his study that the Baiga tribe, known for their unique lifestyle, culture, medicinal skills, and handicraft production, offers valuable insights into societal growth. With proper support, they can preserve their traditions while contributing to national development. However, tribal areas in central and northeastern India face severe conflict, particularly between the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and the Indian state. Tribal civilians, especially in regions like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha, are the most affected by this violence. The state's counter-insurgency initiative, Salwa Judum, has exacerbated the situation, resulting in widespread atrocities such as rapes, murders, and looting.

OBJECTIVE

1. To examine the socio-economic condition of Baiga tribes in Chhattisgarh.
2. To examine the demographic distribution of Baiga tribes in Chhattisgarh.
3. To explore the cultural characteristics of Baiga tribes in Chhattisgarh.
4. To evaluate the issues and challenge among Baiga tribes in Chhattisgarh.
5. To evaluate the government initiative taken for upliftment of Baiga tribes in Chhattisgarh.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive and explorative in nature and based on secondary data which have been collected from national sample survey office, UNICEF data, data of ministry of tribal affairs, census report of 2011, review academic papers, articles, and reports on STs and PVTGs to understand historical and cultural contexts.

Demographic and Socio-Economic status of Baiga Tribe:

S.No.	Factor	Description
1.	Origin	The Baigas are considered the original inhabitants of the Earth, with mythology stating that Nanga Baiga, their ancestor, was gifted an ax by God to cultivate grain and live in forests.
2.	Occupation	Primarily forest dwellers, skilled in swidden (Bewar) agriculture, hunting, fishing, and collecting forest produce. They also possess deep knowledge of medicinal plants and herbs.
3.	Housing	Houses are made of clay, with grass or thatch roofs. Walls are painted with white or yellow soil, and floors are coated with cow dung and mud.
4.	Food Habits	Staple foods include grains like Kodo, Kutki, corn, wheat, and legumes. Pej (a beverage) and Mahua liquor are important elements of their diet
5.	Clothing	Men wear short dhotis and sleeveless waistcoats; Women traditionally wear lugra, though sarees are now common. Jewellery includes bead necklaces, silver bracelets, and armlets.
6.	Market	Weekly village markets are essential for selling forest products like grains, fruits, vegetables, goats, chickens, and bamboo crafts and purchased by this income other goods like salt, spices, oil etc which don't produce by them.
7.	Dance and Music	Folk dances like Karma, Dadaria, and Vilma Nach are popular, performed with drums like Mandar during festivals and ceremonies.
8.	Marriage Rituals	Marriages are arranged early, typically between the ages of 13-18. Types of marriage include Lamsena (Seva), Chori Vivah, and remarriage (Khadoni).
9.	Death Rituals	The deceased are buried, and rituals like Dashakaram are observed on the 10th day, followed by a feast.
10.	Judicial System	Traditional panchayats with officials like Mukaddam and Diwan handle disputes and fines related to marriage, divorce, and immoral relations.
11.	Festivals and Deities	Festivals include Hareli, Pola, Diwali, and Holi. Main deities include Budha Deva, Thakur Dev, Dharti Mata, Khairmai. Offerings of goats, pigs, and alcohol are common in worship.
12.	Language	Speak Baigani among themselves, which has influences from Chhattisgarhi and Gondi. Hindi is used for interactions with outsiders.
13.	Tattoo (Godna)	Baiga women are heavily tattooed, with tattoos signifying cultural identity and attractiveness. Tattoos are done by women from the community, called Godnaharin.
14.	Population	As per the 2011 census, the Baiga population in Chhattisgarh was 89,744, mainly found in Kawardha and Bilaspur districts.
15.	Literacy	Literacy rate was recorded at 40.6% in the 2011 census.
16.		

Secondary source: <https://cgtrti.gov.in/baiga>

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES AMONG BAIGA TRIBE:**1. Loss of Traditional Livelihoods**

The Baiga traditionally practiced *bewar* or shifting cultivation, but this has been restricted by the government due to concerns about deforestation. This has forced the Baigas to abandon their age-old practices, leading to loss of livelihood and food insecurity. Many Baiga families do not have secure land ownership rights, leaving them vulnerable to land grabbing, eviction, and encroachments by outsiders.

2. Health Issues

A significant portion of the Baiga population suffers from malnutrition, especially women and children. Due to limited access to healthcare facilities and nutritious food, health problems like anemia, stunted growth, and high infant mortality rates are prevalent. Tribal areas, including those where Baigas live, often lack adequate healthcare services. Traditional healing methods are common, but for critical health issues, they lack access to modern medical treatment.

3. Educational Backwardness

The Baiga community has one of the lowest literacy rates in Chhattisgarh. Cultural isolation, poverty, and lack of access to schools are significant barriers to education. Since the Baiga speak their own dialect, many children find it difficult to understand the curriculum taught in mainstream schools, which often use Hindi or English, further discouraging them from attending school.

4. Environmental Degradation

Large-scale deforestation and mining activities in Chhattisgarh have significantly reduced the forest cover that Baiga depends on for food, medicinal plants, and livelihood. This has led to loss of biodiversity and disrupted their traditional way of life. The construction of dams, mining operations, and other development projects has led to the displacement of Baiga families from their ancestral lands.

5. Lack of Political Representation

The Baiga tribe is often underrepresented in local governance structures, which limits their ability to influence decisions that impact their lives, such as land rights, healthcare, and education policies. This marginalization hampers their ability to secure development schemes meant for tribal welfare.

INITIATIVES OF GOVERNMENT TOWARDS BAIGA TRIBES IN CHHATTISGARH:

The government of India, along with the state government of Chhattisgarh, has taken several initiatives aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of the Baiga tribe. These initiatives focus on their rights, livelihood, education, healthcare, and overall development. Some initiatives are following:

1. Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) Development Scheme:

The Baiga tribe is classified as a PVTG, which means they are prioritized for special government programs. The PVTG Development Scheme aims to ensure livelihood support, health, education, and basic services like housing and drinking water. Under this scheme, the government provides financial assistance for housing, skills development, and other necessary infrastructure to improve the living standards of Baiga families. Focus is given on health interventions to reduce malnutrition and infant mortality among the Baiga population.

2. Baiga Development Agency (BDA):

The Baiga Development Agency was established to focus specifically on the needs of the Baiga community. The agency coordinates various government welfare programs to ensure their effective implementation. This includes programs related to healthcare, housing, livelihood promotion, and skills training, aimed at uplifting the socio-economic status of the Baiga tribe.

3. Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:

The Forest Rights Act recognizes the rights of forest-dwelling tribes, including the Baiga, to own and cultivate land in forest areas. This law allows Baiga families to claim ownership of land they have been traditionally cultivating. The implementation of FRA in Chhattisgarh has provided legal ownership to some Baiga families, helping them secure their livelihoods and prevent forced evictions.

4. Healthcare Initiatives:

Special focus has been placed on improving healthcare services in tribal areas through mobile health clinics and primary healthcare centres. Under the National Health Mission and Tribal Health Program, special drives are conducted to address high malnutrition and infant mortality rates among the Baiga. Regular health camps are organized, and nutritional supplements are provided to pregnant women and children. Ayushman Bharat and Sanchar

Kranti Yojana are also extended to Baiga families, providing them with access to free healthcare services and telemedicine consultations.

5. Education and Residential Schools

The government has set up Ashram Schools (residential schools) and Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) for tribal students, including Baigas, to improve access to education. These schools aim to provide quality education and encourage higher enrollment of Baiga children, especially girls, by offering free lodging, meals, and educational materials. Scholarships for Tribal Students are available through schemes like the Post Matric Scholarship and Pre Matric Scholarship to encourage Baiga students to pursue higher education.

6. Livelihood and Employment Programs

The Baiga people take benefit from Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which guarantees 100 days of wage employment. This has provided temporary employment opportunities and helped in the development of infrastructure in Baiga villages. The government, through various tribal welfare schemes, offers skill development training in areas like traditional handicrafts, agriculture, and forest-based livelihoods to improve the income-generating capacity of the Baiga community.

7. Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) / Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY):

Housing programs like Indira Awas Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana have been extended to Baiga families, providing them with financial assistance to build pucca houses (concrete homes). These initiatives help improve living conditions in Baiga villages.

CONCLUSIONS:

The Baiga tribe is a deeply rooted indigenous community in Central India, with a rich cultural heritage that reflects a strong connection to the land and forests. Their origin myths, traditional occupations like swidden agriculture, hunting, and knowledge of medicinal plants highlight their close relationship with nature. Though modernization has brought changes in their attire, housing, and market practices, their distinct traditions, such as the Godna (tattooing), folk dances, and rituals, remain integral to their identity.

Despite socio-economic challenges, including limited literacy (40.6% as per the 2011 census), the Baigas have maintained a unique cultural identity. Their tribal panchayats, traditional marriage customs, and death rituals preserve their autonomy in societal matters. However, the tribe faces growing pressures from external influences, including changes in agricultural practices and economic activities. Efforts to enhance their literacy, socio-economic conditions, and preserve their cultural traditions are essential for their sustainable development while respecting their heritage.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The limitation of this study is that it is based on the census report of 2011 and the report and research paper which I have used in this study is also based on the same. This study is also limited to Chhattisgarh state and related to particular type of tribe that is Baiga tribe. The findings may be vary as variation of region and data.

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