

Challenges and Progress: The Journey of Kutia Kondh Development

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Abstract: *In the past, during India's Fifth Five Year Plan, a special category called Primitive Tribal Group (PTG) was created under Scheduled Tribes. These groups were characterized by living in a way similar to ancient times, relying on hunting and gathering for survival, having very few children or even decreasing population, and having very low levels of education compared to other tribal groups. However, in 2009, the Government of India decided to change the name from "Primitive Tribal Group" to "Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)" because some people felt that the word 'primitive' was disrespectful. Odisha, a state in India, has 13 communities classified as PTGs, and one of them is the Kutia Kondh community. This study looked at the Kutia Kondh people who live in villages managed by the Kutia Kondh Development Agency (KKDA) in Belghar, part of the Baliguda area in the Kandhamal district. The research compared important measures of progress for the Kutia Kondh community over two different time periods using surveys that examined their social and economic situations. The study also included information about the Kutia Kondh way of life gathered through ethnographic research. The study finds that the Kutia Kondh people are in a transition phase, balancing between their traditional way of life and modern influences. While socio - economic development initiatives have brought significant changes to their culture and lifestyle, many traditional practices still endure. However, when examining various factors, Kutia Kondh villages still lag behind in access to essential facilities like infrastructure, education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities. Key concerns include inadequate infrastructure, limited connectivity, housing issues, lack of clean drinking water and electricity, poor education and healthcare services, and insufficient support for livelihood improvement. It's crucial to not only focus on development efforts to enhance their socio - economic status but also to preserve their unique culture and traditions. Efforts should be directed towards both improving living conditions and safeguarding their cultural heritage.*

Keywords: Development indicators, Livelihood, Transition phase, Socio - economic development

The Kondhs are the principal inhabitants of Boudh and Kandhamal. Being Dravidian in origin they were living in this track of the country before the advent of the Aryans. They have been classified under the ancient Gondi race of the Proto - Austroloid group.

The Kutia Kondh people are a subgroup of the Kondh community and are mainly found in the Baliguda area, which used to be part of Phulbani and is now in the Kandhamal district. They were previously classified as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG) but are now called Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG). Most of them live in the Belghar area of the Tumudibandh block and the Kotagarh area.

This study focuses on the Kutia Kondh people living in the Belghar area, which falls under the Kutia Kondh Development Agency (KKDA). The KKDA is located between specific latitude and longitude coordinates. Belghar is about 30 km from Tumudibandh and 65 km from Baliguda, towards Muniguda in the Rayagada district. It's situated at an altitude of 2255 feet above sea level and covers an area of 300 square kilometers.

The climate in Belghar varies, with temperatures reaching up to 35°C in summer and dropping to around 3°C in winter. The region receives an average annual rainfall of 1360 mm. The soil here is mainly of the Red Lateritic Group type.

Primitive tribal groups (PTGs)

Back in the 1960s, the Dhebar Commission pointed out that not all Scheduled Tribes were progressing at the same rate. To address this disparity, during the Fifth Five Year Plan, a

specific subgroup was carved out within the Scheduled Tribes category. This subgroup was called "Primitive Tribal Group" (PTGs). PTGs were identified based on certain characteristics: they typically lived through hunting and gathering rather than farming, their population either stayed the same or decreased, and their literacy rates were notably lower compared to other tribal groups.

By the end of the Fifth Five Year Plan, 52 communities were recognized as "Primitive Tribal Groups" (PTGs). During the Sixth Five Year Plan, 20 more groups were included, followed by 2 additional groups in the Seventh Five Year Plan, and 1 more group in the Eighth Five - Year Plan, bringing the total number of PTGs to 75. State governments recommended these communities for identification based on certain criteria.

In 2009, Government of India (GoI) decided to re - designate "Primitive Tribal Group" (PTG) as "Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)" considering the complaints that the term 'primitive' is value loaded.

Odisha has the largest number of PTGs (13) among the States and Union Territories of India. They are the Bonda, Birhor, Didayi, Paudi Bhuyan, Lanjia Saora, Hill Kharia, Mankirdia, Kutia Kondh, Dongria Kondh, Juang, Chuktia Bhunjia, Lodha and Saora. These PTGs were identified in Odisha during different plan periods starting from 5th Plan period (1974 - 79).

General Characteristics of PTGs

'In common parlance, the term primitive means simple - ness and antiquity. The commonly agreed cultural traits of

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primitive people are (1) homogeneity, (2) small population, (3) relative physical isolation, (4) social institutions are cast in a simple mould, (5) absence of a written language (6) relatively simple technology and (7) a slower rate of change. In the present context the group of aboriginals who continue to pursue an archaic way of life and absorb the changes slowly are distinguished as PTGs' (Ota & Mohanty, 2015).

Tribal communities, who carry on pre - agricultural activities for their survival, have been classified as so called Primitive Tribal Groups. Government of India have selected four criteria for identifying Primitive Tribal Groups. The criteria are: (1) pre - agricultural level of technology and economy, (ii) very low rate of literacy, (iii) declining or near stagnant population, and (iv) general backwardness due to seclusion, and consequential archaic mode of living.

The so called Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) are indeed vulnerable and techno - economically backward. Their habitats are natural and serene. Development of infrastructure in their habitats is utterly inadequate. They have perfectly adapted to their eco - system, and lead a very simple life like natural men. However, it is ridiculous to brand them as "primitive". This epithet is value - loaded and means primeval, or aboriginal and archaic. When the mankind is at the threshold of Twenty - first Century there should be rethinking about these Colonial and Imperial jargons. "Primitive" is the word commonly used to describe the tribes with whom anthropologists have been traditionally concerned. (Behura and Mohanti, 1998)

'Now Government of India has adopted the term Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group by replacing its earlier nomenclature Primitive Tribal Groups while keeping the abbreviation the same i. e., PTG for the purpose of classification and identification of a tribe or a section of it on the basis of the main criteria, like: - (i) Stagnant or diminishing population, (ii) Very low level of literacy, (iii) Low level of techno - economy i. e., subsistence level of economy associated with pre agricultural stage of hunting, foods gathering and shifting cultivation (iv) relative physical isolation'. (Ota & Mohanty: 2015)

'With the vision of comprehensive development of the PTGs, the concept of micro level planning was introduced in the country in the year 1975 - 76. This envisages integrated and comprehensive development of the Micro Project areas in which various programmes irrespective of the sources of funding can be implemented in unison to achieve the common goal of bringing the area at par with other areas and to improve the quality of life of the primitive tribes' (Ota, 2015).

Kutia Kandha Development Agency, Belghar was established in the year 1978 - 79 during 5th Five Year Plan (1979 - 80) and registered under the Society Registration Act, 1960.

Socio - cultural and economic life of Kutia Kondh

The Kutia Kondh people identify themselves through terms like Kondh, Kutti, and Kui. They believe their origins trace back to emerging from holes in a forest, hence their name. Their language, Kui, is a Dravidian language, slightly

different from other Kondh communities. While some Kutia Kondhs speak Oriya alongside Kui, maintaining connections with mainstream society, their traditional language remains central to their identity.

In Kutia Kondh villages, houses are arranged in rows facing each other, symbolizing unity. These houses, called ilu, are rectangular with gabled roofs and a high verandah. Traditional construction materials include Sal poles, bamboo, and mud walls. The village layout centers around a Meria pole for sacrifices, with kitchen gardens and cattle sheds in the backyard.

Family structure is patriarchal, with nuclear families predominant. Property inheritance follows customary laws, and lineage is exogamous, meaning people marry outside their clan. Nine main clans exist within Kutia society, with lineage determining family composition and roles in rituals and ceremonies.

Food primarily consists of forest resources like cereals, pulses, meat, and tubers. Gruel, made from rice and millets, is a staple. Alcohol consumption includes toddy from palm trees and liquor distilled from fruits. Tobacco is also used.

Economically, Kutia Kondhs rely on slash - and - burn cultivation, supplemented by food gathering and occasional hunting. Division of labor is based on gender, with women mainly responsible for household tasks and men for heavy labor.

Political organization is decentralized, with the village head, called Majhi, resolving disputes and representing the village in external affairs. Religion revolves around nature worship, with various deities believed to reside in natural elements. Festivals and ceremonies are significant, accompanied by traditional dances like Kedu, Meria, and Dhangada Dhangidi.

Overall, Kutia Kondh life revolves around their language, traditional practices, and close relationship with nature, despite some integration with mainstream society.

Development and Change of Kutia Kondh under the KKDA

The Kutia Kondh community, monitored by the Kutia Kondh Development Agency (KKDA), has seen changes over the years in various aspects of life.

Population - wise, the tribe's numbers have increased by about 16.50% from 2007 to 2015, with both males and females contributing to this growth. This increase reflects positive development, with the sex ratio also improving slightly.

Education - wise, there's been a slight rise in literacy rates, from 44% in 2007 to 45.71% in 2015. This puts them above the state average for Scheduled Tribes. Both men and women have shown improvement in literacy, outpacing the overall ST population in Odisha.

Infrastructure has seen notable improvements, with around 80% of villages now connected by motorable roads. However, there are still areas lacking road access, causing

difficulties in accessing essential services like healthcare and education.

Electricity access has improved significantly, with around 38% of villages electrified in 2015 compared to only 23.5% in 2007. However, solar power remains the main source of energy, and there's a need for more widespread electricity provision.

Access to safe drinking water has increased, with 94% of villages having tube wells in 2015 compared to 79% in 2007. However, some villages still face challenges during dry spells, relying on open sources for water.

Sanitation remains a concern, with open defecation prevalent due to a lack of toilet facilities and water access. Insufficient sanitation contributes to health issues like malaria and diarrhea.

In terms of facilities, while most villages have Anganwadi Centers, improvements are needed in supplementary nutrition provisions. Market access is limited, with few grocery shops, and most Kutia Kondhs rely on the Public Distribution System for essentials.

Livelihoods primarily depend on shifting cultivation, supplemented by wage labor and NTFP collection. Crop diversity is essential for food and economic security, with millets and oilseeds being prominent crops. However, soil erosion and poor land conditions pose challenges.

Migration is also observed, with some youth seeking opportunities in other states.

Overall, while there have been improvements in various aspects of life for the Kutia Kondh community, challenges remain in infrastructure, sanitation, and livelihoods. Continued support and interventions are necessary to address these issues and ensure sustainable development for the community.

Development and change

The Kutia Kondh people are experiencing a shift from their traditional way of life to a more modern lifestyle. They've seen significant changes in their culture and daily routines due to various socio-economic development efforts. While they've embraced some modern practices, they've also held onto many of their traditional customs.

The government and non-governmental organizations have played a big role in this transformation. They've introduced programs aimed at improving living standards and overall well-being. These efforts focus on areas like health, education, sanitation, environmental conservation, and infrastructure development.

In terms of agriculture, there's been a move towards modern techniques such as using better seeds, irrigation systems, and assistance with farming inputs. These changes are expected to continue shaping the Kutia Kondh community's future.

Recently, young women from the Kutia Kondh community have been finding employment opportunities in road construction projects as daily wage laborers or working for

contractors. Some have ventured into small businesses and trading. Additionally, a few Kutia Kondh individuals have started using motorbikes, indicating a shift towards modern transportation methods.

The presence of development organizations and welfare institutions has played a significant role in transforming the lives of the Kutia Kondh people. These include public health centers, police check posts, agricultural extension offices, veterinary hospitals, post offices, weekly markets, large stores, banks, and LAMPS (Local Area Mutual Benefit Societies). These institutions have contributed to the changing dynamics of the Kutia Kondh community by providing essential services and fostering economic opportunities.

Conclusion

When we compare Kutia Kondh villages with nearby urban areas, it's clear they are significantly behind in terms of basic facilities and infrastructure. There's an urgent need to improve their living conditions and raise their Human Development Indicators (HDI). Critical areas needing attention include better infrastructure, like roads and buildings, improved connectivity, housing, clean drinking water, reliable electricity, education, healthcare, and nutrition. Additionally, livelihood opportunities, irrigation for farming, social security, and skill development are crucial.

Efforts are needed not only for their economic development but also to preserve their unique culture and traditions. It's important to design programs that address these challenges and ensure the well-being of the Kutia Kondh community.

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