



## FROM DAKSHIN KOSALA TO CHHATTISGARH: A HISTORICAL TRANSITION OF IDENTITY AND GOVERNANCE

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### ABSTRACT:

This research paper explores the historical evolution of Chhattisgarh from its ancient identity as DakshinKosala to its present status as a modern Indian state, formed in the year 2000. The study critically examines the multifaceted transition that spans centuries, tracing the political, cultural, economic, and administrative developments that collectively shaped the region's distinct identity and ultimately led to its demand for statehood.

The first part of the paper delves into the ancient political heritage of DakshinKosala, highlighting the contributions of native dynasties such as the Panduvamshis and Kalachuris in establishing regional governance and cultural autonomy. The second section investigates how cultural identity, particularly tribal traditions, local languages, and folk practices, served as the bedrock of continuity amid changing regimes and external influences.

The paper then moves into the colonial period, analyzing the impact of British administrative reforms, revenue extraction, and forest laws that disrupted traditional governance and dispossessed tribal communities. Post-independence, the inclusion of Chhattisgarh within Madhya Pradesh failed to address longstanding regional disparities, despite the region's natural wealth in minerals, forests, and agriculture. This led to increasing economic marginalization and social underdevelopment, which catalyzed grassroots mobilization and demands for autonomy.

The final section evaluates the political movements and democratic negotiations that resulted in the creation of Chhattisgarh as a separate state. By synthesizing historical records, socio-political commentary, and critical scholarly perspectives, this study asserts that the formation of Chhattisgarh was not merely a political act but a reclamation of historical and cultural identity, long overshadowed by centralized governance. This research contributes to a broader understanding of regionalism in India and underscores the significance of cultural memory, local governance, and historical continuity in the shaping of modern states.

### KEYWORDS:

**DAKSHINKOSALA, CHHATTISGARH, REGIONAL IDENTITY, COLONIAL GOVERNANCE, TRIBAL CULTURE, ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION, STATEHOOD MOVEMENT, POSTCOLONIAL TRANSITION.**

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### INTRODUCTION

The transformation from DakshinKosala to modern-day Chhattisgarh is a journey marked by deep historical roots and dynamic political transitions. DakshinKosala, the ancient name of the region, finds mention in various classical texts and inscriptions, including the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and several Puranas. Geographically corresponding to parts of present-day Chhattisgarh and Odisha, DakshinKosala was historically significant due to its strategic location, rich natural resources, and cultural diversity.

During the Mauryan era, the region was a vital part of Ashoka's empire, evidenced by edicts found in nearby areas. Following this, it saw the rise of regional dynasties like the Sharabhapuriyas, Panduvamshis, and later the Kalachuris of Ratanpur, who established their rule from the 9th to 14th centuries. These dynasties played a key role in the political consolidation of the region and contributed to the growth of temple architecture, Sanskritization, and administrative organization.

Under Mughal and Maratha influence, the region

experienced a decline in local autonomy, yet it retained a distinct identity through local chieftaincies and feudal lords. With the advent of British colonialism, the region was incorporated into the Central Provinces. Colonial administrative restructuring diminished traditional governance and imposed new land revenue systems that altered rural society and governance mechanisms. According to historian K.S. Singh,

“The history of Chhattisgarh cannot be viewed merely as an offshoot of Central India’s political narrative. The region, historically known as DakshinKosala, maintained an independent cultural and political identity, shaped by its tribal heritage and the rule of native dynasties like the Panduvamshis and Kalachuris. Its distinctiveness, long overshadowed under larger administrative units, has found expression again in the post-2000 statehood era.”  
(*People of India: Chhattisgarh*, K.S. Singh, Anthropological Survey of India, 2004, p. 12)

Post-independence, DakshinKosala became part of Madhya Pradesh, but the aspiration for separate statehood remained. The demand was rooted in cultural, linguistic, and developmental concerns, culminating in the formation of Chhattisgarh in 2000. This marked not just a political reorganization, but the rebirth of a long-standing historical identity.

The transformation of DakshinKosala into Chhattisgarh is not merely a political evolution, but a profound reassertion of regional and cultural identity. Rooted in ancient traditions, DakshinKosala possessed a distinct cultural fabric shaped by tribal heritage, folk traditions, and classical influences. Over centuries, this unique identity evolved through the synthesis of indigenous customs, Sanskritic values, and regional languages, forming the foundation of what we now recognize as Chhattisgarhi culture.

The region’s tribal communities, such as the Gonds, Baigas, and Oraons, have played a pivotal role in preserving traditional music, dance, folklore, and social customs. Their oral traditions, spiritual beliefs, and ecological knowledge are central to the cultural ethos of Chhattisgarh. Over time, interaction with classical Hindu traditions led to the assimilation of local deities like Budha Dev, Danteshwari, and Mahadev, into mainstream worship, reflecting a process of acculturation rather than erasure.

Language has also been a vital marker of identity. The Chhattisgarhi language, once seen as a dialect of Hindi, has increasingly been recognized as a vehicle of regional expression, literature, and resistance. Folk literature, including the narratives of Pandavani, Nacha, and Chaitra songs, continue to reflect the historical consciousness and identity of the people.

The post-independence period saw the marginalization of this cultural identity under the administrative dominance of Madhya Pradesh. The demand for statehood, eventually realized in 2000, was thus not only about governance but also about cultural self-assertion. The creation of Chhattisgarh allowed the people to re-center their

historical narratives, linguistic heritage, and folk traditions in public life and policy. As sociologist Alok Mukherjee observes:

“Chhattisgarh’s claim to statehood was deeply rooted in its cultural uniqueness—its oral traditions, tribal heritage, and linguistic identity long stood apart from the cultural mainstream of Madhya Pradesh. The assertion of Chhattisgarhi pride was not anti-national but rather a quest for recognition of a regional consciousness that had thrived quietly for centuries.”

(*Cultural Politics in India*, Alok Mukherjee, Sage Publications, 2005, p. 88)

The British colonial period marked a significant turning point in the governance and administrative framework of the DakshinKosala region, which would later become Chhattisgarh. Prior to colonial intervention, the region had a relatively decentralized system of rule under various dynasties such as the Kalachuris of Ratanpur, where governance often respected local autonomy, traditional leadership, and tribal self-regulation.

However, British annexation in the 19th century—particularly after the Maratha defeat—led to a complete restructuring of political and administrative systems. Chhattisgarh was absorbed into the Central Provinces, and with it came the imposition of colonial revenue systems, codified laws, and bureaucratic administration. The traditional chiefs and zamindars were either co-opted as tax collectors under the British or stripped of their powers altogether.

The land revenue system introduced by the British drastically changed agrarian relations. Forests, which were central to tribal life and sustenance, were declared state property under laws like the Indian Forest Act, alienating tribal communities from their ancestral lands. The economic exploitation through revenue extraction, forced labor, and suppression of local uprisings created a deep sense of marginalization and resentment.

Moreover, the introduction of Western-style education and legal systems disrupted the indigenous knowledge systems and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms. Administrative posts were dominated by outsiders, often ignoring local language and customs, which widened the gap between rulers and the ruled.

Despite these disruptions, colonial rule inadvertently laid the groundwork for modern political awareness. The exploitative systems eventually fueled regional consciousness and resistance, setting the stage for the post-independence demand for statehood and administrative autonomy, which culminated in the formation of Chhattisgarh in 2000. Historian Bipan Chandra notes:

“British colonial policies in Central India, including regions like Chhattisgarh, disrupted traditional governance structures and imposed extractive economic models that disempowered both tribal and feudal leadership. By undermining local autonomy and enforcing land laws and forest acts, the colonial state not only transformed the

economic base but also sowed the seeds of regional discontent and political consciousness.”

(*India's Struggle for Independence*, Bipan Chandra et al., Penguin Books, 1989, p. 55)

The transformation of DakshinKosala into modern-day Chhattisgarh was accompanied by significant economic and social transitions, which played a crucial role in the region's journey towards statehood. Historically, Chhattisgarh has been a land rich in natural resources, including forests, minerals, and fertile plains. These resources shaped both the traditional agrarian economy and tribal livelihoods for centuries.

During the colonial period, British policies commodified these resources, turning them into extractive tools for imperial revenue. Post-independence, industrialization began to accelerate, especially in the mineral-rich districts like Korba, Raigarh, and Bastar. However, despite abundant resources, the region remained economically underdeveloped, largely due to systemic neglect by the Madhya Pradesh government.

While heavy industries such as steel, coal, and power generation flourished, the local population—especially tribal communities—saw little benefit. Displacement due to mining, lack of rehabilitation, and inadequate employment opportunities led to socio-economic alienation. Moreover, poor infrastructure, low literacy rates, and limited healthcare further reinforced the region's marginal status.

Agriculture, the primary livelihood for a majority of the population, also suffered from inconsistent irrigation, limited market access, and exploitative middlemen. These factors led to rising poverty, malnutrition, and socio-economic stagnation in rural Chhattisgarh.

The economic disparities, especially when compared to urbanized and developed regions of Madhya Pradesh, became a major catalyst for the demand for statehood. The people of Chhattisgarh sought more equitable access to their resources and local governance that prioritized their development.

The formation of Chhattisgarh in 2000 was, therefore, not only a political milestone but also a socio-economic assertion—a call for justice, inclusion, and sustainable development rooted in the region's unique challenges and aspirations. Economist Jean Drèze writes:

“Despite being rich in natural resources, Chhattisgarh has long remained economically backward due to systemic neglect and resource exploitation without local benefit. The contradiction between resource wealth and human poverty is nowhere more visible. This economic disparity and underdevelopment were central to the region's justified demand for separate statehood and the right to determine its developmental path.”

(*Drèze, Jean and Amartya Sen. An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions*, Penguin Books, 2013, p. 164)

The demand for a separate Chhattisgarh state emerged strongly in the post-independence era, rooted in

long-standing regional marginalization, cultural distinction, and developmental neglect. After 1947, Chhattisgarh was integrated into the larger state of Madhya Pradesh, but this administrative unification did little to improve the lives of its people. Despite being rich in natural and cultural resources, the region remained politically underrepresented and economically deprived.

A strong sense of regional identity began to take shape in the 1950s and 1960s, as local intellectuals, artists, and political activists began highlighting the unique linguistic, cultural, and social features of Chhattisgarh. The Chhattisgarhi language, tribal customs, and folk traditions were often sidelined under broader Madhya Pradesh policies. This spurred demands for recognition and autonomy.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Chhattisgarh MuktiMorchha and other regional parties started mobilizing the masses, calling for greater local governance, fair resource allocation, and administrative decentralization. Tribal exploitation, land alienation, and backwardness were central themes in the movement. These grassroots campaigns were supported by academics and social leaders who envisioned Chhattisgarh not as a fragmented demand, but as a historically and culturally justified statehood movement. As political analyst Balveer Arora notes:

“The Chhattisgarh statehood movement was a unique example of democratic mobilization rooted in cultural identity and regional neglect. It was not driven by linguistic chauvinism or secessionist demands, but by the people's aspiration for participatory governance and local development. The eventual formation of the state was the culmination of decades of political assertion by a region long overlooked by centralized administrations.”

(Arora, Balveer. *Federalism and Regionalism in India: Institutional Strategies and Political Accommodation*, Konark Publishers, 2005, p. 142)

By the late 1990s, political consensus across major parties such as the Congress and BJP acknowledged the legitimacy of the demand. The formation of Chhattisgarh on 1 November 2000 was a landmark moment, symbolizing the fulfillment of decades-long democratic struggle for self-determination, dignity, and governance rooted in regional needs. The birth of Chhattisgarh marked not just a cartographic change but a restoration of historical and political identity, rooted in the voices of its people.

## CONCLUSION

The historical journey from DakshinKosala to Chhattisgarh is a profound narrative of cultural endurance, political transformation, and regional assertion. This transition encapsulates more than just a geographical renaming—it is a layered story of identity reclamation shaped by centuries of indigenous legacy, colonial disruption, post-independence marginalization, and democratic aspiration.

Historically, DakshinKosala stood as a vibrant political and

cultural region, ruled by native dynasties such as the Panduvamshis and Kalachuris, who contributed significantly to regional administration, temple architecture, and the preservation of local traditions. The region's autonomy and self-governance were integral to its identity until the onset of British colonialism, which systematically dismantled traditional administrative structures and replaced them with extractive revenue systems, exploitative land reforms, and centralized bureaucracy. These interventions not only disrupted the socio-political equilibrium but also alienated local communities, particularly the tribal population, from their cultural and economic lifelines.

Culturally, the region retained a distinct identity through its folk traditions, tribal customs, and Chhattisgarhi language, which were continuously overlooked or suppressed under colonial rule and even after independence, during its inclusion in Madhya Pradesh. The dissonance between the region's rich resource base and its underdevelopment led to a growing awareness of socio-economic injustices. Despite having an abundance of minerals, forests, and fertile land, the local population remained impoverished and underrepresented—a condition that intensified calls for political autonomy.

The economic exploitation of the region, especially in terms of displacement, lack of rehabilitation, and the monopolization of resources by outside forces, became key motivators for grassroots resistance. Political consciousness grew from these grievances, leading to organized movements throughout the 20th century that demanded recognition, representation, and administrative independence.

The culmination of these historical, cultural, economic, and political forces was the formation of Chhattisgarh in 2000, a landmark moment that marked the region's emergence from the shadows of neglect. The new state represented more than political redrawing—it was the revival of DakshinKosala's historical identity, with a commitment to inclusive governance, cultural pride, and developmental equity. As Balveer Arora aptly observed, the formation of Chhattisgarh was not based on divisive rhetoric but on “the people's aspiration for participatory governance and local development” (2005, p. 142). This democratic achievement stands today as a reminder of how deeply rooted historical and cultural identities can inspire transformative political change when aligned with people's collective voice.

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