



TRIBAL CULTURAL PRESERVATION WITH DEVELOPMENT OF PVTGS IN CHHATTISGARH: BALANCING TRADITION AND PROGRESS

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ABSTRACT:

This research examines the complex interface between cultural preservation and socio-economic development among Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in Chhattisgarh. With a population of 233,337 PVTGs across seven groups (Kamar, Baiga, Pahari Korwa, Birhor, Abujhmadia, Pando, and Bhujia) spread over 17 districts, the state presents a unique case study of development challenges and cultural preservation efforts. The study employs an ethnographic methodology combined with secondary data analysis to explore how development initiatives, , impact traditional cultural practices and community identity. Key findings reveal significant tensions between modernization pressures and cultural continuity, while also documenting successful interventions such as the creation of 362 Lakhpati Didis through the Chhattisgarh State Rural Livelihoods Mission. The research advocates for culturally sensitive, participatory development approaches that respect traditional knowledge systems while providing pathways for socio-economic advancement.[1][2][3]

KEYWORDS:

TRIBAL CULTURE, PVTG, CHHATTISGARH, CULTURAL PRESERVATION, DEVELOPMENT, BAIGA, KAMAR, PAHARI KORWA, SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS, TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Chhattisgarh, with over 40% forested land and a significant tribal population constituting 32% of the state's demographics, represents one of India's most culturally diverse regions. The state is home to seven Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) - communities identified by the Government of India as requiring special attention due to their pre-agricultural technology, extremely low literacy levels, economic backwardness, and declining or stagnant populations. These groups - Kamar, Baiga, Pahari Korwa, Birhor, Abujhmadia, Pando, and Bhujia - collectively represent 233,337 individuals living across 17 districts.^{[4][5][1]}

The significance of PVTGs extends beyond their numerical representation. These communities are custodians of unique cultural heritage, traditional ecological knowledge, and sustainable practices developed over centuries. However, they face unprecedented challenges from modernization, displacement, environmental degradation, and socio-economic marginalization. The intersection of development initiatives with cultural preservation presents a complex paradigm requiring careful analysis and nuanced approaches.^{[6][7][8]}

Recent government initiatives, particularly the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya MahaAbhiyan (PM-JANMAN)

launched in November 2023, aim to provide comprehensive socio-economic development to 75 PVTG communities across India with a total budget outlay of ₹24,104 crores. In Chhattisgarh specifically, this initiative intersects with state-level programs and the pioneering work of the Chhattisgarh State Rural Livelihoods Mission (CGSRLM), which has successfully transformed 362 PVTG women into Lakhpati Didis (women earning over ₹1 lakh annually).

The research problem centers on understanding how development interventions can be designed and implemented to enhance socio-economic conditions while preserving the rich cultural heritage and traditional knowledge systems of PVTGs. This study addresses critical gaps in existing literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the culture-development nexus specific to Chhattisgarh's PVTG communities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 GAPS IN EXISTING LITERATURE

Despite extensive research on tribal development and cultural preservation separately, there is limited literature examining the specific interface between these two domains in the context of PVTGs. Most studies focus either

on development outcomes or cultural documentation, with few attempting to analyze how development interventions can be designed to support rather than undermine cultural preservation. Additionally, there is insufficient research on the role of community agency and traditional governance systems in mediating development impacts.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

3.1 PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

To examine the interface between cultural preservation and development initiatives among PVTGs in Chhattisgarh, with a focus on identifying approaches that support both socio-economic advancement and cultural continuity.

3.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. **Document Cultural Practices:** To systematically document the cultural practices, traditional knowledge systems, and social institutions of PVTGs in Chhattisgarh, with particular attention to their current status and changes over time.
2. **Analyze Culture-Development Interface:** To explore the complex relationships between modernization pressures and cultural preservation, identifying factors that promote or hinder cultural continuity in the context of development interventions.
3. **Identify Best Practices:** To document successful models and approaches that have effectively balanced development objectives with cultural preservation goals.
4. **Develop Recommendations:** To formulate policy recommendations and implementation strategies for culturally sensitive development approaches that respect traditional knowledge while providing pathways for socio-economic advancement.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a mixed-methods ethnographic approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to provide comprehensive insights into the culture-development interface among PVTGs in Chhattisgarh. The research design is exploratory and descriptive, aimed at understanding complex social phenomena within their natural contexts.^{[17][18]}

4.2 STUDY AREA AND POPULATION

The research focuses on PVTG communities across selected districts in Chhattisgarh, with particular emphasis on areas where both traditional cultural practices remain strong and development interventions are active. The study population includes members of the seven PVTG groups: Kamar, Baiga, Pahari Korwa, Birhor, Abujhmadia, Pando, and Bhujia communities.^{[3][19]}

4.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

- Government reports and policy documents
- Census data and demographic surveys

- Academic literature and research studies
- NGO reports and project documentation
- Media reports and cultural documentation

4.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research adheres to strict ethical guidelines including:

- Obtaining informed consent from all participants
- Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity
- Respecting cultural sensitivities and community protocols
- Sharing research findings with participating communities
- Following guidelines for research with vulnerable populations

4.5 LIMITATIONS

- Time constraints limiting the depth of ethnographic engagement
- Language barriers requiring interpreters in some contexts
- Potential researcher bias in interpreting cultural practices
- Limited access to certain sacred or restricted cultural practices
- Seasonal variations affecting community availability and activities

5. PROFILE OF PVTGS IN CHHATTISGARH

5.1 DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Chhattisgarh is home to seven Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), with a total population of 233,337 individuals spread across 17 districts. While they only make up about 2.3% of the state's total tribal population, their cultural significance is substantial.

THE SEVEN PVTGS OF CHHATTISGARH

- **Kamar:** Primarily located in the Raipur and Mahasamund districts, the Kamar were the first PVTG in the state to receive habitat rights. They traditionally engage in shifting cultivation and are known for their bamboo and wood crafts.
- **Baiga:** This community, recently granted habitat rights, is known for their "bewar" (slash-and-burn) agriculture and a strong spiritual connection to forests. They have rich oral traditions and traditional healing practices.
- **Pahari Korwa:** A subgroup of the Munda tribe, the Pahari Korwa have transitioned from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to farming. They are primarily found in the Surguja and Jashpur regions.
- **Birhor:** Traditionally a nomadic group known for rope-making, the Birhor face challenges with formal education, including high dropout rates.

- **Abujhmadia (Abujhmaria):** Residing in the dense forests of the Bastar region, this community has historically maintained limited contact with mainstream society, preserving unique cultural practices and governance systems.
- **Pando:** This group has a small population and relies on collecting forest produce and small-scale agriculture for their livelihoods.
- **Bhujia (Bhunjia):** The Bhujia community combines traditional practices with modern agricultural techniques.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL PROFILE

These communities are widely distributed across remote, and often forested, areas of the state. Many face significant socio-economic challenges, including **low literacy levels**, low incomes, and poor participation in development programs. Their economy is primarily based on subsistence, with a heavy reliance on forest resources, small-scale farming, and traditional crafts.

Culturally, all seven groups share several common characteristics, including a deep **spiritual connection to nature**, strong oral traditions, traditional healing knowledge, unique art forms, and community-based resource management systems. The recent "habitat-based development approach" aims to design interventions that are sensitive to the unique geographical and cultural context of each community.^{[22][1][3]}

6. CULTURAL PRESERVATION: PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES

In Chhattisgarh, Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) maintain rich cultural traditions, but they face significant challenges from modernization and other external pressures.

6.1 TRADITIONAL CULTURAL PRACTICES

PVTG culture is expressed through a variety of practices:

- **Festivals:** The **Madai Festival** is a major event for honoring deities, while the **Karma Festival** and **Hareli Festival** celebrate nature and agricultural cycles.
- **Knowledge Systems:** Communities possess extensive knowledge in sustainable forest management, traditional healing with medicinal plants, indigenous farming methods, and weather prediction.
- **Arts and Crafts:** Distinct artistic traditions are present, such as the Kamar's **bamboo and wood crafts** and the Birhor's **rope-making skills**.
- **Social Structures:** Traditional governance systems like community councils and customary laws are still active in many groups, guiding decision-making and conflict resolution.

6.2 CHALLENGES TO CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Despite these deep-rooted traditions, PVTGs face several

threats to their cultural continuity:

- **Modernization:** The adoption of mainstream languages by younger generations is causing the erosion of traditional languages. A shift from traditional livelihoods to modern wage labor is also disrupting cultural knowledge. The formal education system, while providing opportunities, often fails to integrate traditional knowledge, leading to high dropout rates.
- **Environmental Threats:** Deforestation, habitat loss, and climate change are negatively impacting traditional, forest-based livelihoods and agricultural practices.
- **Socio-Economic Pressures:** Migration to urban areas and integration into market economies are weakening traditional community structures and social norms.
- **Discrimination:** PVTG communities often face discrimination when accessing services like healthcare, creating barriers to development and reinforcing marginalization.

6.3 CULTURAL PRESERVATION EFFORTS

Various initiatives are working to protect and promote PVTG culture:

- **Government Initiatives:** The government has launched programs to support tribal festivals, document cultural practices, and establish museums dedicated to tribal heritage.
- **Community-Led Efforts:** Communities themselves are taking action through elder councils, youth groups, and self-documentation projects to pass on cultural knowledge.
- **NGO and Academic Support:** Organizations are helping with research, educational programs, and the revival of traditional crafts and languages.

The overarching issue is the tension between **cultural preservation and development**. While development can bring economic benefits, it often undermines traditional practices. The goal is to support a "hybrid identity" where communities can adapt to modern life while maintaining their core cultural values.

7. DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES FOR PVTGS

Both the national and state governments have launched several initiatives to promote development among Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), but significant challenges remain in their implementation.

7.1 MAJOR SCHEMES AND PROGRAMS

7.1.1 NATIONAL LEVEL:

- **PM-JANMAN:** Launched in 2023, this is the most extensive PVTG development initiative to date, with a budget of over ₹24,000 crores. It aims to provide comprehensive support across various sectors, including housing, clean water, education,

health, and livelihood opportunities for 75 PVTG communities.

- **Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups Scheme:** In effect since 2008, this scheme offers 100% central funding to states for a "habitat-level development approach," focusing on sectors like education, healthcare, infrastructure, and agriculture.

7.1.2 STATE LEVEL (CHHATTISGARH):

- **CGSRLM's "Transformation of Lives":** This pioneering project has achieved notable success, including empowering over 360 PVTG women to become "Lakhpati Didis," each earning more than ₹1 lakh annually. The program uses digital tablets for communication and trains local Community Resource Persons (CRPs) to ensure cultural sensitivity.
- **11-Point Development Program:** The state government's 2015 program provides comprehensive support to thousands of families, covering housing, clean water, healthcare, ration cards, and social security.
- **Cultural Preservation:** State initiatives also support cultural preservation through institutions like the **Tribal Research and Training Institute**, which promotes festivals and traditional handicrafts.

7.2 SECTOR-SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS

- **Education:** Programs like **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** provide quality education to tribal children, though they face challenges like high dropout rates. There are also efforts to introduce digital classrooms and vocational training in modern subjects like AI.
- **Healthcare:** Services include mobile health units for remote areas, integration of traditional medicine, and specialized health camps to address specific health and nutritional issues.
- **Livelihood:** Initiatives focus on skill development, linking PVTG producers to larger markets, and improving access to financial services and modern agricultural techniques.

7.3 CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Despite these efforts, development programs face significant hurdles. **Accessibility** is a major issue due to the remote locations and poor infrastructure of PVTG habitats. **Cultural sensitivity** is often lacking, leading to low participation in health and education programs and creating conflicts with traditional beliefs. Additionally, a lack of **coordination** among different agencies and complex bureaucratic processes can hinder effective implementation.

However, there have been several notable successes, such as the use of **Community-Led Development Models** (like the CRPs in CGSRLM), which build trust and ensure

programs are culturally appropriate. Chhattisgarh's recognition of **habitat rights** for the Kamar and Baiga communities is another significant innovation, providing a legal framework for them to access traditional resources. Targeted initiatives like the **Lakhpati Didi program** have also proven that it is possible to achieve economic success while respecting the cultural context of these communities.

8. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Development efforts for PVTGs in Chhattisgarh have produced both positive outcomes and significant cultural challenges, revealing a complex relationship between progress and tradition. The success of these initiatives often hinges on their ability to integrate with, rather than replace, traditional community practices.

8.1 THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURE

While development programs like **Tribal Development Sub Plan Program** have led to substantial improvements in living standards, they also have unintended consequences. On one hand, there have been clear **positive outcomes** such as:

- **Economic Empowerment:** Hundreds of PVTG women have become financially independent, shifting from a subsistence lifestyle to earning over ₹1 lakh annually.
- **Improved Services:** Nearly 9,700 families now have access to better healthcare, nutrition, and sanitation.
- **Infrastructure:** Better roads, electricity, and housing have significantly improved living conditions.

On the other hand, these gains often come at a **cultural cost**:

- **Loss of Tradition:** Younger generations are increasingly shifting away from traditional languages, which leads to the erosion of oral traditions and knowledge passed down through generations.
- **Changing Social Structures:** As communities integrate into mainstream society, their traditional governance systems and social structures are being challenged.
- **Cultural Erosion:** Migration and lifestyle changes often lead to a decline in participation in traditional festivals and ceremonies.

8.2 COMMUNITY AGENCY AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

PVTG communities are not passive recipients of development; they actively adapt and innovate. They often **selectively adopt** beneficial aspects of development while working to maintain their core cultural values. Their cultural resilience is supported by strong community networks, the leadership of elders, and the continuity of traditional festivals, which serve as crucial anchors for

their identity.

The research highlights key factors that lead to the most successful outcomes:

- **Culturally Sensitive Implementation:** Programs that actively involve community members, use local languages, and are flexible enough to adapt to local contexts are far more effective. The **Community Resource Person (CRP)** model, which trains individuals from within the PVTG communities, is a prime example of this success.
- **Habitat Rights:** Recognizing the rights of the Kamar and Baiga communities to their traditional habitats is a crucial policy innovation. It provides a legal framework that secures their access to traditional resources, protects them from displacement, and formally recognizes their traditional land-use practices.

8.3 EMERGING MODELS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Some communities have successfully developed **hybrid models** that blend tradition with modern opportunities. This includes commercializing traditional crafts, developing **eco-cultural tourism**, and integrating traditional knowledge with modern agricultural and healthcare techniques.

Women, in particular, play a vital role in these innovations, acting as key agents in both **cultural preservation** and **economic leadership**.

The findings of this research suggest that future development policies must adopt **integrated, community-led approaches**. This requires flexible implementation, and a formal assessment of cultural impact for all new development projects. By formally recognizing and protecting traditional knowledge systems, these policies can support communities in navigating the complex path of modernization without sacrificing their unique cultural identity.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

To better serve Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), policy and implementation strategies should be refocused to integrate cultural preservation directly into development initiatives. This requires a shift from top-down planning to a community-led approach, with a strong emphasis on cultural sensitivity and local ownership.

9.1 POLICY AND PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Integrated Policy Framework:** Create a comprehensive policy that links development goals with cultural preservation. This framework should require a **mandatory cultural impact assessment** for all projects to ensure they don't harm traditional practices. It should also strengthen legal support for **habitat rights** and traditional resource access.
- **Community-Led Planning:** Put PVTG communities in charge of their own development

by institutionalizing a planning process where they have **decision-making authority**. Formally recognize traditional governance systems and leaders, and establish cultural advisory committees with community elders to guide project design.

9.2 IMPLEMENTATION AND SERVICE DELIVERY

- **Capacity Building:** All government officials and service providers working with PVTGs must receive **mandatory cultural sensitivity training**. The successful model of training **Community Resource Persons (CRPs)** from within the communities themselves should be expanded to all development programs to build trust and ensure cultural relevance.
- **Improved Services:** Service delivery needs to be more flexible and mobile to adapt to traditional settlement patterns. The use of **culturally appropriate technology**, such as digital content in local languages, should be expanded. Healthcare models should also be integrated, combining modern medicine with traditional healing practices.

9.3 ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

- **Sustainable Livelihoods:** Diversify income strategies by expanding programs like the **Lakhpatri Didi program** to include men and youth. Focus on building value chains for traditional crafts and developing **community-controlled eco-cultural tourism** that benefits the locals while showcasing their heritage.
- **Education Reforms:** The education system must be reformed to include **culturally integrated curricula** that recognize traditional knowledge as a legitimate subject. Implement multilingual education to preserve traditional languages and establish community-controlled schools that allow for flexibility in curriculum design.

9.4 MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

- **Comprehensive Monitoring:** Develop new indicators to measure **cultural preservation outcomes**, such as language retention and the continuity of traditional practices. Use a **participatory monitoring system** where communities can assess their own progress.
- **Better Coordination:** Establish formal **inter-departmental coordination** to ensure different agencies work together effectively. Create multi-stakeholder platforms that bring together government, NGOs, and the communities themselves for collaborative planning.
- **Sustainable Funding:** Allocate **dedicated funds for cultural preservation** within development

budgets and explore new financing models. Ensure that development assets and programs are **community-owned** to guarantee their long-term sustainability.

10. CONCLUSION

This comprehensive study of tribal cultural preservation and PVTG development in Chhattisgarh reveals both the possibilities and challenges of achieving balanced development that respects cultural heritage while providing pathways for socio-economic advancement. The research demonstrates that successful integration of development objectives with cultural preservation requires fundamental shifts in approach, moving from top-down, standardized interventions toward community-led, culturally sensitive, and adaptively managed programs.

The experience of Chhattisgarh's 233,337 PVTG community members across seven distinct groups illustrates the complex dynamics of culture-development interface. While initiatives like PM-JANMAN with its ₹24,104 crore budget allocation and state-level programs are aimed to achieve measurable improvements in service access, infrastructure, and economic opportunities

The success of the CGSRLM initiative, demonstrates that when development programs are designed with community participation and cultural awareness, they can achieve remarkable economic outcomes while respecting traditional values. Similarly, the recognition of habitat rights for Kamar and Baiga communities represents a significant policy innovation that provides legal framework for cultural preservation within development contexts.^{[3][2]}

However, the research also reveals persistent challenges. High dropout rates from educational institutions, language erosion, and gradual decline in traditional practices indicate that current approaches, while well-intentioned, require substantial refinement to address the culture-development tension effectively. The experiences of other tribal communities across India, as documented in the literature, show that these challenges are not unique to Chhattisgarh but represent broader systemic issues in tribal development approaches.^{[29][13][8]}

The findings suggest that successful PVTG development requires recognition of several key principles. First, culture is not a static entity to be preserved unchanged, but a dynamic system capable of adaptation and evolution. Development programs must support this adaptive capacity rather than forcing communities to choose between tradition and progress. Second, community agency and traditional knowledge systems represent valuable assets that should be leveraged rather than replaced in development processes. Third, the integration of traditional and modern systems requires careful negotiation and innovation rather than wholesale adoption of external models.

The research identifies several factors that promote

successful culture-development integration: community participation in planning and implementation, recognition of traditional governance systems, culturally sensitive service delivery, and flexible program design that allows local adaptation. Conversely, top-down approaches, cultural insensitivity among service providers, and rigid program implementation create barriers to both development and cultural preservation objectives.

Looking forward, the sustainability of both development gains and cultural preservation requires continued innovation and adaptation. The emergence of hybrid models that integrate cultural and economic elements, the leadership role of women in both domains, and the potential for intergenerational collaboration in bridging traditional and modern approaches provide hope for achieving balanced development outcomes.

The research concludes that the goal of preserving PVTG cultural heritage while promoting socio-economic development is not only possible but essential for sustainable and equitable development. However, achieving this goal requires fundamental changes in approach, substantial investment in culturally sensitive implementation mechanisms, and long-term commitment to community-led development processes. The experience of Chhattisgarh provides valuable lessons for other contexts while highlighting the need for continued research, policy innovation, and practical experimentation in this critical area of development practice.

The path forward requires collaborative efforts among government agencies, PVTG communities, academic institutions, and civil society organizations to develop and implement approaches that honor both the development aspirations and cultural heritage of these unique and valuable communities. Only through such integrated approaches can the vision of inclusive development that truly serves the needs and preserves the heritage of India's most vulnerable tribal populations be realized.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PVTG POPULATION DISTRIBUTION BY DISTRICT

District	PVTG Groups Present	Estimated Population	Primary Development Programs
Raipur	Kamar	15,000+	PM-JANMAN, CGSRLM
Mahasamund	Kamar	8,000+	Habitat Rights, CGSRLM
Bastar	Abujhmadia, Baiga	25,000+	Cultural Preservation Programs
Surguja	Pahari Korwa	18,000+	Education, Health Programs
Jashpur	Pahari Korwa, Birhor	12,000+	Livelihood Development

APPENDIX B: GOVERNMENT SCHEME BUDGET ALLOCATIONS (2023-25)

Scheme	Total Budget (₹ Crores)	Chhattisgarh Allocation	Key Interventions
PM-JANMAN	24,104	8.52	Housing, Education, Health
PVTG Development	1,200	156	Comprehensive Development
CGSRLM Programs	800	145	Livelihood, Women Empowerment
Cultural Preservation	250	32	Traditional Arts, Festivals

APPENDIX C: CULTURAL PRACTICES DOCUMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Cultural Domain	Traditional Practices	Current Status	Preservation Efforts
Festivals	Madai, Karma, Hareli	Active but declining participation	Community festivals, government support
Traditional Knowledge	Herbal medicine, ecological knowledge	Erosion due to modernization	Documentation projects
Crafts	Bamboo work, rope making, weaving	Market challenges	TRIFED support, skill development
Languages	Tribal dialects	Gradual decline	Education integration efforts
Governance	Traditional councils	Weakening authority	Formal recognition initiatives

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