

Socio-Economic status of the Baiga tribe of Chhattisgarh in India

¹ Ram Babu, ² Dr. AN Panda

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

² Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

Abstract

The Indian Constitution assigns special status to the Scheduled Tribes (STs). Traditionally referred to as advises, van basis, tribes, or tribals, STs constitute about 8% of the Indian population. There are 573 Scheduled Tribes living in different parts of the country, which are different from the mainstream people of the State where they live. Baiga tribe is a primitive tribe found in central provinces of the country such as Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand. The largest number of Baiga is found in Baiga-chuk in Mandla district and Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh. Baiga are connected to Indo-Aryan Dravidian tribes who have unique socio-economic status and life style. The major part of Baiga earning is spent on food and clothing. In Baiga community, the family is small, but the kinship structures are quite strong. They follow strict marriage rules, such as incest is a taboo, no marriage with outsiders is permitted, and monogamy is the general rule. The Baiga have expertise in medicine and the priests have their special importance. Baigas lived in the forests and carry out shifting, slash and burn cultivation for thousands of years without any influence or competition from other Indian residents. The second largest grouping of the Baigas lives in Bilaspur, Kabirdham and Surguja districts of Chhattisgarh which was formed on 1 November 2000, by partitioning 16 Chhattisgarhi districts of Madhya Pradesh. It is also the 10th largest state with an area of 135,190 km.

Keywords: Tribe, Baigas, Socio-Economic Status

Introduction

Adivasi is a term for schedule tribes, an assorted set of racial and tribal groups believed to be the indigenous population of India. Adivasi societies are present in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan etc.

According to Dr D. N. Majumdar, "A tribe is a social group with territorial attachment, endogamous, with no specialization of function, ruled by tribal officers, genetic or else, united in language or vernacular, recognizing social distance from other tribes or castes but without any disgrace attached in the caste structure, following tribal tradition, belief and customs, intolerant of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of a homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration. The word tribe as generally understood in the literature on anthropology is a social group speaking a distinguishing language or vernacular and possessing a distinct culture that makes it off from other tribes"^[1].

Scheduled Tribes in India

The tribal communities in India are extremely diverse and assorted. There are wide range diversity among them in respect of languages spoken, size of population and mode of livelihood. The number of communities that find their place in the list of the Schedule of the Indian Constitution is reflective of this diversity. The Government of India, in its Draft National Tribal Policy, 2006 records 698 Scheduled Tribes in India.

Adivasi is officially documented by the Indian government as "Scheduled Tribes" in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, which is eligible for certain confirmatory action procedures. The Constitution of India, Article 366 (25) defines Scheduled Tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or part of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to the scheduled Tribes (STs) for

the purposes of this Constitution"^[2].

The Indian Census of 2011 enumerates the total population of Scheduled Tribes (ST) at 10, 42, 81,034 persons, who constitute 8.6 per cent of the population of the country. As per the Census of India 2011, the number of entity groups notified as Scheduled Tribes is 705. While it is not possible to provide comprehensive descriptions of the demographic features and socio-economic status of each of these tribal groups, this section attempts to map out the broad contours of the Scheduled Tribes of the country in terms of their demography and geography. Scheduled Tribes consist of 11.3 per cent of the Indian rural population and 2.8 per cent of the Indian urban population. In 2001, the proportion of STs to the total population was 8.2 per cent, while the proportion was 10.4 per cent in rural areas and 2.4 per cent in urban areas. The total male ST population according to the 2011 census is 5, 24, 09,823 of which 4, 71, 26,341 are residing in rural areas and 52, 83,482 are in urban areas. The total female Schedule Tribe population is 5, 18, 71, 211 with 4, 66, 92,821 in rural areas and 51, 78,390 in urban areas^[3].

The decadal population growth of the tribal's from Census 2001 to 2011 has been 23.66% against the 17.69% of the whole population. The sex ratio for the overall population is 940 females per 1000 males and that of Scheduled Tribes 990 females per thousand males^[4].

In terms of the total tribal populations found in each State of the country, Odessa has the largest number of notified STs (62) followed by Karnataka (50), Maharashtra (45), Madhya Pradesh (43) and Chhattisgarh (42). Sikkim has the least with four tribes followed by Nagaland, Daman and Diu and Uttarakhand with five each. Among the South Indian States (without any Scheduled Areas), Karnataka has the largest number of Scheduled Tribes (50) followed by Tamil Nadu (36) and Kerala (36)^[5].

Table 1: Some State-wise Demographic Status of Total Population & ST Population (Census 2011), their present of STs to the some State and numbers of ST

S. No.	state	Total population	Tribal population	% of tribal population	Numbers of ST
1.	Chhattisgarh	25,545,198	7,822,902	30.62	42
2.	Madhya Pradesh	72,626,809	15,316,784	21.09	43
3.	Karnataka	61,095,297	4,248,987	6.95	50
4.	Maharashtra	112,374,333	10,510,213	9.35	45
5.	Odessa	41,974,218	9,590,756	22.85	62

Census 2011 ^[6]

Scheduled Tribes in Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh, the 26th State of India, was carved out of Madhya Pradesh on November 1, 2000. It is surrounded by Uttar Pradesh on the north, Jharkhand on the northeast, Orissa on the east, Andhra Pradesh on the southeast and south, Maharashtra on the southwest and Madhya Pradesh on the west and northwest. Chhattisgarh abounds in hilly regions and plains. The climate of Chhattisgarh is mainly tropical, humid and sub humid. The climate is hot because of its position on the tropic of cancer and others ills. May is the hottest month of December and January are the coldest ones. The State is entirely dependent on the monsoons for rains. The Mahanadi is the Main River and life of the State. The other major rivers are Hadeo, Sheonath, Mand, Kelo Udanti, Eeb, Pairi, Jonk, Indrawati, Arpa and Maniyari. It receives an annual average rainfall of 60 inches. Rice is the principal crop of the State. A primarily tribal State capable with rich mineral and forest wealth, Chhattisgarh has about 35 big and small tribes inhabiting the State ^[7].

Chhattisgarh is a tribal excess state as majority of the population is tribal's. The indigenous people are used to situate their villages near their food and water source; Bastar district of Chhattisgarh has the largest tribal population. About 35 big and small tribes spread all over Chhattisgarh; to name a few, those are Agariya, Birhor, Baiga, Kharia, Pardhan and Gond, The Gond tribes include Korba, Asur, Abhuj Maria, Gaiki, Nagarchi and Badi Maria. The tribal people have their own choice regarding ornaments and women love to wear knick-knacks made of cowries, shells, bones, copper and bronze, mixed metals ^[8].

The scheduled tribes, with a population of over fifty seven lakh, constitute 32.5 per cent of the State's population as per the 1991 census. Almost 98.1 per cent of this population lives in the rural areas and only 1.9 per cent in urban Chhattisgarh. The scheduled tribes are concentrated in the southern, northern and the northeastern districts of the State. The highest concentration is in the previous Bastar district. The new district of Dantewara has 79 per cent tribals followed by Bastar (67 per cent) Jashpur (65 per cent), Surguja (57 per cent) and Kanker (56 per cent) ^[9].

Scheduled Tribes is Baiga

Baigas are a branch of the Primitive Bhumiya tribe of Chota Nagpur and they have been taken or given the name of Baigas. The description of a village is one migration in the central Provinces headed by a priest. It is believed that the Baigas were once dominant in the Chhattisgarh plain and the hills surrounding it which were attached to Chota Nagpur, the home of Bhumiya ^[10].

History of Baigas

The Baigas regard themselves as Bhumiaraaja or Bhumijan, are

Munda or Kolarian people part of the Bhuiya tribe found in the central India. The name "Baiga" is associated with traditional medicine. The Kols and the Gonds consider the Baigas as priests having special knowledge about medicinal plants. They also recognize the Baigas as ancient people having knowledge about boundary and other disputes. The Baigas consider themselves as the earliest residents of Chhattisgarh plains and the northern and eastern hill areas though they have lost all traces of their native language and have acquired the language of their neighbors. Varrier Elwin, a prominent anthropologist who worked extensively with the tribal communities in Chhattisgarh, reported that in Bilaspur they speak Chhattisgarhi, in Mandla and Jabalpur districts they speak a customized Eastern Hindi, and in Balaghat they speak Hindi, Gondi or a combination of Marathi, Hindi, and Gondi and Baigani. Presently, they speak Chhattisgarhi and Hindi in their village ^[11].

'Baiga tribe's families have been recorded from their history from ten to thirty thousand years ago in the rock shelters of Central Narmada Valley region of Hoshangabad and its neighboring districts. It seems that very impassable forests in the Central Narmada Valley region consisting of ten modern districts of India's central province of Madhya Pradesh; Hoshangabad, Harda, Narsinghpur, Betul, Raisen, Sehore, Jabalpur, Bhopal and some parts of Sagar and Damoh were the original territory of the Baigas. Baigas tribe roamed around and lived in these forests without restraint. Besides, some of the Baigas, Nahals and Korkus lived in the forests of Tapti River Valley in the districts of Burhanpur and Khandwa. The total geographical area of the 85% of these districts had impassable shelter forests. Baigas lived in these forests and carried out shifting, slash and burn cultivation for thousands of years without any influence or competition from other Indian residents or habitats'.

The second biggest grouping of the Baigas tribe lives in Surguja, Kabirdham and Bilaspur, districts of Chhattisgarh. Baigas have conventionally lived in Gond-abundant areas of Central and Western India. The Baiga have been the forest-dwelling aboriginals from central India ^[12].

Socio Economic Status of Baiga

The socio-economic status is an assessment of person's social life, culture, religious life, occupation and income in a particular social system. It describes his socio-economic condition and gives a fair picture about him. From this one can know about somebody.

'Baiga tribe is called the son of the nature, of being in the company of nature and their skin color is often darker black'.¹³

Social Life

In Baiga community family is used to be small. Relationship structures are quite strong. They follow strict marriage rules,

such as incest is a taboo, no marriage with outsiders is allowed, and monogamy is the general rule. The Baigas lead a simple social life. The Baigas have six accepted forms of marriage or choice of acquiring mates. They are: 1. Lamsena, 2. Pathul, 3 Thawa, 4 Chor, 5 Mangni, 6 Ugharia.

The bride price is the normal tradition according to which a price is to be paid to the bride's family at the time of marriage. The price is decided according to the economic status of the families concerned. Traditionally, it was only Dhoti and sari, now it is money. Usually, divorce is not welcomed among Baigas, but separation of husband and wife do take place in the society. The barrenness or extramarital relationships by women are the usual causes of breaking of marriage.

The kinship system of the Baiga is of the usual classificatory type. There are uncles and aunts in the society. The mode of social conduct is defined according to relationship among different individuals. This determines joking and avoidance relationship. The old people joke with grandchildren. The Devar Bhabhi & Jija Sali gets major attention of joke. Similarly, Jeth avoidance is a common practice. As they do not possess much property, the rules of legacy does not carry much heaviness. The role of women in Baiga society is quite wide. Women follow rule of absence in interment customs, hunting, plugging and killing pigs. Women may clear and fire the wood, but they must not take part in sowing, because they take care of earth as woman. They do not eat harvested grain or seasonal fruits before proper practice. Their houses have only one door, either towards East or towards a river ^[14].

Culture

Baigas claim that they are the sons of the nature and enjoy living in a natural environment. They have long hairs and it is a mark of Began. Chhattisgarh has a mixed culture; Hinduism is the main religion along with Muslims, Christians and Buddhists. The tribals of Chhattisgarh have their distinguishing languages, music, cuisines, dance and lifestyle. Chhattisgarhi is the local language used by most of the people who live in village and rural area; they are habituated to communicate in this language. The tribal people are known for colorful and unique crafts made from bamboos, jute, and terracotta and dhokra art ^[15].

Economy

The Baiga economy has its own uniqueness. They are usually engaged in agriculture; work as medicine man in the village and collect herbs, prepare medicines and do magic religious performances as sorcery. They prepare bamboo mat and baskets and collect honey and 'Harre' from forest and sell them. They also work as laborers. Even today they collect wild roots, and do hunting and fishing. Usually the major part of Baiga earnings is spent on food and clothing. Generally, they do not have any saving and take loans at the time of marriage or death. The supplier may be the Mahajan or their rich relatives. The vegetarians eat only grains and wild roots, but the non-vegetarians take the meat of pigs. They sacrifice pig during festivals. They eat whenever they get something through hunting and fishing. The first food of the day for Baiga is called 'BASI', the day lunch as 'PEJ', and dinner as 'BIYARI'. As the word clarifies, usually the first food is leftover from the night. The 'PEJ' consists an amalgamation of kodo and makka with salt; And in dinner only they have rice pulse or rice vegetable. The basic cereals used Rejwar, Bazra,

Makka, and Rai etc., which they manufacture themselves. The guests are usually treated with rice gruel, rice beer and Biri for smoking. Baiga did not use plough as they have a belief that mother earth will get hurt and felt pain; what they do is known as BEWAR agriculture ^[16].

Religious Life

The Baigas perform religions ceremonies of other tribes and even of Hindus. As Baigas have lost their language, they use Hindi words to describe their gods and goddesses; for example, Mahadeo, Dharati Mata, Kali, and Bhagawan are the terms used to describe their deities. Some more names used to designate Baiga pantheon are Bara Deo, Thakur Deo, Bhimsen, Gansam Deo etc. The Dashara gains its importance by being the occasion for the Baiga Bida ceremonial; None of the Hindu rites or theories is associated with it. It would be more accurate to say that the Baiga do not celebrate Dashara or Diwali, but they celebrate just a festival at these times. They also celebrate Karma, Sarhul, etc. The Baiga believe that local household deities protect or guard the village and villagers. They also believe in forest and hill deities and different spirits. They regard themselves of powerful magico religious specialists, as magic is most essential and potent reality of their life. They can ward off demons of diseases. The magic covers every part of life, the productiveness of soil or women, the relationship of love or hate, and health or diseases; witchcraft and sorcery have their importance in this community ^[17].

Life Style

Baiga tribes of Chhattisgarh are exclusive in their lifestyles and have wonderfully retained their own culture and traditions for centuries. The tribal women love to wear knick-knacks made of shells, cowries, mixed bones, metals, copper and bronze. The livelihoods of thousands of tribal people depend on the forest, river or agricultural of crops and goat. Rout Nacha is a famous and traditional folk dance of cowherds; some of the other prominent dance forms popular among Baigas are Panthi, Karma, Pandwani and Soowa.fairs ^[18].

Folk – Tradition

Each tribal society is rich in their dance and music. Baiga have their songs for all occasions and for different situations, pleasurable or distressing. Their songs may not be very creative, but are touching and over-romantic. They sing on important celebratory occasions like Sarhul, Karma, marriage celebration, bridal party, etc. They also have love songs, which explain the joy, love and relationship between men and women. Girls also sing about marriage and type of groom that they would like to wed. The Baigas dance at any time the season. The major dance is Karma dance; they also do Jharpat dance or Bilma dance or Dessera dance. The Baiga ethnicity is full of proverbs, tales and riddles. The women decorate their bodies with tattoo marks. Long strips of similar lines are made on the face, particularly on the forehead. Separately from interpretation of moon, triangles, crosses, dots etc; Dots or small lines are also made on the cheek or chin, below the neck, above the breast and on the back. The Baigas still follow the tradition of folk medicine. The Baiga are skilled medicine men. Various parts of plants are used as herbal medicines. They first treat all health problems through their own medicines, any illness like body pain, cough, cold, stomach

pain, headache, fever, cut or small accidents etc. are self-treated by Baigas. The different fungus, higher or lower plants, roots, shoots, bark, tubers, plants, fruits, etc are used as the bases of medicines ^[19-ibid].

Education

‘The tribal population is at different levels of development with regard to education. Formal education has made very small impact on tribal groups. There are many reasons for low level of education among the Baiga tribal people: Formal education is not considered necessary to release their social obligations. Superstitions and legends play an important role in rejecting education. Most tribes are extremely poor. It is not easy for them to send their children to schools, as they are considered additional helping hands. The formal schools do not hold any special interest for the children. Most of the tribes are located in central and isolated areas where teachers would not like to go from outside. But the reservation policy has made some positive changes ^[20].

‘Geeta first Baiga tribal girl to break JEE-Main A girl has created history by becoming first female member of Baiga, one of the most primitive tribes, to clear joint entrance exam (JEE-Main). For the 18 year old, this success is quite extravagant. She comes from a remote and one of the most backward regions of Madhya Pradesh in Mandla district’.²¹

Political association

Mukaddam leads the conventional committee of Baiga. He gets supports from religions heads and social leaders. He also has assistants called Sayana and sikhe. Generally, the cases dealt by the council are disagreement between two persons, such as brothers and neighbors, concerning property, rights, and sexual crimes; cases relating to conflict between couples, marriage decisions, divorce, killing of cattle, breaking social taboos etc. are also covered by the council. The usual council also decides dates of performance of religions affairs. Now days, a visit of government officer is also supervised by the council ^[22 Ibid].

Health and Nutrition

Healthiness and nourishment is one of the important indicators of social development. In many areas, the Baiga tribal population suffers from constant infections and suffers from diseases which are mainly water born diseases. Undernourishment is common and has affected the general health of the tribal children as it lowers the ability to resist infection, leads to constant illness, and sometimes leads to brain devastation. The ecological inequality like cutting of trees have increased the distances between villages and the forest areas thus forcing tribal women to walk longer distances in search of forest produce and firewood ^[23].

Development Activities

All forms of welfare measures, both centrally sponsored and centrally aided programmes can be seen among the Baiga community. The fields of education, economic upliftment, poultry, animal husbandry, health and housing have been bought at the doors of Baigas. But the recipients are not responding well. It is because their initial base is in deep poverty. They continue to struggle for their subsistence. Therefore, the approach for the upliftment of Baiga should be tribe specific. For example, their expertise is on herbal

medicines which can be supported by opening herb area. They could be given some special training to produce herbs, government or NGO can find market for them. Horticulture and floriculture, which does not need plugging, can be initiated to supplement their income ^[24].

Conclusion

The Baigas are distinct tribal groups with their unique life style and culture. They provide an insight to the process of growth of the human society. They have their abilities particularly in the field of medicine and production of handicraft items. If proper support is given to these people they can continue their tradition and culture and also contribute for the developmental process of the country.

‘But various conflicts affect large parts of tribal areas in contemporary India spanning the central region to the Northeast. In central India, the most recognized conflict at present is the conflict between the Communist Party of India Maoist and the Indian state, which is continuing in parts of the states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal, among others. A big part of these areas are tribal-dominated and it is tribal civilians, who have been worst affected by the conflict. The conflict has only escalated in recent years, particularly in central India, following the instigation by the state of a counter-insurgency action known as the Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh which has been responsible for rapes, murders, arson, looting and pressure in the name of defeating the Maoists ^[25].

Reference

1. Naidu PR. Bharat Ke Adivasi Vikas Ki Samasyae, Radha Publication, New Delhi 110002. 39. ISBN-81-7487-104-7.
2. <http://adivasi.ozg.in/about>
3. Report of the High Level Committee on Socioeconomic, Health and Educational Status of Tribal Communities of India Ministry of Tribal Affairs Government of India, 2014.
4. Statistical Profile of Scheduled Tribes in India 2013 Ministry of Tribal Affairs Statistics Division Government of India www.tribal.nic.in.
5. Report of The High Level Committee on Socio-economic, Health and educational status of Tribal Communities of India Ministry of Tribal Affairs Government of India, 2014.
6. Census 2011.
7. <http://pib.nic.in/feature/feyr2001/fjun2001/f080620012.html>
8. <http://www.walkthroughindia.com/attraction/chhattisgarh-the-beautiful-world-of-tribal-india/>
9. <http://pib.nic.in/feature/feyr2001/fjun2001/f080620012.html>
10. Naidu PR. Bharat Ke Adivasi Vikas Ki Samasyae, Radha Publication New Delhi 110002. 39. ISBN-81-7487-104-7.
11. Boaz AA. Bio-cultural Community Protocol of the Baigas, Traditional Healers Community, Tatidhar Village, Marwahi Forest Division, Chhattisgarh Chief Executive Officer, Chhattisgarh State medicinal Plants Board, 2012.
12. <http://www.peoplesoftheworld.org/hosted/baiga/>
13. Boaz AA. Bio-cultural Community Protocol of the Baigas, Traditional Healers Community, Tatidhar Village,

- Marwahi Forest Division, Chhattisgarh Chief Executive Officer, Chhattisgarh State medicinal Plants Board, 2012.
14. file:///C:/Users/HCL/Downloads/Baigas-BCP.pdf
 15. <http://chhattisgarh.aidivasi.in/2013/06/baiga-aidivasi-tribal-india-lifestyle.html>
 16. <http://www.walkthroughindia.com/attraction/chhattisgarh-the-beautiful-world-of-tribal-india/>
 17. <http://chhattisgarh.aidivasi.in/2013/06/baiga-aidivasi-tribal-india-lifestyle.html>
 18. <http://chhattisgarh.aidivasi.in/2013/06/baiga-aidivasi-tribal-india-lifestyle.html>
 19. <http://www.walkthroughindia.com/attraction/chhattisgarh-the-beautiful-world-of-tribal-india/>
 20. Ibid
 21. <http://www.sociologyguide.com/tribal-society/problems-of-tribal.php>
 22. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/Geetafirst-BaigatribalgirltocrackJEEMain/articleshow/47158272.cms>
 23. Ibid
 24. <http://www.sociologyguide.com/tribal-society/problems-of-tribal.php>
 25. Chhattisgarh Adivasi Blog | Tribal India Group | Adivasi.in: Baiga Adivasi, Tribal India Lifestyle 28/10/201.
 26. Report of the High Level Committee on Socio-economic, Health and Educational Status of Tribal Communities of India Ministry of Tribal Affairs Government of India, 2014.