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Challenges and Potentials for Holistic Development of Kharia Community of Purulia, West Bengal

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the economic condition of the Kharia tribe in Purulia, West Bengal, India, one of the most marginalized communities in the region. Despite their rich traditional knowledge, most families live below the poverty line. The research is based on both primary data collected through field surveys, interviews with Kharia community members and secondary data from government reports and academic studies. The findings highlight the complex interplay between social, cultural, and economic factors that shape the economic condition of the Kharia tribe. The study reveals that the community's economic condition is closely tied to their traditional occupations, including agriculture and forest-based livelihoods which are increasingly at risk due to environmental degradation, market fluctuations, and government policies. The study advocates for a holistic, community-led development approach that considers their social, cultural and economic context, including education, vocational training, and support for traditional livelihoods.

Keywords: Kharia Tribe; Challenges and potentials; Present condition; Development

1. Introduction

India is home to one of the largest tribal populations in the world, with over 705 recognized Scheduled Tribes, accounting for approximately 8.6% of the country's total population (Census of India, 2011). These communities represent diverse socio-cultural systems, languages, traditions, and ecological adaptations that have evolved over centuries. Among the numerous tribal groups inhabiting eastern India, the Kharia tribe holds a distinct place due to its unique socio-cultural characteristics, linguistic heritage, and adaptive strategies within the forested and hilly terrains of eastern states like Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal. The present study focuses on the Kharia tribal community of Purulia District, located in the westernmost part of West Bengal, an area that forms a transitional zone between the Chotanagpur Plateau and the Bengal plain.

Holism refers to the approach of studying human societies and cultures as a whole, acknowledging that distinct components are interconnected and interdependent. This philosophy recognizes that individual parts of a system, such as people, objects, and events, are not isolated or independent, but are part of a larger complex web of relationships and interactions.

The concept of holistic community development is a creative and collaborative process that aims to cultivate the economic, cultural, social, environmental, and political conditions to thrive upon by the entire community (Skrable 2016). A community developer or an outside organization works to begin and sustain the process of holistic community development by creating space for dialogue with the inhabitants of the community. The two-way communication-based

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dialogue investigates critical questions and helps the community to re-narrate its story in the context of the status quo as well as the forces applied locally and non-locally within the community to sustain the status quo (Singh & Ahmad 2015). With this critical consciousness, the community is empowered and a more equitable, sustainable, just and novel vision emerges within the community that ensures its better future.

The Kharia tribe arrived in India from Central Asia. Their habitat in India became the intermediate region of India. In the long journey of almost hundreds of years, their civilization and culture also developed. Their history is hidden in their folk songs. Kharia society was considered very prosperous in its early period. As they settled there, they cleaned the forests and created arable land. Periods and circumstances forced them to migrate from one place to another. In the British rule and zamindari system, the land was plundered by the Kharia. This sequence continues even today. Due to the absence of major means of income, their prosperity gradually decreased. Even after the independence of the country, they remained deprived of government schemes. With the advent of other societies, their identity started getting diluted. Their culture, language and their history came under an identity crisis. In such a situation, seeing the existence of its existence, Kharia society has done the work of organizing itself as Kharia Mahasabha. The Kharia community has experienced significant socio-economic hardships. After India's independence, they were displaced from their forest habitats and subjected to stigmatization under colonial-era laws. Although the "Criminal Tribes Act" was repealed in 1952, the community continued to face discrimination and marginalization. In response, the Paschim Banga Kharia Sabar Kalyan Samity was established in 1968 to advocate for their rights and welfare. The organization gained prominence with the support of renowned social activist Mahasweta Devi in the 1980s.

Kharia people of Purulia district live in undulated hilly terrains, fringe and out skirt of forest. They are found in scattered and dispersed habitation are generally live in separate hamlets and villages. They are distributed in different blocks of Purulia district. Mainly they reside at Barabazar, Balarampur, Manbazar-I&II, Bandwan and Pancha blocks. The Hill Kharia, hunting and gathering tribe, belong to the proto-australoid racial stock and mainly inhabit in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal in India. In Purulia, the Hill Kharia is found in 11 out of 23 blocks of the district. They are also found in different districts like Paschim Medinipur, Bankura, Jhargram contiguous with Purulia in West Bengal, in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha and in East Singhbhum of Jharkhand.

Prior to 2001 Kharia is one of the Scheduled Tribe Communities of West Bengal. In 2001 Census no separate Census enumeration was done regarding this community. They have been included with the Lodhas, the total population of the 'Lodha, Kheria or Kharia' being 84,966 in the State of West Bengal, forming 1.93 per cent of the total Scheduled Tribe population of the State. The Kharias are original settlers of Bihar and Orissa. But they have migrated from their original homeland and have settled in different regions including West Bengal. The Kharias are mainly agriculturists and are allied to Mundas (Das, 1968). The Kharias of West Bengal reside mainly in the districts of Purulia, Bankura, Paschim Medinipur and Jalpaiguri. They are the original inhabitant of Choto Nagpur area in Bihar presently in Jharkhand, and Mayurbhanj area of Orissa and migrated to West Bengal in the districts mentioned above. Main concentration of Kharia population is found at different villages of Jhalda and Purulia Sadar sub-division in Purulia district, Khatra sub-division in Bankura district and Jhargram sub-division in Paschim Medinipur district. The aforesaid subdivisions are adjacent and share common borders with one another. So, it is discreet to consider that large area spread over Purulia, Bankura and Paschim Medinipur as the same and one single region. The Kharias have also migrated to Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal working mainly as wage laborers since the middle of the British rule in India.

Objectives

The present study aims to focus on the problems and challenges of the Kharia tribe of Purulia district, West Bengal. The main objective of this study is to understand the present condition of development of the Kharia community of Purulia district and to give possible recommendations for their holistic development.

Area and People

Purulia district is an extended eastern part of the Chotanagpur plateau. The geographical extension of this area extends from 22°42'35" North to 23°42'00" North latitudes and from 85°49'25" East to 86°54'37" East longitudes. This area is selected especially due to its aboriginal roots. According to the 2011 Census, the district has about 18.45% tribal population of the total population. Kharia people of Purulia district live in undulated hilly terrains, fringe and out skirt of forest. They are found in scattered and dispersed habitation and generally live in separate hamlets and villages. They are distributed in the different blocks of Purulia district. Mainly they reside at Barabazar, Balarampur, Manbazar-I &II, Bandwan and Pancha blocks. The Hill Kharia, hunting and gathering tribe, belong to the proto-Australoid racial stock and mainly inhabit Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal in India. In Purulia. Hill Kharia is found in 11 out of 23 blocks of the district. They are also found in different districts like Paschim Medinipur,

Bankura, Jhargram contiguous with Purulia in West Bengal, in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha and in East Singhbhum of Jharkhand.

In this study four Community Development Blocks namely Manbazar-II, Balarampur, Barabazar and Bandwan of Purulia district in West Bengal, India are taken into consideration for the study.

2. Literature Review

Developmental schemes targeting tribal groups in India are implemented mainly through two institutional channels: the Forest Department, which manages forest-based livelihoods and conservation-linked initiatives, and the Tribal Welfare Department, which oversees welfare, education, economic development and rights-based programs. The Forest Department has been central in programs related to community forest management, afforestation, and non-timber forest product (NTFP) development. Joint Forest Management (JFM), introduced nationally in the 1990s, remains one of the most significant initiatives, creating village-level Forest Protection Committees that share responsibilities in conserving forests while receiving usufruct rights over fuelwood, minor forest produces and a portion of timber revenue (Sundar, 2000). Several states, including Odisha, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, have implemented NTFP value-addition schemes such as honey processing, sal-leaf plate units, tamarind processing centers and bamboo craft development aimed at improving income generation for forest-dependent tribes (Reddy et al., 2018). The Forest Department has also promoted sustainable harvesting, community-managed bamboo plantations, eco-tourism projects, fire management committees and training programs for forest-based enterprises. In parallel, the Tribal Welfare Department administers broader rights-based and socio-economic schemes. The implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006, although multi-departmental, is significantly supported by Tribal Welfare agencies, which facilitate claims for individual forest rights, community forest rights and community forest resource management (Sarin et al., 2010). Welfare schemes include the Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana, an umbrella initiative that covers education, health, livelihood diversification, housing, and skill development for Scheduled Tribes. Educational programs such as Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), Ashram Schools and post-matric scholarships aim to increase literacy and reduce dropout rates among tribal youth (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021). Economic empowerment schemes include the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation (TRIFED) and its associated "Van Dhan Vikas Kendras," which support self-help groups in processing and marketing NTFPs, helping tribal collectors obtain fair prices and access national markets (TRIFED, 2020). State-level Tribal Welfare Departments also run livelihood schemes involving goatery, piggery, poultry, horticulture and irrigation support, particularly in Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, where agriculture and forest dependence are intertwined. Skill-development initiatives under schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) often include tribal-specific components aimed at training youth in modern trades while also supporting traditional crafts. Housing schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Gramin), when adapted for tribal regions, prioritize landless or displaced tribal households. Together, these interventions reflect a dual approach: forest departments focus on resource management and sustainable livelihoods, while tribal welfare departments emphasize rights, education, economic diversification and social protection. Despite these programs, scholars note that uneven implementation, bureaucratic complexity and limited community participation often restrict their long-term effectiveness (Sarin et al., 2010).

Recent approaches to tribal development in India have shifted from welfare-oriented models toward integrated, rights-based and community-driven frameworks that emphasize autonomy, sustainability and cultural relevance. One of the most significant changes has been the recognition of land and resource rights through the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, which attempts to correct historical injustices by granting individual and community rights over forest land, as well as Community Forest Resource (CFR) management authority (Sarin et al., 2010). This approach reframes tribal development by linking livelihood security with resource governance rather than relying solely on state-led welfare distribution. Another emerging trend is the focus on participatory and decentralized planning through institutions such as Gram Sabhas in Fifth Schedule areas and autonomous regional councils in the Northeast, enabling tribes to influence local development priorities, manage community resources and participate in conservation planning (Xaxa, 2014). Livelihood diversification has also become central to new developmental strategies. Programs such as the Van Dhan Vikas Kendras under TRIFED promote value addition, skill training and market integration for non-timber forest products, enhancing income beyond raw-product collection (TRIFED, 2020). Similarly, cluster-based rural entrepreneurship, digital marketing platforms, and cooperative models are being introduced to support tribal artisans, women's collectives and youth enterprise. In education and human development, Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) and Ashram Schools aim to provide high-quality schooling with attention to cultural context and language inclusion, signaling a shift from assimilationist policies to culturally sensitive pedagogy (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021). Digital inclusion has emerged as another major frontier: digital literacy programs, telemedicine services, online banking and e-governance initiatives are increasingly reaching remote tribal regions, reducing transaction barriers and improving access to welfare schemes

(Pati & Dash, 2022). Recent approaches have also integrated environmental sustainability by promoting community-led conservation, climate-resilient agriculture, and eco-cultural tourism projects that align with indigenous ecological knowledge. However, scholars caution that new models must ensure meaningful participation, address structural inequality and avoid reproducing top-down development patterns. While rights-based, market-linked and community-driven programs represent significant progress, their outcomes vary across states due to differences in land tenure, administrative capacity and political commitment (Xaxa, 2014). Overall, contemporary tribal development in India reflects a transition toward empowerment-oriented frameworks that combine rights, livelihoods, education, decentralization and sustainability.

Contemporary models of tribal development in India reflect a shift from welfare-driven and assimilationist approaches toward rights-based, participatory and sustainability-oriented frameworks that recognize the distinct socio-cultural and ecological contexts of tribal communities. A central component of this new model is the rights-based approach anchored in the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, which grants individuals and communities legal authority over forest land, minor forest produces and community forest resources. This framework aims to correct historical dispossession while strengthening livelihood security and empowering tribal institutions to manage forests collectively (Sarin et al., 2010). Complementing this shift is the decentralized governance model promoted through the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) 1996, which strengthens Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas by granting decision-making power over land use, resource management, local markets and customary dispute resolution. Scholars argue that PESA represents an important move from bureaucratic control to community autonomy, enabling tribal groups to shape development priorities according to local needs and cultural norms (Xaxa, 2014). A parallel development is the increasing emphasis on livelihood diversification and market-linked enterprise, most notably through TRIFED's Van Dhan Vikas Kendras, which support tribal self-help groups in processing, value addition and marketing of non-timber forest products. These initiatives reflect a growing recognition that enhancing income opportunities requires integrating indigenous skills with cooperative management and improved market access (TRIFED, 2020). New educational and human development interventions, including the expansion of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), highlight another important dimension of the new development model. These schools aim to provide high-quality, culturally responsive schooling that incorporates local knowledge while addressing structural gaps in access to education (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021). The integration of digital technology into tribal regions also marks a significant shift, with recent initiatives focusing on digital literacy, e-governance, online banking, telemedicine and digital market platforms to reduce administrative barriers and expand livelihood opportunities (Pati & Dash, 2022). Additionally, sustainability-based models linking indigenous ecological knowledge with biodiversity conservation, climate-resilient agriculture and eco-tourism reflect a broader transition toward development that is ecologically grounded and culturally respectful. Together, these new models emphasize empowerment, local governance, rights, livelihood diversification and ecological sustainability as central principles of tribal development in India.

3. Methodology

The present study adopted the following methodology and techniques to collect data:

Snowball technique: Snowball technique is a non-probability sampling technique in which existing study participants help researchers identify and recruit additional participants from among their social networks. The sample "snowballs" as each recruited participant refers to others who meet the study criteria. It is especially useful for studying hidden, hard-to-reach, or stigmatized populations where a complete sampling frame is not available (Goodman, 1961). Because it relies on referrals, snowball sampling is based on chain recruitment, allowing researchers to access individuals who might otherwise be inaccessible through conventional sampling methods (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

In this method, we began with a small number of initial participants who then nominate further participants. Although it is effective in gaining trust and entry into closed communities, it is subject to selection bias because the sample is not randomly drawn (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Despite this limitation.

Household survey by pretested structured schedule: The study employed a household survey method using pretested structured schedules to collect primary data from the selected population. A snowball sampling technique was adopted to identify respondents, particularly because the target group was dispersed and not easily accessible through conventional sampling frames (Goodman, 1961; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The process began with a set of initial participants (key informants) who met the study criteria and subsequently referred other eligible households, allowing the sample to expand through chain referral (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Data were collected using a structured schedule containing fixed, closed-ended questions on demographic, socio-economic, and behavioural aspects. The tool was pretested among a small group of households to assess clarity, sequencing, cultural appropriateness, and response

reliability, after which necessary revisions were made. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research, participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality of personal information was maintained, and respondents had the right to withdraw at any point without consequences. The combination of systematic data collection, context-appropriate sampling, and adherence to ethical standards strengthened the reliability and validity of the study.

Interview method: The interview method is a qualitative data-collection technique in which a researcher gathers information directly from respondents through verbal interaction, typically using a structured, semi-structured, or unstructured set of questions. It allows the investigator to explore participants' experiences, attitudes, and interpretations in depth, while also capturing non-verbal cues and contextual details that enrich the understanding of social phenomena (Kvale, 1996). Interviews facilitate a flexible and interactive process in which respondents can elaborate on their views, making it particularly useful for studies that aim to understand meanings, perceptions, and complex social realities (Patton, 2002). As a method of social research, interviewing is grounded in interpersonal communication and relies on building rapport, enabling the researcher to obtain reliable and nuanced information that may not emerge through surveys or observational tools (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Photographic method: The photographic method is a visual research technique in which photographs are used either as data or as tools for generating data to study social, cultural, or behavioral phenomena. In this method, researchers capture or collect images that document events, settings, interactions, or material conditions, allowing for systematic observation and interpretation of visual information that may not be easily captured through verbal or written methods (Collier & Collier, 1986). Photographs serve as both records of reality and prompts for discussion, helping researchers to explore meanings, emotions, and symbolic dimensions embedded in everyday life (Prosser & Schwartz, 1998). As a methodological approach, photographic research enhances the depth of inquiry by enabling detailed, multi-layered analysis of context, environment, and social behavior, making it especially valuable in ethnography, anthropology, sociology, and community studies (Pink, 2013).

Village selection: 16 different Kharia-dominated villages were selected from Barabazar, Balarampur, Manbazar-II, and Bandwan blocks of Purulia district, West Bengal. The villages are named as: Kumari (Olgara), Boro, Chirugora, Tamakhun, Kalipur, Shyamnagar, Bandhdih, Bela, Sargo (Chirkundi), Beldih (Digar Para), Jahanabad, Bardaha, Hijla, Mangla, Ghatihuli, Mirgichami, Popo (Ketki).

Sampling: A total of 260 Kharia households were selected from the selected villages in terms of habitation, representation from different economic classes, educational status, and health status. A pilot survey was made after getting the panchayat-level data. Conventional ethnographic and anthropometric fieldwork was with household censuses, interviews with structured schedules, and an anthropometric schedule. Group discussions were held on specific topics. In order to gather the necessary information, a few intensive case studies were conducted. Physical and human resource mapping was also made using GPS.

4. Discussion

4.1. Scenario of Development

Electricity: There is electricity in the villages which includes very few low-quality bulbs and may be one fan in the households, some households do not really have electricity. Very few houses are there where proper arrangements of lights are there.

Market: The villagers are used to the names of *Hat* (local term). The hat resides far away from villages. In a big field there sits different vendors with different objects, food items, daily need products etc. These hats do not sit for every day. It sits on particular days within a week. Different villagers opt for different markets. One that we came across was beside Boro village. People go there and collect necessary products.

Drinking water: Purulia is a place where there is scarcity of drinking water. But compared to that there are drinking water facilities still there in each village. But the main problem is there is no scope of filtration of the water which brings different health hazards to the villagers. The ICDS personnels try to make the villagers aware of the health hazards and tell them to boil the water and drink.

4.2. Skilled persons in the villages

There is no such educationally skilled villager. There are people who are especially skilled in understanding medicinal plants, some illogical activities like *Jolpora* (local term). On the other hand, it is seen that different educationally skilled or occupationally skilled outsiders come there to facilitate them. Sometimes Debasish Sen, an outsider of Kumari village, comes there to try to educate the children, help the villagers, and give them health related facilities. According to him he tries to give a wholesome support to the villagers as much as he can.

Political power in the villages: There are no such villagers found who are directly related to politics among our study areas. But the scenario is neither this type of like there is no connection or promotion of political people in the villages. In all the villages it is shown that wall writing is there about particular political parties.

Participation in Local Sub government (Panchayat): Some of the adult villagers from all villages are associated with Panchayat or LAMPS works. Smritilekha Sabar is an active member of the Block Development office as a representative of the Kharia Community.

4.3. Initiatives by the NGO (Sabar Kalyan Samiti)

Since 1968, for the rights of "Jal, Jangal o Jamin", with the hands of Gopiballav Lal Sign Deo, the founder, Paschim Banga Kheria Sabar Kalyan Samity (PBKSKS) has been tirelessly working for the upliftment of the DNT Sabar community in the Purulia and Bankura districts.

The 'Sabar Samiti' came into existence on 7th January 1968 in the form of a community collective at Kuda village of Purulia district. Renowned social activist and teacher Mr. Gopiballav Singdeo, from a royal family, along with 7 other Sabar people, were the founder members of the Samity. It started as a movement in the forest right by the Kheria Sabar tribe of Purulia. Until 1983, the primary goal was to secure the rights of the lost forest land. This society took rebirth as Paschim Banga Kheria Sabar Kalyan Samity at Maldi that year. Padmabibhusan and Magsaysay awardee Mahasweta Devi, who was Working President from 1983 to 2016, played a crucial role in advocating for the rights and welfare of the Sabar people. The oppression from the police department declined slowly owing to the activism of the Samiti.

4.3.1. Their Regular activities at Community Learning Centers (CLCs)

- Education: Daily class with a proper lesson plan, mainstreamed to the formal education, to increase the rate of M.P and H.S pass student, to inspire higher education, to decrease the dropout rate, Monthly assessment, to provide the educational material to the students, to monitor the health condition of the children.
- Guardian Meeting: To be aware of the importance of education, to motivate the parents to send their children daily to the CLC, to be aware of cleanliness and hygiene, to discuss various problems and their needs.
- Teacher's Meeting: Samity organizes a monthly meeting with all CLC teachers. In the meeting, we discuss various matters related to the CLC- the problems and challenges faced by the teachers to run the CLCs and their other issues.
- Teacher's Training by Adhigam Bhumi: After the collaboration with Adhigam Bhumi, operated by Help Us Help Them, teachers of our CLCs are regularly trained. The teachers are generally trained with the curriculum and module, extracurricular activities, Kalari Pattu etc. Annual Report 2024-25.
- Distribution of Dresses and clothes and other reliefs: In every year dresses are donated among all the students of the CLC. This year with the collaboration of Govt and other individual and Institutional donors, we provide clothes and other kinds of donations among the villagers and the children. The BDO of Balarampur block provided Mosquito nets to all the villagers.
- CLC visit by the Samity: A representative from Samity visits the CLCs regularly. We talk to the children and discuss their problems, and sometimes take classes in Language and Mathematics. We meet with the parents and discuss their problems.
- Cultural Program: The CLC children celebrate Saraswati Puja, and other important days like Republic Day, Independence Day, Children's Day, World Environment Day, Teacher Day etc. and in those days, they organize a cultural program and participate in the programme.
- Entitlements and documentation: The teacher of CLC keeps a record of the children. A proper documentation is maintained by the teachers; The work of entitlements is done regularly. We track the families who do not have any kind of certificate like an Aadhar card, voter card, cast certificate, ration card, etc. The teacher collects documents and applies for the new certificate.

4.3.2. Livelihood Enhancement Program Pusti Bagan

Nutritional Kitchen Garden Pusti Bagan, also known as the Nutritional Kitchen Garden, is an initiative undertaken by Paschim Banga Kheria Sabar Kalyan Samity (PBKSKS) to promote food diversity and improve the nutritional status of the Sabar community. This program focuses on the cultivation of fresh, organic vegetables in kitchen gardens established at the Community Learning Centers (CLCs) and Anganwadi centers. The primary objective of Pusti Bagan is to ensure a diverse and nutritious diet for pregnant women, lactating mothers, and young children. PBKSKS recognizes the significance of the first 1000 days, starting from the onset of pregnancy, in determining the long-term health and well-being of individuals. Therefore, special attention is given to the nutritional needs of pregnant women and young children during this critical period. The program also aims to raise awareness among adolescent girls about menstrual hygiene, the consequences of early marriages and pregnancies, and the importance of staying in school. Child marriage is prevalent in the Sabar community, and educating young girls about their health rights and well-being is a crucial aspect of the program. By promoting kitchen gardening and providing access to fresh and organic vegetables, PBKSKS ensures a regular supply of nutritious food at the CLCs and Anganwadi centers. This not only improves the dietary diversity of the community but also contributes to better maternal and child health outcomes. Additionally, the program emphasizes community participation and awareness regarding common health ailments, prevention and control measures, and healthcare entitlements. The Samity actively engages with the Village Health Sanitation Nutrition Committee to decentralize health, nutrition, and sanitation services and ensure the accountability of the public healthcare delivery system and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). Furthermore, community health volunteers, along with ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) and Anganwadi workers, serve as the first point of contact for healthcare services. Their involvement enhances the accessibility and effectiveness of healthcare interventions within the Sabar community. As a result of PBKSKS's efforts in promoting health and nutrition, there has been an improvement in community participation and awareness in neighboring villages as well. The positive effects of the Samity's work have led to a more responsive and accountable public healthcare system, as well as increased community engagement in health, nutrition, and sanitation-related initiatives.

4.3.3. Sabar Handicrafts and Its Promotion

Sabar Handicrafts is now become the identity of the Sabar community. To this vulnerable indigenous community, this handicraft is a boon from God. It is mingled in the blood of the community. Various items are made up of Date palm and Kashi grass. PBKSKS plays a vital role in the development and commercialization of these handicrafts. In the early 1980s, PBKSKS recognized the potential of Sabar Handicrafts and decided to support the community in transforming their traditional craft into a profession. Training camps were initiated in 1983 to teach the Sabar artisans how to create a wide range of handicraft products. Through these training programs, the Sabar artisans acquired technical skills and learned to produce intricate and appealing handicraft items. The success of this project is vast as Sabar Handicrafts emerged as a prominent industry in West Bengal. This industry got GEO Tag recognition in October 2022 from the Government of India in Hyderabad. In these last six months, men and women participated in various sale promotion exhibitions, and Fair-festivals and raised their qualitative skills in the field of industry. Without any help from men, the Sabar women alone travelled in trains and buses and participated in various programs. In those ongoing programs, they took orders, made the product at the fair, and delivered the products to their customers. In the last 6 months, Sabar artisans joined in many sale and exhibition programs.

4.3.4. Community Health Volunteer Training

Paschim Banga Kheria Sabar Kalyan Samiti (PBKSKS) continues its dedicated efforts to improve the health and well-being of the Sabar community by organizing comprehensive training programs. These programs are held every six months, aiming to create a network of community health volunteer workers who can provide essential healthcare services and education within their community. This report provides an in-depth overview of the recent two-day training session on 23.06.2024 & 25.06.2024, highlighting the significant strides PBKSKS has made in developing self-sufficient and self-dependent health workers within the Sabar community like Rampada Sabar and Kalpana Sabar. Trained by PBKSKS and supported with scholarships and fellowship, they have become pillars of health support in their community. The Sabar community faces numerous health challenges due to their remote location and limited access to healthcare facilities. Common health emergencies in the community include diarrhea, high fever, fire burns, snake bites, and inadequate menstrual hygiene. Addressing these issues requires trained individuals who are not only knowledgeable about medical care but also culturally aware and trusted by the community.

4.3.5. Fellowship programme

The fellowship program initiated in 2020 with the support of various organizations aims to foster leadership qualities among the youth of the Sabar tribe community. Currently, 5 fellows under APF and 10 fellows under Keystone Foundation from different locations within the Sabar community are actively engaged in the day-to-day activities of

Sabar Samity. These fellows work alongside the Samity team members and receive training and guidance on various aspects, including cultural values of the Sabar tribe, the challenges they face, organizational structure and function, as well as ethics and values. The governing board, under the guidance of the eminent advisory board, provides mentorship to these fellows, helping them develop the necessary skills and knowledge to lead and carry forward the legacy of Sabar Samity. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the comprehensive development of the Sabar tribe community in the near future. Currently, PBKSKS has a total of 15 fellows, distributed among different organizations such as APPI (Azim Premji Philanthropy Initiative), RASTA, and Keystone. These fellows undergo capacity building training organized by PBKSKS, focusing on various topics including COVID-19, para-legal skills, organic farming, report writing, case study, and social media. These trainings aim to equip the youth fellows with the necessary tools and knowledge to address the challenges faced by the Sabar community effectively. Through the fellowship program and capacity building initiatives, Sabar Samity strives to nurture leadership potential, empower the youth, and ensure the sustained development and progress of the Sabar tribe community.

4.3.6. Youth Leadership Development Program

PBKSKS successfully organized a four-day Youth Development Training from January 4th to 7th, 2025, involving 37 Sabar girls from Class 9 to B.A. This training aimed at their holistic development, focusing on mental health, child rights, personality development, skill-building, and education. On the first day, Bijaylaxmi Giri, a child counselor from DCL, Govt. of W.B. conducted a session on mental health and emotional well-being. She helped the girls understand self-awareness, stress management, and confidence-building. Through interactive activities and storytelling, she created a safe space for them to express their thoughts and emotions freely. In this training program, she also involved the girls with their day health issues. What should be kept in their daily meal for their health development and how to manage their menstrual health and hygiene also discussed with the girls. On the second day, Pintu Tiwari, Coordinator of District Child Line, Govt. of W.B. educated the girls about child rights, protection laws, and safety measures. He explained the importance of reporting abuse, understanding early marriage risks, and seeking help from Child Line. The session empowered the girls with knowledge about their rights and the mechanisms available for their protection. He also discussed internet security and the misuse of mobile. Mousumi Samanta and Arun Sarkar led the third day from Team Swapnalok, who conducted a creative and skill-based session. They trained the girls in making dolls using unused or rag clothes, promoting creativity, resourcefulness, and sustainable practices. This activity not only introduced them to a new craft but also encouraged self-reliance and the possibility of income generation. Alongside the skill training, she also guided them on personality development and confidence-building, motivating them to pursue their dreams with determination. On the final day, Mr. Sanjit Biswas, an English teacher from Basantapur High School, focused on English communication skills. He helped the girls overcome their fear of English, making the learning process engaging through storytelling and interactive exercises. He emphasized the importance of English in education and career opportunities, encouraging them to build their language skills with confidence. He taught the girls how to write different types of applications for various official departments in both Bengali and English. This four-day training proved to be a transformative experience for the 37 Sabar girls. It provided them with valuable knowledge, skills, and motivation to face the future with confidence. PBKSKS remains dedicated to empowering Sabar youth, ensuring they have continuous learning opportunities for their personal and social growth.

4.4. Major challenges for development

There is an educational infrastructural lack in the villages. In the case of education there are insufficient schools. Not every village has a school. If at all there are schools but teachers are irregular there. Above all, the villagers are very less enthusiastic about learning. That is the main problem for them to grow. They have no such interest to uplift their living.

In case of health, the villagers rely upon medicinal plants mostly for their primary treatment. There is no such good health infrastructure in the villages. The hospitals are far away and there is no ambulance service. Most of the time people drink traditional liquors and are in a state where they are not in sense fully. This habit makes them lack the willpower to do other work. Whether it's a male or a female all the people are habituated with almost regular drinking.

Coming to occupational development, education is very important for white collar jobs. None of the villagers are associated with it. Most of them work as a daily labor, a mason, or an agricultural field worker. There are Kharia people who are associated with block development work and Panchayat related work. But there is no such person from our study area.

There can be development in the sectors like their folk culture also. Kharia people have their own troops of singing and dancing in different places. If their cultural activities can be preserved then it will be very helpful for them to sustain their livelihood.

4.4.1. *Self-initiative Development by the members of Kharia Tribe. Agriculture, Business, White collar jobs etc.)*

There are people like Smritilekha Sabar, Ratnabali Sabar, Bishnu Sabar, Jaladhar Sabar, Meghnad Sabar, Bharati Sabar, Ajit Sabar, Fatik Kumar Hembram who are associated with NGO, Block Development office etc. they are trying hard to elevate the living of the Kharia people as a whole. They are trying to upgrade their education system, Occupational life. Educational upliftment will help to get them evolve from blue collar jobs to white collar jobs. The initiators try to provide general knowledge about agricultural activities also so that it can be better.

4.4.2. *Women Empowerment (SHG, Participation in political activities, Business)*

As mentioned earlier women like Ratnabali Sabar, Smritilekha Sabar, Bharati Sabar are related to Block Development offices, Panchayat, NGO so that they can serve their very own community. The Kharia community is degrading as there are no such educationally skilled people among them. These women are the ray of hope among this type of scenario.

4.4.3. *Education in advance school hostels*

Advance education is not the cup of tea for the Kharia community. Still, there is a high school in Boro and Bardaha village. There is a hostel outside of Popo (Ketki) village. Some of the children live there as their parents are aware of the importance of education. There is one male named Akash Sabar who studies at Sidho Kanho Birsha University. But there is no such information about the bulk population for advanced education.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Kharia tribes of Purulia face different developmental problems daily. But it must be mentioned that there are NGOs which help them to grow. This process needs awareness among the villagers themselves. Here are some possible recommendations for their holistic development.

Education is the key to development. Kharia tribes have little access to education. This isolation of tribal communities has limited their worldwide view and in dealing with the present-day administrative system So the researcher makes some suggestions for better literacy and development opportunities for the tribals in general and the Kharia in particular.

Due to the failure of the government. sponsored efforts even for five decades of independence, different democratic organization will have to be taken up this challenge for eradicating at least minimizing the illiteracy among the Kharia;

In education, certain spatial and social pockets of illiteracy need to be addressed, in occupational terms, agricultural labor households (and especially females in such households) require special policy attention.

Overall, the lack of basic infrastructural facilities continues to be a serious concern for the proper growth of primary education in West Bengal. The issue of finding more resources for education especially for increasing the availability and quality of the physical infrastructure - is therefore crucial;

The organization of teachers, students, and women will have to shoulder this duty with the help of local self-government. (Panchayati Raj Institution);

The continuing concerns about the quality of delivery services for school education suggest that there may be a need to restructure the organization and administration of schools, to make them amenable to greater local community control. There is therefore, a strong case for increasing the control of panchayats over the formal school system in the state;

Linguistic mapping should be done to assess the incidence and category of tribals before planning for their education. The curriculum should be developed in tribal languages for better way of instruction;

The school environment should be attractive with gardens, plantations, and children friendly elements with cost effective locally available raw materials. The school must have play materials and self-learning materials for the children to create interest in them to attend school regularly.

The teacher working in a tribal dominated school should be rightly informed about his role. He should be oriented on the richness of heritage and culture of the tribals. He should have enough patience to bear the tribal child in a classroom and act as a friend and facilitator rather than a master;

The non-tribal teachers working for long time in spite of various health hazards by knowing the tribal language should be identified and compensated with incentives and rewards as a token of commendations for their valuable services towards the education of tribals so that other non-tribal teachers will be interested to join the force;

Tribal teachers should be identified by their category and be posted to schools where he can serve his community children better;

The village community, although illiterate, are great assets as far as education on art and craft is concerned. Their resources should be used while topics related to agriculture, animal husbandry, fishery, horticulture, sericulture and material culture are transacted in the classroom.

Innovation through research on various aspects of education must be conducted so as to identify problems and their solutions. The problems and issues identified at this juncture may seriously affect the future developments in the district. Hence, it is high time that appropriate strategies must be built up to find out ways and means not to subside but to mitigate the problems for the future.

- More primary schools or SSK or MSK should be opened in the remote tribal villages to ensure the participation of the Kharia students;
- Educated Kharias should be trained and encouraged to teach in the school in their locality;
- To avoid the drop out due to child labor the residential school should be promoted;
- Anganwadi, non-formal, adult education centers should be opened to minimize adult illiteracy; Adult literacy programme should be more strengthened in the tribal areas to motivate the Kharia people so that they understand the reality to send their wards to send the nearby school;
- The employment opportunity should be more to attract them to the education;
- Need based development activities should be taken up to economically empower the Kharias so that their children need not to be engaged in bread earning activities;
- Education of the tribal cannot be left merely to short term plan strategies. It is important that planners take a long-term view which is embedded in a meaningful policy framework;
- Looking at the tribal context, it is of absolute necessity that the school schedule be prepared as per the local requirement rather than following a directive from the State. It has been found that vacations and holidays are planned without taking into cognizance, local contexts and thereby unnecessarily antagonizing tribal communities and keeping them out of school;
- Though it has been highlighted time and again no concrete step has been taken to provide locally relevant materials to tribal students. Availability of locally relevant materials will not only facilitate faster learning but also help the children to develop a sense of affiliation to the school;
- The success of educational endeavor in a particular community can be gauged by the extent of adjustment with changing conditions achieved by the students. The supplementary method should be followed in educating the tribal communities. Existing educational institutions with their syllabus, examination system, etc. may be utilized;
- In order to make education effective and sustainable, building partnership between the community and the Government. Results from pilot projects in Andhra Pradesh shows that community partnership not only augments state expenditure on education but also guarantees supervision and monitoring thus addressing an intractable problem for the State;
- Environment building is of immense importance in the context of educational development among tribal communities. Community awareness and community mobilization which are the core elements in should receive adequate importance and attention;
- Decentralization of education management is another aspect that needs special consideration in the context of tribal areas. In fact, considering the geographical terrain and communication problems in tribal areas, it is crucial to restructure the existing system of educational management Adaptation of structures such as school complexes and Village Education Committees (VECs) to the tribal areas need careful consideration;
- Where new initiatives such as the Sishu Siksha Karmasuchi are underway, it is necessary to avoid the possibility of such parallel systems becoming another means of class differentiation in school education, and to integrate them into the wider public education system as soon as possible;
- Financing and implementing Mid-day meals in schools is difficult, but nevertheless this is a programme that the state government should attempt to universalize as quickly as possible of its positive effects in terms of better nutrition among the young and increasing incentives for regular attendance;
- To operationalize the nutrition education, the pre-service and in-service training to teachers on regular basis needs to be revamped;

- Skill development, competency building and motivating the teachers also need to be strengthened for sustaining educational development. Teacher should be made the center of educational transformation and therefore, must remain as the primary facilitator;
- Due attention should be laid on induction of larger number of S.T boys and girls into vocational courses to check the higher discontinuation rate of the tribal students;
- Tribals in many areas have an aptitude for technical education and their boys take to technical trades quickly but due to non-availability of proper technical schools they could not learn it properly; and
- Life-centric education (region-specific, culture-specific and community-specific) will have to be imparted, with emphasis on modern methods of cultivation, poultry, piggery, duckery, weaving, tailoring, carpentry, rural tools, TV, Tape, Radio repairing, Automobile, etc. and the like basing on the available natural resources.

At least one health check-up center per village is important to implement in every village. The requirement of devoted ambulances is also there.

The awareness of hygiene is most important among Kharia people. They live an unhygienic life and let their children do the same. It is noticed that the community people wear untidy clothes, sits on dusty areas. They need to be addressed that these habits must be changed.

Pregnant women need to be educated as much as possible so that they can be aware at this crucial time.

People keep misconceptions there such as women cannot eat eggs during pregnancy. There must be educated personnels who will educate them about these misconceptions.

Drinking water facility is there but they are not in good condition. People need to take care of this. And education is a must for all these developments so that the community people can be aware of their better future.

Education is the base for all the developments. So, it is very important that most of the villagers get at least primary education so that they can be financially stable and developmentally aware.

It is very much needed to preserve the folk cultures of the Kharia community. Their culture is represented by their songs, dances and art and crafts. Broom making is their holy grail for everyday living. It is very important to sow a seed deeply inside their mind for conserving their very own culture.

Compliance with ethical standards

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