



# Baiga Tribe: Society and Economy of Chhattisgarh in India

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**Abstract:** This paper attempts to discuss the socio-economic conditions of the Baiga Tribe. The Baiga is a primitive tribe of Chhattisgarh state and economically backward. They are socio-economically included nomadic-hunting groups but they practice shifting cultivation at present. The Baiga tribe is one of the incoherent tremendous Particular Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) earlier called the Primitive Tribal Group (PTG) of Chhattisgarh. These people live beside the Maikal Mountain range. The Government of Chhattisgarh declares that the Baiga tribe is protected. They differ from the other tribal groups based on socio-cultural activities. At present, the Chhattisgarh Government provides various developmental schemes for this tribe. So that they can be new aviation for their socio-cultural and economic life and get significant results for the Baiga tribe of Chhattisgarh.

**Key Words:** Socio-cultural and economic activities, Changing socio-cultural and economic assessment.

## 1. Introduction:

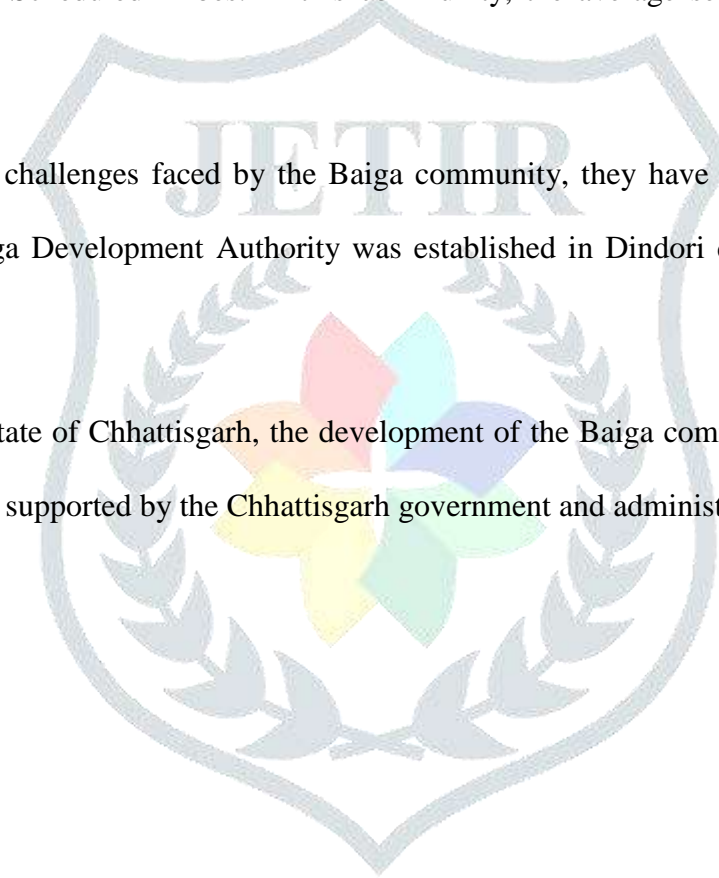
The word Baiga is polysemous. Baiga is indicative of a particular tribe and is also synonymous with a Guniya and Ojha. This tribe are classified into various 'Gotra' (Goti). There so many Gotra are Dhurve, Marawi, Markem, Tekam, Netam, Paratti etc. The major sub caste of the Baiga tribe is Binjhar, Narotia (Nahar), Bharatolia, Rambhaina, Katbhaina, Kodwan (Kundi), Dudhbhaina, Gondabhaina, Kurk Baiga, and Savat Baiga etc. Baiga tribe is a special backward tribe (PVTG) of Chhattisgarh State. These people live here in the Maikal Mountain range. On an administrative basis, the Baiga tribe of the state mainly resides in Kabirdham, Rajnandgaon, Mungeli,

Bilaspur, Gaurela Pendra reside in Marwahi and Korea Districts under the Bilaspur and Durg Subdivision of Chhattisgarh.

According to the 1961 Census, the total population of the Baiga tribe in the state was 10,415. By the 2011 Census, their population had increased to 89,744. Over the past five decades, their population has grown by approximately nine times. During the decade from 2001 to 2011, their population growth rate was 28.21%, which is significantly higher than the state's average population growth rate (Table 1). According to the 2011 Census, the average literacy rate of the Baiga community was 40.6% (male 50.4% and female 30.8%), which is much lower than the average literacy rate of the Scheduled Tribes. In this community, the average sex ratio was 1001 females per thousand males.

Due to the socio-economic challenges faced by the Baiga community, they have been classified as a protected tribe, and in 1978, the Baiga Development Authority was established in Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh to promote their development.

After the formation of the state of Chhattisgarh, the development of the Baiga community as a special Scheduled Tribe has been continuously supported by the Chhattisgarh government and administration.





Source: Chhattisgarh Atlas, 2021.

Computed by authors

Fig. 1: Location Map of the Study Area.

Russel and Hiralal, in their book *"Caste and Tribal Zones of Central India,"* classified the Baiga tribe as part of the Dravidian language group. However, recent studies have categorized the Baiga community within the Austroasiatic language family.

Table – 1

Chhattisgarh: Population Growth Rate of Baiga tribe from 1961 to 2011

Sl. No.	Decade	Population	Growth Rate (%)
1	1961	10415	-
2	1971	13133	26.09
3	1981	43351	230.09
4	1991	54330	25.32
5	2001	69993	28.82
6	2011	89744	28.21

Source: Census of India, 1961 – 2011.

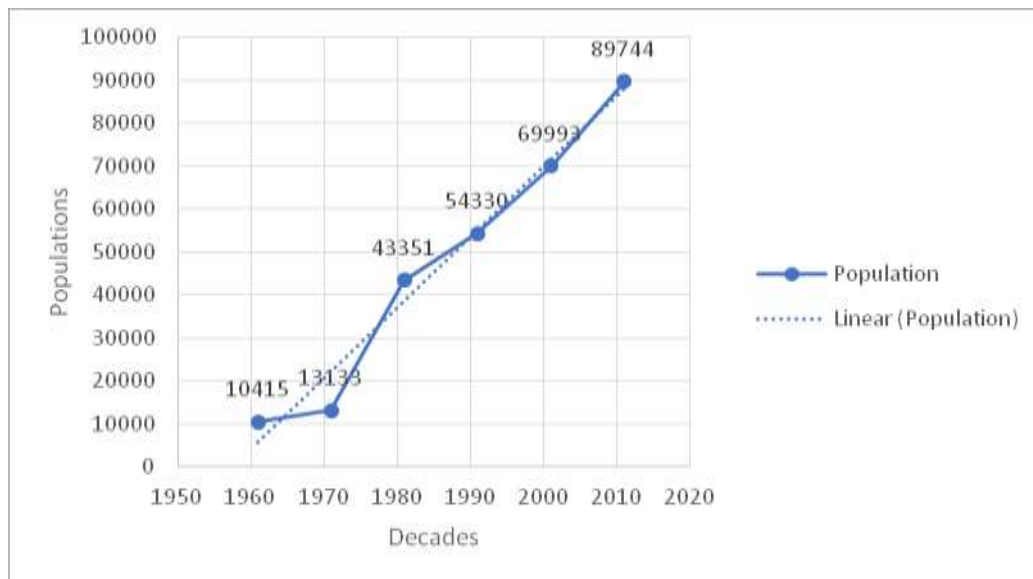


Fig. 2: Compare between decadal wise population and population trend.

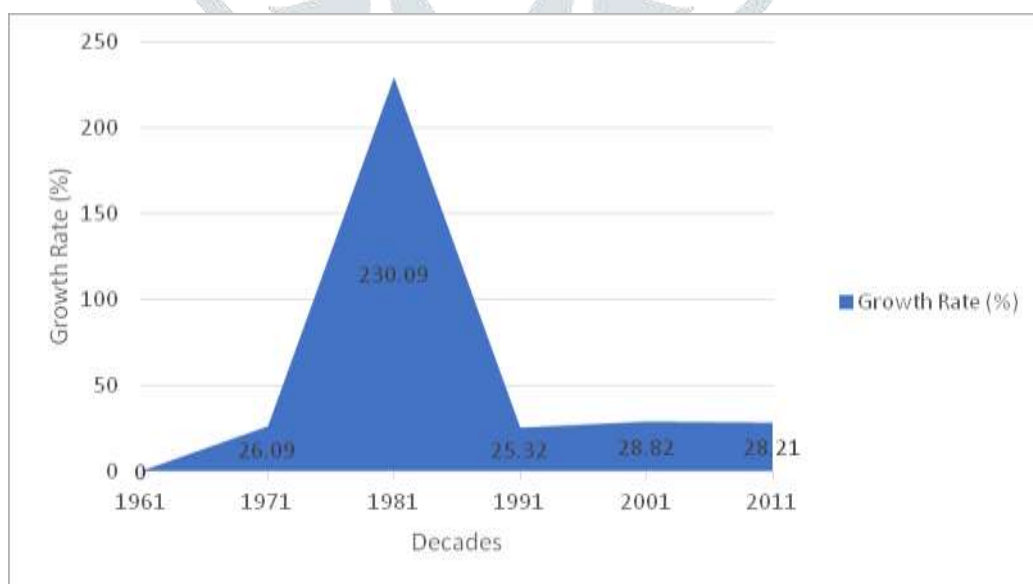


Fig. 3: Decadal-wise population growth rate in %.

## 2. Literature Review:

The word “tribe” is generally used for a “socially cohesive unit, associated with a territory, the members of which regard them as politically autonomous (Duncan, 1972). The term primitive tribe was often used by western anthropologists to denote “a primitive aggregate of people living in a primitive or barbarous condition under a headman or chief.” The profiles of tribal culture, society, and economy are changing fast with time due to close contact with the non-tribal majority populations and their settlements. Most of the tribal research in India owes its beginning to the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1774), H. H. Risley & E. T. Dalton (1872), O’ Mally (1906 – 1925), Russell & Hiralal (1916, "Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces of India"), Thurston in South India, and Crooks in North India, respectively. They wrote encyclopedic inventories about the tribes of India that provide basic information about the life cycle, socio-economic conditions, and culture of the respective regions. Elwin, problem-oriented publications on the tribes of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa like “The Baiga” (1939), The Agaria (1942), The Maria (1943), A Philosophy for NEFA (1955), A New Deal for Tribal India (1963), and Tribal World of Verrer Elwin (1964). K. Bose (1971), "Tribal Life in India." These books look at, from close quarters, various aspects of the social, economic, and cultural lives of around 68 million of our fellow men who are considered to belong to Schedule Tribes. A. S. Ali (1973), "Tribal Demography in Madhya Pradesh: A Socio-economic Study." This book studies the impact of economic development on the socio-economic conditions of various tribal communities.

## 3. Objectives:

The main objectives of the presented research study are as follows:

- a) **Development of the Baiga Tribe:** The Baiga tribe has been recognized as a special Scheduled Tribe since 1978 by the Baiga Development Authority. The current study aims to assess their social and economic status.
- b) **Cultural and Traditional Practices:** The study seeks to understand how their cultural traditions and customs are being preserved and practiced in the modern era.

- c) **Implementation of PM-PVTG Development Mission:** The Pradhan Mantri PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) development Mission was launched on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2023. The study aims to evaluate how the Baiga community has benefited from this mission.

#### 4. Methodology:

To know the socio-economic condition of the people of the Baiga tribe of Chhattisgarh, a random survey was conducted using multistage sampling methods. The presented research paper is based on primary and secondary data. For primary data, the researcher conducted field visits in the residential areas of the Baiga community to analyse their social and economic systems. Data from primary sources has been collected through:

1. Village Survey,
2. Household Survey,
3. Interview,
4. Discussion with the residents of different mouzas.

Data from secondary sources has been collected principally from the following government offices:

1. Revenue Office,
2. Census Handbook,
3. Block Development Office,
4. Agricultural Development Office.

The conducted survey was a purposeful one. Random sampling has been done, keeping in mind that a selected household is a good representation of people belonging to different socio-economic groups.

## 5. Discussion and Result:

### House and Settlement:

The Baiga tribe typically lives in small villages where clusters of 5-10 houses are situated around a central courtyard. Their homes are generally constructed in a simple manner, often with walls made of mud and thatched roofs covered with leaves and branches. These houses are typically 10-20 feet long and feature small doors through which they crouch to enter. The outer walls of the houses are often decorated with hand-painted designs.

The Baiga people generally build their homes as temporary structures. Due to their practice of shifting cultivation, they used to relocate and rebuild their homes every two to three years. However, with the decline of shifting agriculture, they have begun to settle more permanently.

In earlier times, when a family member passed away, the Baiga would abandon that house and move to a new location. This practice was due to the small size of their homes. After the marriage of a son, he would build a separate hut nearby to live in. The Baiga people typically reside on the outskirts of villages, and as a result, their homes often have enclosures for cattle and goats.

### Occupation:

The Baiga community is engaged in various occupations. They work in agriculture, forestry product collection, cottage industries, animal husbandry, fishing, hunting, labour, and other activities for their livelihood. However, they are not known as skilled traders.

Both men and women of the Baiga community participate in their occupations together. The women do not spin thread or weave cloth. They are also skilled in making tools and items necessary for their work, such as nets, baskets, ropes, mats, Plows, hoes, and wooden items especially women. Therefore, it can be said that the Baiga community is not only skilled in farming and craftsmanship but also in traditional medicine, herbal healing, and hunting.

Traditionally, the Baiga community engaged in shifting cultivation that is called 'Bevar, or hunting and gathering as their primary occupations. However, due to restrictions on shifting cultivation and hunting, they have largely abandoned these practices. They are cultivated and produce kodo, maize, sathi paddy, madia, black gram, jhurga, and yellow lentils. Previously they are hunted deer, rabbits, and wild pig but the hunting now banded. They live in forest and mountain areas. Wild roots, vegetables, pickles, gum, lacquer, tendu leaf, honey, bichandi, tikhur, etc are collected from the forest and sold near the market. Some Baiga catch fish from the nala, river by net, fork, kumani, etc.

It is widely believed in the Baiga community that they do not hesitate to hunt a tiger and consider it their younger brother.

### **Food and Drink:**

This community includes both vegetarian and non-vegetarian members. They have a particular fondness for fish and meat. They consume fish regularly and offer it to their deities during certain rituals.

The Baiga people catch fish after harvesting crops, and it has been observed that a single Baiga individual may spend an entire day fishing in a field. They also enjoy a local alcoholic drink made from rice, which both men and women consume almost daily. The people of this community typically brew their own alcohol.

### **Marriage:**

Their family structure is patriarchal, and cross-cousin marriage is common among them. The tribe is ancestral and patriarchal local for marriage. That is the girl go to the bride's father's house after marriage. The marriage age of Baiga tribe is for girls 13 to 16 years and boys 14 to 18 years. The Baiga community practices several forms of marriage, which are known by names such as "Eanguli marriage," "Ispeel marriage," "Chor marriage," "Yelsuna marriage," and "Madharia marriage." Among these, the Eanguli marriage is considered the most prestigious. In this type of marriage, they pay a bride price and conduct the marriage rituals with proper ceremonies. During the wedding, the groom's brother plays a significant role by making a temporary seat and conducting a mock ceremony.

In an Ispeel marriage, if the girl likes a boy, she moves into his house. In an Eanguli marriage, the bride and groom live together after the ceremony, with a proper religious ceremony taking place later.

### **Deities:**

The main deities worshipped by the Baiga community include Burkhan, Narak, Bhandarnath, Dharti Mai, Narayan Dev, Noyagin Devi, Kshetra Mai, Mahadev, and Bhim Dev.

Narak and Noyagin Devi are worshipped in small shrines within their homes, where they offer sacrifices and fish once every three years. The Baiga people also perform a fish offering ceremony to Lord Narayan every twelve years, which is known as "Lakhu worship."

### **Key Rituals:**

The Baiga community is deeply rooted in rituals and music. Both men and women sing and perform dances together. They sing songs while working in the fields or while traveling on the road.

Their main rituals include the Dekh, Saaila, Jhunk, and ByeLe dances. The Saaila dance is performed by men and women together, moving from one village to another during the night. During this time, they also finalize the marriage of an unmarried couple. The Saaila dance is also referred to as the "Chholay dance." The Jhunk dance is performed by the Baiga people during the daytime, and the ByeLe dance is performed during marriages. In the hilly regions, this community is invited to perform their dances during various occasions.

### **Harvest Festivals:**

The Baiga community celebrates several major harvest festivals, including Binjhar, Dhurri, Kharri, Nokharni, Dekh, Narayan Pooja, Nankya, Chaitri, Mahua, Teej, Sohni, and Jaonhar.

They celebrate the Mahua festival in the month of March. On this day, the community worships the plough and the field and then consumes the first harvest of rice. The Jhunk festival is celebrated every four years with great enthusiasm after the sowing of the first crop in February. This festival is celebrated outside the village and is

exclusively for men. On this day, they prepare the "Ghaanti" meal using Mahua flowers and consume it together.

The Nankya festival is celebrated by the community according to traditional customs on a specific day.

### **Clothing and Ornamentation:**

The Baiga community is fond of wearing colorful clothing. The women of this community, before marriage, adorn themselves with various ornaments on almost every part of their body. These include bangles, earrings, nose rings, necklaces, waistbands, and anklets. However, after marriage, the women do not wear a veil.

The men of the Baiga community wear a turban on their heads and decorate themselves with bangles and rings during festivals. They also carry large iron rods with them. The Baiga women wrap a sari around themselves up to the knee.

### **Conclusion:**

With the continuous efforts of the government of Chhattisgarh and its administration, the Baiga community is gradually becoming a part of mainstream development. They are now benefiting from government housing schemes and are starting to live in permanent houses, and they are increasingly engaging in settled agriculture.

Trained by the traditional training center in the village of Farasgaon, located in Bilaspur district, the Baiga youth have earned great respect at both the national and state levels in the field of archery and have won many awards.

They possess extensive knowledge of hunting and herbal medicine, but due to a lack of modern understanding, they have not been able to fully utilize their traditional skills.

The population of this community is rapidly increasing due to educational and economic development, but their family planning remains inconsistent. According to one survey, educated and skilled individuals from this community manage family planning with the help of rational methods.

Their traditional shifting agriculture and fishing practices have played a significant role in their social cohesion and economic development. In conclusion, it can be said with certainty that this community is rich in qualities such as hunting, herbal medicine, farming, and music, making them a self-reliant and unique community.

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