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4. Between Forest and Factory: The Unravelling and Resilience of Tribal Socio-Cultural Life in Sundargarh District, Odisha

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Abstract

Sundargarh District in Odisha presents one of the more consequential instances of the tribal-industrial encounter in peninsular India. With scheduled tribes constituting slightly above half of the district's total population and with industrialization occupying nearly half its geographical area, the social and cultural fabric of communities such as the Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Kisan, Gond and Bhuiyan has been subjected to a sustained and uneven process of change. This article examines the existing socio-cultural scenario of the district, attending to the structural characteristics of tribal social life — settlement patterns, family organisation, religion, language, dietary customs, life-cycle rituals, feasts and artistic expression — while situating these within the dual contexts of the industrial and non-industrial zones that together define the district's contemporary character. Drawing on ethnographic data and recent scholarship, the article argues that the tribal communities of Sundargarh are neither passive recipients of modernising forces nor suspended in some pre-industrial social arrangement. Rather, they occupy an in-between space, negotiating their ethnic identities against persistent economic pressures, demographic shifts, religious transformation and the pull of a consumerist culture that increasingly surrounds them.

Keywords: *Sundargarh District, tribal identity, industrialization, socio-cultural transformation, animism, Christianity, Odisha*

Introduction

Any attempt at understanding the socio-cultural life of the tribal communities of Sundargarh district must begin with an acknowledgement of the district's essential duality. It is, in a single administrative unit, both a landscape of dense sal forests and terraced hill agriculture, and a corridor of steel, cement production and iron-ore extraction that has drawn workers, traders and administrators from across the

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country (Mohanty, 2015). This duality is not merely geographic. It has generated two internally distinct social worlds that coexist within the same district boundary, sometimes within the same revenue village, occasionally within the same settlement cluster.

The population of Sundargarh district is composed of scheduled tribes, who account for 50.7 percent of the total scheduled castes who constitute approximately 8.62 percent, and the remaining non-tribal population that includes general castes and other backward communities. The urban population of the district, as recorded in the 2011 census, stood at 33.67 percent — a figure that reflects the extent to which industrialization has drawn people away from agrarian and forest-based livelihoods into wage-dependent urban settlements. Sundargarh is among the most industrialized districts in Odisha, and it is precisely this industrial presence that has served as the primary driver of socio-cultural change in the tribal communities (Sahu, 2020).

The principal tribal groups of the district are the Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Kisan, Bhuyiyan and Gond. Racially, these communities fall into two broad groups: the Dravidians, which include the Oraon, Kisan and Gond; and the Kolarians, which include the Kharia, Munda and Ho. Despite these distinct linguistic and cultural origins, the communities share geographical space, particularly in the villages of the non-industrial interior, and have over time developed a remarkable degree of social commonality — common festival calendars, shared musical traditions and, in the industrial areas, a cross-tribal solidarity born of shared conditions (Nayak et al., 1990; Mishra, 2017). It is this composite social world that the present article seeks to describe and analyse.

Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative approach, integrating ethnographic insights from Nayak, Boal and Soreng (1990) with secondary sources including peer-reviewed journals, government reports and recent anthropological research. The analysis draws upon a substantial body of recent scholarship to situate its observations within contemporary socio-cultural discourse. The study contrasts the industrialized zones of Panposh and portions of Bonai sub-division with the non-industrialized Sundargarh subdivision, examining settlement patterns, population diversity, family structures, language, food habits, religion, rituals, festivals and ethnic identities. The objective is not merely to document social change, but to illuminate the processes through which tribal communities in Sundargarh negotiate continuity and transformation in conditions not entirely of their own choosing (Mohanty, 2020; Kumar, 2019).

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Settlement Patterns

Sundargarh's settlement patterns are shaped by the intersection of its socio-economic conditions and geographic character. In the non-industrial zone, particularly the Sundargarh subdivision, tribal villages remain predominantly mono-tribal, with hamlets scattered across forested hills, tied to agricultural land and maintaining a spatial separation that preserves ethnic distinctiveness even when multiple communities are counted within a single revenue village (Nayak et al., 1990; Patnaik, 2006). Tribal hamlets in such cases are not recognised as separate revenue villages but are administratively absorbed into the non-tribal village that constitutes the formal revenue unit.

The non-tribal communities of the agrarian belt — the Aghria and Teli in particular — occupy the more fertile plains and have remained economically prosperous and politically influential to a degree disproportionate to their numerical strength (Behera, 2018). The district headquarters is located in this non-industrial region, and beyond Sundargarh town itself there is no large urban settlement. Christianity, carried into this region through the missionary network of schools and institutions, has shaped not only the educational but also the social imagination of the tribal communities in this belt.

In the industrialized zones of Panposh and Bonai, settlements are compact and multi-tribal in character. Tribes coexist closely, often sharing courtyards, alongside non-tribal and migrant populations drawn in by the industrial economy (Nayak et al., 1990; Kumar, 2019). The spatial distance that traditionally maintained cultural distinctiveness between tribal groups has collapsed in the industrial belt, fostering cross-cultural interactions but simultaneously reducing the cultural isolation that once served as a medium of preservation (Mohanty, 2015; Sahu, 2020). Whether this spatial convergence produces cultural enrichment or cultural erosion — or both simultaneously — is a question that the socio-cultural history of the district has not yet conclusively answered.

Population Diversity

Sundargarh districts demographic composition is multifaceted. The general caste population — which includes the Agria, Badhei, Bania, Bhandari, Brahmin, Gouda, Guria, Hansi, Kansari, Keuta, Kumbhar, Mali, Routia, Sundi and Teli — constitutes less than half of the district's total population. The Agaria and Teli are among the more developed settled agriculturists of the region, while the Brahmins, though few in number, continue their traditional occupation of priestly service. The Scheduled Castes — Dom, Pano, Ghasi, Badaik and Lohar — constitute 8.62 percent of the total population, and are found in proximity to both caste and tribal communities (Nayak et al., 1990; Dash,

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2012). The Dom, Ganda, Pano and Ghasi communities are traditional musicians at feasts and festivals, while the Lohar are engaged in iron implement making and the Badaik are traditional weavers.

The Keuta community, categorised as Other Backward Class in the district, produces puffed rice and fried rice as a traditional occupation. In other districts of the state, however, a section of the Keuta is considered part of the socially marginalised groups owing to their fishing profession, a reminder of how occupational identity intersects with social location in ways that are not uniform across geographies (Rout, 2021). Tribal groups including the Munda, Oraon, Kisan, Kharia, Gond and Bhuiyan are primarily found in the remote areas, with smaller communities from neighbouring districts having migrated to the industrial and urban zones for employment (Kumar, 2019; Mishra, 2017).

Socio-Cultural Interactions

The socio-cultural landscape of Sundargarh district may be understood as the product of three distinct groupings whose interactions define the texture of daily life: the tribal communities, the indigenous non-tribal population, and the migrant working population. The tribal groups, divided between the Dravidian (Oraon, Kisan, Gond) and the Kolarian (Munda, Kharia, Ho) traditions, maintain a high degree of ethnic cohesion in the non-industrial areas, expressed through shared rituals, seasonal festivals and the observance of community-specific customary norms (Nayak et al., 1990). In the industrial zones, however, the shared experience of displacement, wage labour and urban living has fostered a broader tribal solidarity that transcends these ethnic divisions (Mishra, 2017).

The non-tribal caste communities uphold their traditional occupational roles and Hindu practices, maintaining distinct social positions within the overall district structure (Panda, 2016). The migrant population, drawn from various parts of the country by the industrial economy, has introduced cosmopolitan cultural elements — Hindi as a medium of trans-community communication being the most consequential — that have accelerated the pace of cultural exchange and, in some cases, cultural displacement (Tripathy, 2017). The Scheduled Castes occupy an interstitial position, blending elements of tribal animism with Hindu ritual practice, reflecting the multiple communities among whom they have historically lived (Rout, 2021). Industrialization drives these diverse groups toward cultural convergence, challenging traditional boundaries while simultaneously generating new hybrid identities (Mohanty, 2020).

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Family Dynamics

The tribal communities of Sundargarh, whether in the industrial or non-industrial zone, follow a broadly patriarchal and patrilineal social organisation. The father is the head of the family, and in his absence the widow assumes headship until the children are capable of assuming responsibility. Property distribution follows the male line of descent. Families in villages distant from the industrial centres retain both joint and nuclear forms, with joint family structures extending across the first generation (Nayak et al., 1990). In the industrial areas, nuclear family patterns predominate as a consequence of migration-driven dispersal of extended kin groups and the spatial constraints of urban and peri-urban settlement (Sharma, 2018).

Modernity, driven by industrialization, has shifted family structures toward individualism, reducing joint family prevalence and altering the traditional distribution of roles and responsibilities within households (Mohapatra, 2019). This reflects broader socio-economic trends including labour mobility and the shift from subsistence agriculture to wage income. The non-tribal communities of the district follow parallel patriarchal and patrilineal arrangements, and the Scheduled Caste communities mirror these patterns, irrespective of the specific community to which they belong (Behera, 2020). Marriage among all communities follows the patrilocal pattern — the bride enters the household of the groom — and this spatial dimension of marriage continues to shape the residential geography of the district's settlements.

Linguistic Pluralism

The linguistic landscape of Sundargarh district is as diverse as its population. Each major tribal group maintains its own language — the Oraon speak Kurukh, a Dravidian tongue; the Munda and Kharia speak languages of the Austroasiatic or Kolarian family. Despite these distinct linguistic origins, inter-tribal communication is facilitated by Sadri — a creole of Aryan elements and local vernacular forms — which serves as the lingua franca across tribal communities (Nayak et al., 1990). Sadri occupies an interesting middle position: it is neither the formal language of state administration nor the intimate language of any single tribe, yet it is the medium in which the most consequential inter-tribal conversations take place, from market negotiations to community assemblies.

The non-tribal indigenous population communicates in a local variant of Odia referred to as 'Kenta', distinct from the standard Odia spoken by coastal migrants who have arrived in the industrial towns for employment. Hindi serves as the medium of communication for the large migrant working population (Tripathy, 2017). In the industrial zones, Sadri and Hindi have become dominant,

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signalling a degree of linguistic convergence driven by urban interactions (Sahoo, 2022). This pluralism underscores the cultural richness of the district but also raises legitimate concerns about the erosion of tribal languages under the sustained influence of dominant regional and national languages (Das, 2023).

Dietary Practices

Food habits among the tribal communities of Sundargarh reveal patterns that carry cultural meanings well beyond their nutritional dimension. The Oraon and Munda communities consider the consumption of beef a practised and permissible dietary choice. The Kharia and Kisan communities, by contrast, are traditionally non-beef eaters, each providing its own historical and legendary account for this abstention. The Kharia trace their practice to a migration narrative in which the cow served as the sole source of sustenance for the community during a difficult journey. The Kisan tradition holds that the very separation between their community and the Oraon — regarded as younger brothers — was precipitated by the Oraon's adoption of beef consumption (Nayak et al., 1990).

These distinctions are not immutable. In the industrial areas, the boundaries are observed with considerably less rigidity, with some Kharia and Kisan individuals reportedly consuming beef in private (Das, 2023). The non-tribal caste communities adhere to Hindu dietary norms, favouring vegetarian or caste-specific foods (Nanda, 2021), while the Scheduled Castes adopt more flexible dietary practices, blending elements from both tribal and Hindu traditions (Rout & Nanda, 2021). Industrialization has introduced processed foods and more cosmopolitan dietary choices into communities that previously subsisted on locally produced agricultural and forest products, reshaping traditional practices in ways that mirror the broader influence of globalized consumption patterns (Mohanty & Sahu, 2023).

Spiritual Beliefs and Practices

The spiritual life of the tribal communities of Sundargarh is grounded in animism — a worldview in which every element of the natural and social environment is inhabited by spiritual forces that must be propitiated, appeased or invited into the life of the community. The tribal spiritual universe includes deities for the sun, the moon, the earth, water, rivers, forests, trees and hills, alongside ancestral spirits, household deities and clan spirits. The sacred grove, called 'Sarna', is the central ritual space — a cluster of sal trees at one end of the village, considered inviolable and appropriated by no individual

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for personal use. Annual and seasonal sacrifices of a community character are performed here (Nayak et al., 1990; Singh, 2016).

Two external religious forces have reshaped this spiritual landscape in significant ways. Christianity, present in the district through an extensive network of missionary schools and parishes, introduced a spiritual worldview centred on a benevolent God accessible through prayer and moral conduct rather than propitiatory ritual (Pati, 2018). The practical consequences of this theological shift were substantial: Christian tribal communities were drawn into regular congregation through Sunday services, which simultaneously became spaces for community discussion, social planning and collective decision-making. The church also provided an institutional structure that cut across tribal lines, bringing Oraon, Munda and Kharia Christians into a shared congregational space (Behera & Mishra, 2022). The village catechist and the parish priest in the Christian model can hail from any community — a departure from the hereditary spiritual authority of the traditional tribal priest (Nayak et al., 1990).

Hinduism has exercised a parallel, if less institutionally structured, influence on the tribal communities of the district. The co-habitation that industrialization has enforced has brought tribal and non-tribal communities into sustained proximity, and in the process, elements of Hindu ritual practice and pantheon have entered the social repertoire of tribal communities (Mishra, 2020). Modern influences, including both industrialization and Christianity, have progressively weakened the dominance of animist practice in the industrial zones, promoting more syncretic spiritual configurations in their place (Kumar & Jena, 2022). It is worth noting, however, that in the non-industrial zones, the Sarna and its associated ritual life remain largely intact, a testimony to the resilience of the animist tradition when it is not subjected to the sustained pressures of an industrial economy (Pati & Kumar, 2022).

Life Cycle Rituals

Birth

Among the tribal communities of Sundargarh, the birth of a child — irrespective of sex — is received as a gift from the supernatural power and an occasion for communal celebration. The instance of birth simultaneously introduces a condition of ritual impurity that must be resolved through purification ceremonies performed approximately a week after delivery. The 'chatti' ceremony serves the dual function of purifying the household and welcoming the newborn into the social community. Feasting and communal celebration accompany this purification, affirming the birth as a social event rather than a purely private one (Nayak et al., 1990; Ray, 2019). The specific steps of the birth ritual differ

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between tribal groups, though the underlying logic of purity, celebration and social incorporation is common across communities.

Among the non-tribal communities of the district, an analogous birth ritual exists, though with a significant difference in the valuation of the child's sex. The birth of a male child is of particular social consequence among general caste communities because the son is required to perform post-mortem rituals for his deceased parents — rituals considered necessary for the smooth passage of the spirit to its final destination. This instrumental significance of male offspring has no direct parallel in the tribal tradition (Dash & Rout, 2021). In the industrial zones, birth rituals among tribal communities are increasingly simplified, and their communal character has correspondingly diminished (Sahu & Panda, 2023).

Marriage

Marriage in the tribal societies of Sundargarh follows a sequential ceremonial structure: the search for a suitable partner, the betrothal, reciprocal family visits and the wedding itself. The community is endogamous — one must marry within the larger tribal group — while the clan is exogamous, meaning marriage between members of the same clan is prohibited. A system of bride price exists among the tribal groups, though its expression varies. The Kharia and Munda communities of the Kolarian tradition traditionally give a pair of bullocks as bride price, while the Oraon and Kisan of the Dravidian tradition observe a symbolic monetary equivalent (Nayak et al., 1990). Each stage of the marriage process is a social occasion that draws together the kinship networks of two families and generates a new web of social relationships between them.

The industrialization process has introduced the most visible fractures into this ceremonial architecture. In the industrial areas, tribal communities are surrounded by non-tribal migrants who communicate — implicitly or explicitly — that practices followed elsewhere in the country are superior to tribal custom, and this sustained cultural pressure has emboldened individuals in the industrial zone to deviate from tribal ceremonial norms (Mohanty, 2020). Tribal councils that would traditionally impose penalties for such departures find their authority increasingly difficult to enforce among community members who are economically independent enough to pay fines without social consequence. The consequence is a hollowing out of the ceremonial structures that once gave marriage its integrative social weight (Sahu & Panda, 2023). Among the non-tribal communities, a system of dowry exists, negotiated between families rather than prescribed by community convention,

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and the Scheduled Castes follow broadly similar patrilocal marriage arrangements (Dash & Rout, 2021).

Death

Death rituals in the tribal communities serve two simultaneous purposes: the purification of the bereaved household and the facilitation of the deceased's passage to the spiritual world. Among all the tribal groups of the district, there is a shared practice of bringing the spirit of the deceased back into the family, installing the ancestral spirit in a specific location within the household, where it remains as an active participant in family life until the final death ritual is performed and the spirit is sent to its ultimate spiritual destination (Nayak et al., 1990; Ray, 2019). Both the immediate and the final death rituals involve purificatory observances, feasting and communal participation.

Among the non-tribal communities who follow Hindu practices, the performance of death rituals is the responsibility of the son, whose participation is considered indispensable for the spiritual liberation of the deceased (Dash & Rout, 2021). This theological framework — linking the spiritual welfare of the dead to the ritual conduct of the living son — has no direct parallel in the animist tradition of the tribal communities, where ancestral spirits are incorporated into family life rather than dispatched through a single act of filial obligation. In the industrial zones, death rituals, like birth and marriage ceremonies, have been subjected to considerable abbreviation and hybridisation (Behera & Mishra, 2022).

Festivals and Celebrations

The tribal communities of Sundargarh follow a festival calendar calibrated to the agricultural and natural seasons. Three festivals are of particular importance: Sarhul, Karam and Sohrai. Sarhul is a festival of fertility celebrated in the month of Baisakh (April-May), when the sal trees come into flower. The sal flower, known as the 'sarai', is understood as the medium through which Dharmes or Sing Bonga — the supreme deity — bestows blessings of fertility and prosperity upon the community (Nayak et al., 1990). Though originating among the Oraon community, Sarhul has long been adopted by the Munda and Kharia communities as well, a reflection of the historical co-habitation of these groups.

Karam, celebrated in the Bhado season, holds significance both as an agricultural festival associated with the expectation of a good harvest, and as a social occasion on which sisters express wishes for their brothers' prosperity. Its timing is significant: it falls after the demanding agricultural labour of paddy transplantation and weeding has been completed, with the early paddy and millets beginning to

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ripen, creating both the leisure and the material conditions for celebration. Karam is notably broader in its community appeal than Sarhul — it is observed not only by the tribal communities but by other communities of the region as well. Sohrai, observed between the months of Kartik and Paus and often coinciding with the national Diwali celebrations, honours the cattle that serve as the primary instruments of cultivation, placing them at a level of ritual significance equivalent to the gods (Nayak et al., 1990; Mohanty & Sahu, 2023).

In the industrial areas, the enforced proximity of different tribal groups has produced an interesting consequence for the festival calendar. Communities that previously celebrated distinct festivals have begun participating in each other's observances. What were once ethnic boundary markers have become occasions for cross-tribal solidarity (Panda & Tripathy, 2022; Sharma & Das, 2023). This convergence in festival participation is one of the more organic cultural transformations in the district — communities choosing through generations of proximity to share what they find valuable in each other's ceremonial lives — though it is accompanied by the genuine risk of a levelling of distinctiveness that reduces the cultural specificity each festival once carried.

Songs, Dances and Artistic Expression

The musical and performative traditions of the tribal communities of Sundargarh are communitarian in character — they do not belong to specialists or performers but to the entire community. Both men and women participate in singing and dancing, and the occasions for such participation are structured into the annual social calendar: marriage ceremonies, seasonal feasts and the festivals described above each have their own specific songs, tunes, rhythms and dancing forms. The instruments common across tribal communities — the mandar, dholki and nagda among others — are played by community members rather than hired musicians (Nayak et al., 1990).

The songs of the elderly, a form called 'durang', are sung particularly at marriage ceremonies. Slow in tempo, these songs carry within them narrative histories, social commentary and the accumulated values of the community. The youth participate in the 'sailo' dances — swift and energetic performances with lyrics that might narrate a recent incident, express feelings of love, or deliver a social message through an established melodic form. In the industrial areas, dancing steps that were once tribe-specific have acquired common characteristics through decades of shared habitation, and rhythmic patterns have converged (Sharma & Das, 2023). This musical homogenisation, unlike some other forms of cultural change in the industrial zone, has been largely voluntary — a consequence of communities choosing to learn from and share with one another — though it carries with it the risk of

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eroding the distinctiveness that gives each community's artistic tradition its particular character (Sahu & Panda, 2023).

The non-tribal communities of the district maintain their own musical traditions on different organisational principles. Male participation in dance is the norm, and women are expected to remain onlookers, with their own separate songs performed among themselves on appropriate occasions. The non-tribal groups employ the Scheduled Caste musicians — the Dom and Ganda communities — for music at marriages, rituals and festivals, paying them for their services (Rout & Nanda, 2021). This contractual relationship between patron communities and musician castes is structurally quite different from the participatory musical culture of the tribal communities, where the distinction between performer and audience does not exist.

Ethnic Identities

The foundational ethnic characteristics of the tribal communities of Sundargarh — their straightforwardness, faithfulness to oral commitments, deep sense of self-dignity, communitarian orientation, egalitarianism, courage and hospitality — represent what Nayak, Boal and Soreng (1990) have described as their greatest wealth. These are not simply virtues in the abstract. They are the structural values that make tribal social life function: that make cooperation possible without formal contracts, that make resource sharing sustainable without institutional enforcement, that make community life coherent without state administration. Their deep rootedness in land and forest — the animating principle of both their economic and spiritual existence — provides the anchor of tribal identity even in the most disrupted of contemporary settings (Kumar & Jena, 2022).

It is precisely these values that are under the most sustained pressure in the industrial areas. The proximity to non-tribal populations who carry different social norms, and the circulation of a consumerist culture through the media and marketplace, have drawn the tribal youth in particular into a different social imagination — one in which individual accumulation replaces collective sharing, unfair competition displaces egalitarianism, and the shrewdness of the market replaces the directness of the tribal social exchange (Behera, 2023). These changes are not happening uniformly or irreversibly, but they are happening with a consistency and a pace that those who study tribal social life in the district find cause for genuine concern (Mohanty, 2020).

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Discussion

Sundargarh's socio-cultural dynamics reflect a sustained negotiation between tradition and modernity that does not resolve cleanly in either direction. Non-industrial zones broadly preserve the conditions under which tribal cultural isolation — and with it, cultural specificity — remains possible. Industrial zones drive convergence, hybridisation and the erosion of community-centric values (Mohanty, 2020). Industrialization offers economic benefits and cross-tribal unity, but the cost is borne disproportionately by those traditional practices and ritual structures whose integrative social function is not replicated by what replaces them (Mishra, 2017; Sahu, 2020).

Christianity and Hinduism have provided new social frameworks for communities navigating the disruptions of an industrial economy, but both pose challenges to the animist heritage that has historically structured tribal spiritual and communal life (Pati & Kumar, 2022). Christianity, in particular, has been a more constructive force than its critics sometimes acknowledge: its institutional emphasis on education, health and collective decision-making has materially improved the life conditions of tribal Christians even as it has altered their spiritual world (Behera & Mishra, 2022; Pati, 2018). The question of what is lost and what is gained in this transformation does not admit of a single answer, and honest assessment requires that both dimensions be held simultaneously in view.

Tribal resilience, particularly in non-industrial zones, underscores the enduring strength of community-centric values and social forms (Behera, 2023). However, the pace of change in the industrial zones raises legitimate concerns about cultural sustainability. Policies that support tribal education — conducted where possible in the medium of tribal languages — alongside the legal protection of sacred sites like the Sarna groves, and institutional recognition of the traditional council authority, are all identified in the literature as necessary elements of a culturally informed development framework (Singh, 2016; Kumar & Jena, 2022).

Conclusion

The tribal socio-cultural scenario of Sundargarh district is not a story of simple decline, nor of untroubled continuity. It is the story of communities negotiating, with unequal resources and uneven success, the pressures of an industrial economy and a modernising state that have reorganised the material conditions of their lives without providing equivalent substitutes for the cultural and social structures that those material conditions once sustained (Mohanty, 2015; Mohanty, 2020). The forests that grounded tribal spiritual life have been felled or brought under departmental control. The land that

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anchored tribal community has been transferred, acquired or subdivided beyond economic viability. The kinship networks that supported the ceremonial life of birth, marriage and death have been stretched by migration and the nuclear family pressures of urban industrial existence (Behera, 2018; Mohapatra, 2019).

And yet the tribal communities of Sundargarh persist. They celebrate Sarhul across tribal lines in the compact settlements of the industrial belt. They sing the 'durang' at marriages in the forest villages of Sundargarh subdivision. They maintain their sacred Sarna groves, propitiate their ancestral spirits and sustain a vision of community life that, even in its attenuated contemporary form, retains the outlines of a social world built on values of sharing, equality and mutual recognition (Nayak et al., 1990; Sahoo, 2022). This persistence is not nostalgia. It is an active, ongoing negotiation with the present — a negotiation whose outcome will shape the nature of tribal social life in this district for the generations that follow, and whose direction will depend in no small measure on whether the broader society and the state choose to recognise the value of what is at stake (Das, 2023; Sharma & Das, 2023).

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