



## Socio-economic life of special backward tribes Pahari Korwa in Surguja District (C.G.): A geographical study

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### Abstract

The socio-economic life of the Pahari Korwa tribe in Surguja district is challenging, marked by a lack of basic amenities such as education, healthcare, electricity, and water, low literacy rates, heavy dependence on agriculture and forest produce; although the Chhattisgarh government is running integrated development programs, progress is slow, and they require concerted efforts for a better life, as they still suffer from poverty and backwardness. The Pahari Korwa tribe, also known as the "Lion of Mahasamund," is known for its distinct cultural identity and challenging lifestyle. Due to geographical isolation, this tribe remains cut off from modern society. Studies show that access to basic amenities such as education and healthcare is extremely limited due to their residence in remote areas. The economy of the Pahari Korwa community is primarily based on primary activities. Research reveals that the collection of forest produce (Mahua, Chironji, Honey) and traditional agriculture (shifting cultivation) are their main sources of livelihood. Due to geographical constraints and the lack of irrigation facilities, agriculture is limited to subsistence farming. Because of their economic hardship, they often fall into debt and resort to seasonal migration. The study concludes that although the government is implementing various welfare schemes through the 'Pahadi Korwa Development Agency', their implementation has not been entirely successful due to geographical constraints. This study will assist policymakers in formulating a geographically balanced strategy for the holistic development of this tribal community.

**Keywords:** Pahari korwa tribes, particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGS), surguja district & traditional agriculture

### Introduction

Poverty, a global phenomenon and biggest hurdle in the path of development. It is a challenge for economists, policymakers, and even government to understand it (Chandra & Sonekar, 2024) [1, 2]. The Indian Constitution assigns special status to the Scheduled Tribes (STs). Traditionally referred to as adivasi, vanbasis, tribes, or tribal's, STs constitute about 8.6% of the Indian population (Khan, 2018) [6, 7]. The Pahari Korwa is one of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) that lacks the knowledge of their rights and privileges as well as how to obtain them (Khan & Nayak, 2018) [6, 7]. Social characteristics which include, caste, religion and housing type, availabilities of basic needs like water, electricity, road connectivity, health status and literacy level are considered to be as an important indicator which determines the social status of Pahari's in study area (Hag & Singh, 2023) [5]. Tribal communities are often identified by some specific signs such as primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness to contact with the community at large and backwardness (Chandra & Kumeti, 2024) [1, 2]. This tribe lives away from modernity by building houses near the forests. They are from those human communities who have been left behind in the race of development and are still living in antiquity (Toppo, 2022)

[10]. The Hill Korwas, one of the notified particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs), have their settlement and prominence majorly in hilly terrains of Jaspur, Surguja and Korba districts of Chhattisgarh (Das, 2020) [3].

### Study area

Surguja district in Chhattisgarh has a predominantly rural, tribal population, with Hinduism as the major religion. Surguja district, located in the northern part of Chhattisgarh state, is an important district with a geographical landscape that is primarily plateau and hilly. It can be divided into various geomorphic divisions, such as highlands (mountains), plateaus, and intermediate plains. Surguja district is situated between 23°37'25" to 24°6'17" North latitude and 81°34'40" to 84°4'40" East longitude. It extends across the southeastern part of the Vindhychal-Baghelkhand region. Approximately 58% of the district's geographical area is covered by forests. Surguja's headquarters are in Ambikapur, and the district is landlocked, meaning it does not share a border with any other state. The district is bordered by Surajpur (north-west), Balrampur (north-east), Jashpur (east), Raigarh (south-east) and Korba District (south-west). The district has 7 tehsils and development blocks; Ambikapur, Lakhanpur, Udaipur, Lundra, Batauli, Sitapur and Mainpat.

Table 1: Demographic profiles of Surguja district

Demographic indicators	
Total Population	2,359,886
Sex Ratio	978
Literacy	60.01 %
SC Population	4.9 %
ST Population	55.1 %
Rural Population	89.7 %
Urban Population	10.3 %

Source: District Census Handbook of Surguja District – 2011

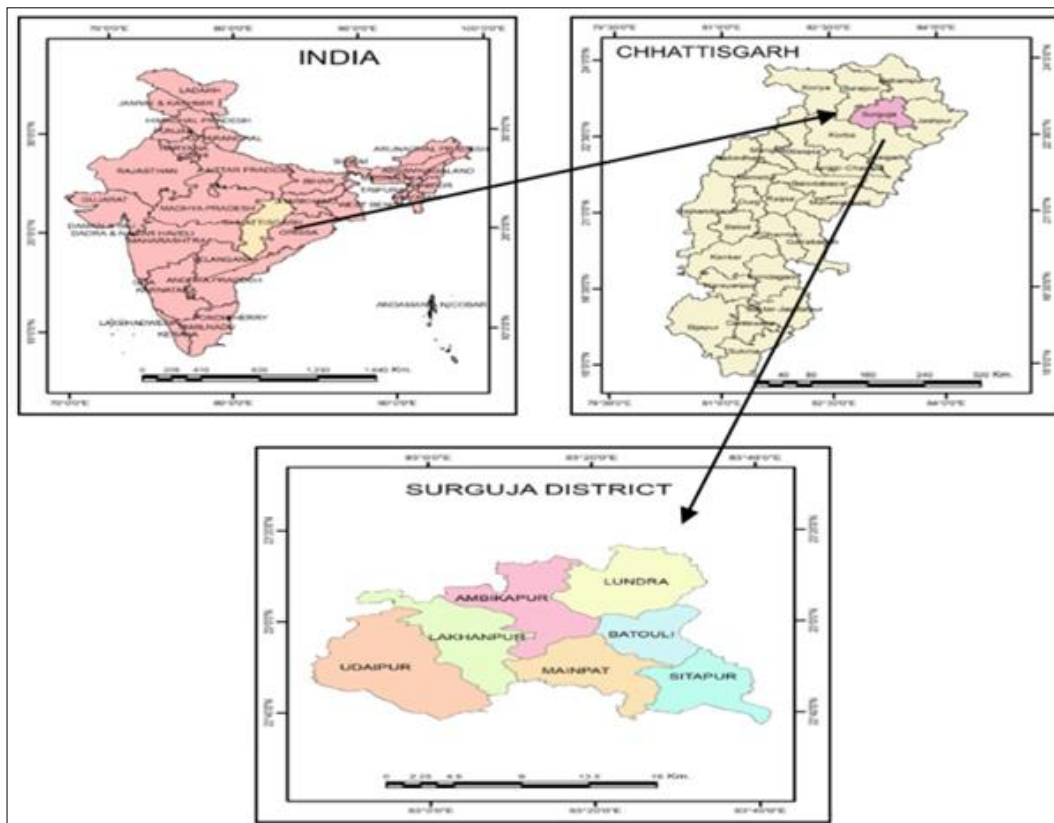


Fig 1: Location map of the study area

**Objectives Of The Study:** The main objectives of this research paper are as follows –

1. To assess the social life of Pahari Korwa tribes residing in the study area.
2. To analyze the economic conditions of Pahari Korwa tribes, a particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs) in Surguja district.
3. To ascertain the current status of socio-economic life of the Pahari Korwa tribes.

#### Database & methodology

This research paper has been based on both the primary and secondary data. Primary data has been obtained through survey method. To conduct a survey of the Pahari Korwa Tribes, information was collected through the group interview, observation, and personal interviews in household's survey. To collect the necessary data, a family questionnaire was prepared at the village level and the questionnaire & schedule was followed for primary data collection. The secondary data has been collected from the research report on "Anthropological Study of Pahari Korwa Special Backward Tribe" which was published by Tribal Research and Training Institute, Regional unit, Surguja, Ambikapur (Chhattisgarh). The obtained data has been analyzed with the help of computer as well as quantitative techniques. The outcome has been represented by the cartographic techniques for visual look of the study.

#### Results & discussion

##### About Pahari Korwa Tribes of Surguja District

The Pahari Korwa tribes have been declared Special backward tribes by the Government of India for the state of Chhattisgarh. To designate a tribe as a special backward tribe, their social, economic, educational, and agricultural

technical knowledge are considered and evaluated based on these criteria. Only if they meet these criteria are they granted the benefits of a Special Backward Tribe (Research report, 1991) [9]. The Pahari Korwa tribe of Surguja district is among the five Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of Chhattisgarh, who are accorded the honor of being considered "adopted sons of the President." According to their legends, they consider themselves descendants of the Kauravas from the Mahabharata, who took refuge in the forests and caves after the war and became inhabitants of the region. This tribe primarily prefers to live in isolation in the remote hilly and forested areas of the Surguja division. Their social system is patriarchal, and the 'caste council' (Jati Panchayat) holds great importance, with its head known as the 'Nayak' or 'Pradhan'. Traditional forms of marriage such as Dhuku (cohabitation), Lamsaina (service marriage), and Gurawat (exchange marriage) are prevalent among them.

For their livelihood, they still largely depend on nature and practice 'Dahiya' or shifting cultivation, in which a part of the forest is cleared to grow crops. The collection of mahua flowers, tubers, and honey is an essential part of their lives. Religiously, they consider 'Khudhiya Rani' as their presiding deity and have a deep belief in ancestor worship (Pitar Dev). A unique tradition among them is that when a family member dies, they abandon their house and build a new hut in a different location. Although in modern times they are connecting with education and the mainstream through government schemes and the 'Pahari Korwa Development Agency', they still cherish their original culture, such as the Karma and Damkach dances. Their language, 'Korvi', belongs to the Munda language family, which is a symbol of their distinct identity.

**Table 2:** Information on the area inhabited by Pahari Korwa Tribes in Surguja district

Name of the district	Name of Tehsils / Development Blocks	Village Numbers	Family Numbers	Pahari Korwa Tribes Population
Surguja District	Ambikapur	08	141	585
	Sitapur	09	116	475
	Batauli	16	318	1307
	Lakhanpur	07	97	434
	Udaipur	05	88	320
	Lundra	60	820	3416
	Mainpat	15	198	965
Total		120	1778	7502

Source: Census – 1991

### Social Life of Pahari Korwa Tribes in Surguja District

The social structure of the population is not only the pillar of economic development but also an important basis of the social environment and social life of the population group (Ekka, 2023) [4]. The creation of society is essential for the individual; life without society is dull and meaningless. Society builds a person's personality. Society alone brings about a person's all-round development. Life cannot exist without society. A person is born alone but is nurtured in society. Every caste is divided according to its function in society.

- 1. Sub Caste:** The society has been divided into sub-castes, clans, and gotras. The Pahari Korwa community has three main divisions. The Korwa are considered the original descendants. Because they reside in the mountains, the Pahari Korwa was identified by the government as a special backward tribe. The third group, the Dihari Korwa, followed the example of the plains and general caste people and began living with other tribes.
- 2. Gotra:** The gotra holds a significant place in the Pahari Korwa tribe. Therefore, it holds special significance when establishing relationships. Marriage within the same gotra is prohibited. A boy and a girl are considered siblings within their own gotra. Eight gotras have been identified within the Pahari Korwa tribe, as follows: Hasdwar, Edegwar, Mudiya, Count, Hadmad, Samadh, Samar Vaar, and Rehla. Clan system of the Pahari Korwas, the origin of the gotra is explained as follows:
  - **Hasadwar Gotra:** During the survey, it was revealed that the head of the family set out to find a suitable girl for his son's marriage, but he was unable to find one. As he wandered, many people laughed at him, and because of this wandering, he himself laughed at himself. Because of this laughter, they called themselves the Hasada clan, which became known as Hansdwar.
  - **Edge or Edgwar:** This clan of the hill Korwa tribe, people who leave their excreta after defecation, call themselves Edge or Edgwar.
  - **Hadmad / Harmath Gotra:** Harmath means to make a noise. Their ancestors used to make noise, which is why they came to be known as the Harmath or Hadmad clan.
  - **Ginu Gotra:** In the Korwa dialect/language, "Ginu" means water. The ancestors of this clan engaged in water sports, such as fishing, turtle, and crab catching, and hence became known as the Ginu clan.

- **Samad Gotra:** These members of the hill Korwa tribe took everyone along, such as during social activities and hunting. The ancestors of these individuals who united society were known as the Samad clan.

Hasadwar Gotra holds the highest status among the Pahari Korwa tribe. Their leader is chosen from the Hasadwar clan. Those from the Edgwar clan are considered uncivilized because they are considered relatively aggressive. People of other gotras were unable to explain the origin of their gotras.

- 3. Family:** The hill Korwa tribe primarily believes in nuclear families. A family consists of parents and unmarried children. As soon as a child reaches adulthood, they are married and given a separate residence.
- 4. Kinship:** Kinship is divided into two categories: blood relations and marriage relations.
  - **Blood relatives:** Blood relatives include parents, son-daughter, grandparents, uncle-aunt, nephew-niece, uncle, grandfather, brother and sister.
  - **Marriage-related:** This relationship includes mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, maternal grandparents, uncle-aunt, in-laws, maternal uncle-aunt and brother-in-law.
- 5. Humor:** In the hill Korwa tribe, jokes are related to brother-in-law and sister-in-law, grandfather and grandson, sister-in-law and brother-in-law etc.
- 6. Secondary Address:** Secondary address occurs between two persons whose names are not used, such as between husband and wife or with the elder sister-in-law. The wife does not call her husband by name but instead calls her brother-in-law by name or if they have a child, the child's name is followed by Papa or Pita or Baba etc.

**Table 3:** Kinship Address of Pahari Korwa Tribes

Korwa Dialect	Addressed as
Came	Mother
Grandfather	elder brother
Brother	Younger brother
Dow	Father

- 7. Inter-caste relations:** Inter-caste relations are also found within the hill Korwa tribe. The Hasadwar clan considers itself dominant in society and considers other clans inferior to them. Similarly, other tribal communities are ranked higher or lower than themselves.

**Table 4:** Categories of Caste among the Pahari Korwa Tribes

Categories of Caste	Name of caste
Upper castes	Brahmin, Kshatriya, Baniya
Equal caste	Oraon, Gond, Farmer, Nagesia, Kanwar
Lower castes	Scavenger, cobbler, barber, Mahkul, Rajwar

The Pahari Korwas do not consume cooked food from other castes. They only eat raw food and water.

8. **Status of women:** In Pahari Korwa, women have equal status but they remain subordinate to men and help them fully in their work.
9. **Family Relations:** Family relationships in this tribe are cordial. Only unmarried children live in the family, and after marriage, they establish their own homes. Therefore, relationships are also cordial.

Relationships of family members are as follows -

- **Parents:** The duty of parents to raise, educate and arrange marriages for their children.
- **Husband and wife:** In society, the relationship between husband and wife is considered unbreakable. The wife does all the household chores and fully supports her husband in financial matters. Tubers and flowers from the forest. They perform tasks such as bringing fruits, cooking, and caring for the children. A woman's status is lower than that of a man. A woman considers her husband her everything. A wife considers serving her husband her duty. She does not use her husband's name when addressing him; instead, she addresses him by the name of the children's father.
- **Mother-eldest daughter:** After her mother, the eldest daughter takes care of all the household chores. She manages the house, cleaning the dishes, fetching water, and caring for her younger siblings.
- **Mother-Little Girl:** A little girl is loved by everyone and is not scolded much.
- **Father-Son:** Fathers love and care for their sons from childhood. They provide for their education and other needs. As young adults, sons respect and obey their father's commands.
- **Mother-son:** Mother loves her son very much and whenever there is any big work, she consults her son after the father.

### **Economic Life of Pahari Korwa Tribes in Surguja District**

The lives of the hill Korwas are filled with poverty. They have no significant economic resources. Their needs are limited. Living in the mountains, they avoid other luxuries (Mishra, 2018) <sup>[8]</sup>.

1. **Forest-dependent economy:** The Pahari Korwa tribe's economy is forest-based, so they build their homes within dense forests. They find abundant tubers, roots, fruits, and flowers for their diet, and dense forests offer a wealth of wild animals and birds for hunting. Men, women, and children work together to gather tubers, roots, and vegetables in dense forests. Forest produce includes mahua, tendu leaves, sal leaves, sal seeds,

cocoons, herbs, chirauji, honey, and lac. They use mahua to make and sell liquor. Other forest produce, such as sal seeds, honey, lac, gum, chirauji, and other items, are sold in the local weekly market. They used to exchange essential goods there. However, today they sell all goods in rupees and purchase their essential goods.

2. **Hunt:** The hill Korwa people hunt individually with bows and arrows. They hunt birds, squirrels, etc. during the day. They go out in the morning with bows and arrows. In the evening they hunt any wild animal they see. They hunt large animals like deer and pigs collectively. They divide the prey equally among themselves. As hunting equipment they use bows and arrows, spears, fishing nets or pieces of mosquito net, Choriya, etc.
3. **Fishing:** The Pahari Korwa tribes use chauriya bow and arrow, spear and net for fishing. They use pieces of mosquito netting. They find fish in abundance during the rainy season. At other times, they fish in ponds or small lakes where there is a source of water.
4. **Agriculture:** In ancient times, the hill Korwa tribe practiced hoe farming. This meant clearing the land by setting fire to the forest and later sowing seeds during the rainy season. They didn't do any weeding or tilling, resulting in very low crop yields. Presently, due to coming in contact with other castes, these people are turning towards modern agriculture.
5. **Agricultural System:** Information has been collected from the surveyed families about farming methods, seeds, fertilizers, and related agricultural implements. An attempt has been made to compile the information on this basis.
  - **Land preparation:** Before harvesting, the land is plowed to loosen the soil. When asked about plowing equipment, the survey revealed that they plow their fields with oxen in July. Those who don't own oxen rent oxen from others or work as laborers for their jobs.
  - **Use of fertilizer:** The Pahari Korwa tribe does not use chemical fertilizers. Most families use cow dung manure.
  - **Seed:** The Pahari Korwa people do not use certified or government seeds but rather they use the seeds available with other castes living in the village.
  - **Sowing method:** The hill Korwa people use the common sprinkler method. Currently, only a few families use the transplanting method. They plow the field before the rains. When the first rains arrive, they plow and sprinkle the seeds. The plowing process mixes the seeds with the soil. As soon as rain falls, the seeds begin to germinate after two to three days. In the transplanting method, half of the field is plowed and sprinkled with water, and then seeds are sown. Paddy is uprooted when the plants are half a foot tall. This is called transplanting. For transplanting, the field is plowed two to three times, filled with water, and a layer is prepared. After this, the paddy is planted. After this, fertilizer is applied if available. Otherwise, it remains as it is. When the paddy ripens in the month of Kartik, it is harvested and

stored in a threshing floor. As per the time, the paddy is threshed by the bulls and the chaff is separated and the paddy is taken inside the house and the chaff is left in the barn to feed the animals.

- **To sow:** When farming using the sprinkler method, the crop is then transplanted when it reaches 1–2 feet tall. This involves filling the fields with water and plowing the crop, which uproots the crop. This also destroys

other weeds and grasses, allowing the rice plant to take root again.

- **Weeding:** Weeding is typically done once or twice. During the survey, inquiries revealed that weeding is typically done only once. Rice plants are plentiful in weeds. Weeding removes these weeds, resulting in significantly reduced yields. Weeding breaks up large lumps of soil into smaller pieces, which then becomes loose and produces good yields.



(a) Bamboo products are making



(b) The broom is being prepared



(c) Consumption of beverages



(d) Collection of mahua



(e) Exhibition of food products and traditional seeds



(f) Traditional dress



(g) Making bowls from sal leaves.



(h) House conditions.

- **Cutting and milling:** After the crop is ready, harvesting is carried out. The primary harvesting tool is a sickle or hoe. After harvesting, the crop is bundled and transported to the threshing floor. The paddy is stored in bales in the threshing floor. For threshing, the crop is spread out in the barn. Then, a group of oxen are tied to a yoke and driven over it. This process lasts for 3–5 hours, separating the grain from the chaff. The chaff is then cleaned and separated from the grain.
  - **Storage:** The grain brought home after threshing is carried inside in a Kavadi or basket. A small pot or pudding is kept inside the house. The grain is then stored in it.
6. **Wages:-** Earlier, the hill Korwas used to depend on forests but now as the mountain forests are maintained by the government, their life is no longer based only on forest produce but they have now moved towards other works.
    - **Forest Department in Government work:** The hill Korwa tribe is still employed by the Forest Department on a daily basis. They do not work extensively for the department because they require daily wages. Due to the labor force, in fact, most hill Korwa men and women work for daily wages for other tribes in the village, or earn a living by selling wood and other forest produce.
    - **Gather means of livelihood:** They do not get much profit from agriculture; rather they get food grains for only 2–5 months.
  7. **Animal Husbandry:** The hill Korwa tribe has no particular interest in animal husbandry. A few years ago, the government provided them with a pair of bulls. They sold them, killed them, and ate them, or they became prey to wild animals in the forests. They raise poultry and other livestock.
  8. **Division of Labor:** There is no universally accepted principle of division of labour among the people of Pahari Korwa tribe. Adult men and women go to the forest for livelihood. For example, men go for hunting and women go with small children to collect tubers, roots, flowers, tendu, mahua, tendu leaves and mohlain leaves as per the time. Men cut the hunting and wood dry trees and take them to the nearby village or market for sale and buy rice, mahua etc. with the money earned. No work is taken from children below 10 years of age. Rather they help their parents in their work. When they are above 14 years of age, children start hunting or doing other work.
  9. **Daily Routine:** The daily routine of the Pahari Korwa tribe begins at 5 a.m. Men head to the forest as soon as they wake up. There, they complete their daily chores and then take their bows and arrows or axes for hunting. They cut dry wood with their axes and sell it in the market by noon, returning home with rice and other essential items in the evening. Women wake up in the morning, sweep, fetch water, and head to the rivers and ponds for their daily routine. Available at home after preparing food from the available ingredients and feeding the children, she heads into the forest to gather roots, fruits, and forest produce. She returns in the evening, by which time the men have already prepared the kitchen with the items they brought with them, eaten, and then gone to sleep.
  10. **Property:** The Pahari Korwa has no property in their possession. They possess only broken pottery, bows and arrows, agricultural tools, and other items. They also have forest land, which is not in their name because they frequently change residences. Therefore, they lack permanent land. As soon as a boy grows up, and after marriage, a house is built for him and given to him to live separately.
  11. **Market System:** Generally, the hill Korwa tribe fulfills their daily needs at weekly markets held at specific locations. There, they sell forest produce and purchase essential goods such as salt, pepper, soap, clothing, shoes, slippers, and other items. In the past, tribal people used to barter. However, today they sell their goods and receive tax, which they use to purchase the goods they need. Traders use government-designated instruments for measurement and weighing, which are used to conduct purchases and sales.
  12. **Food items:** Food and forest produce are stored at home. No special method or procedure is followed for storage, for example, Mahua is dried in the sun to prevent it from spoiling.
  13. **Escape:** The hill Korwa tribe migrates only around their homes. Especially when a family member dies, they abandon their home and build a new one far away. They do not leave the district or village.
  14. **Average family income:** The hill Korwa tribe has no specific source of income. Collecting forest produce, selling timber, and working as daily wage laborers are their main sources of income. They do not generate significant income from agriculture.

### Conclusion

The study reveals that the Pahari Korwa community still primarily inhabits inaccessible hills and dense forest areas. This geographical isolation is the biggest obstacle to their modern development, preventing them from receiving basic government services (roads, electricity, hospitals) effectively. This tribe is gradually shifting away from its traditional 'Bewra' (shifting) cultivation and forest produce collection towards wage labor and settled agriculture. However, due to the lack of modern agricultural equipment and irrigation facilities, their economic condition remains poor. Despite government efforts, the literacy rate is still not satisfactory. In the health sector, a lack of awareness and prevailing traditional superstitions mean that malnutrition and infectious diseases continue to pose a challenge for this community. Having been granted the status of a 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group' (PVTG), they receive special government protection. Schemes like 'PM-JANMAN' are improving their housing and connectivity, but corruption and middlemen prevent them from receiving the full benefits of these programs. The study concludes that financial assistance alone is not sufficient; an area-specific development strategy is also necessary. Their socio-

economic status can only be improved sustainably by promoting skill development and local forest-based small-scale industries.

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