

# The Role of Tribal Identity in the Formation of Jharkhand State

**Manoj Kumar Gupta**

Assistant Professor, Bharathi College of Education  
Kandri, Mandar, Ranchi, Jharkhand

*Email: Manojkumarguptamail1987@Gmail.Com*

---

## ABSTRACT

The formation of Jharkhand as a separate state in 2000 stemmed from the assertion of tribal identity, crucial in socio-political movements. Tribal communities like the Santhals, Mundas, Oraons, and Hos, with unique languages, traditions, and social systems, demanded statehood to preserve their cultural heritage and address historical exploitation. Leaders like Jaipal Singh Munda and the Jharkhand Party played pivotal roles in advocating for tribal rights. The recognition of tribal identity's potent role in regional politics underscores its significance in governance and policy formulation, emphasizing the need for inclusive development.

**Keywords:** *Jharkhand Statehood, Tribal Identity, Socio-Political Movements*

## 1. Introduction

The formation of Jharkhand (Kumar, 2015) as a separate state in India is deeply intertwined with the assertion of tribal identity, which played a pivotal role in the socio-political movements leading to its establishment on November 15, 2000. This region, historically marginalized and rich in cultural heritage and natural resources, is home to numerous tribal communities whose distinct identity fueled the demand for statehood. The tribals of Jharkhand, such as the Santhals, Mundas, Oraons, and Hos, possess unique languages, traditions, and social systems that distinguish them from the non-tribal population. Historically, these communities faced exploitation under both colonial and post-colonial administrations, which led to significant uprisings like the Santhal Rebellion (1855-56) and the Birsa Munda Movement (1899-1900), pivotal in shaping tribal consciousness. The cultural heritage, traditional land rights, and social structures of these tribes were central to their demand for a political entity that could safeguard their unique identities and promote tailored socio-economic development. The political mobilization, spearheaded by leaders like Jaipal Singh Munda and the Jharkhand Party, articulated the aspirations of the tribal people, focusing on issues such as land alienation, economic exploitation, and cultural marginalization. Socio-economic challenges, including poverty, lack of education, unemployment, and inadequate healthcare, further underscored the need for a separate state that could address these disparities effectively. The eventual realization of Jharkhand's statehood reflects the powerful role of tribal identity (Carrin, 2013) in regional politics, highlighting the importance of recognizing and integrating indigenous identities within broader political and development frameworks to achieve sustainable development and social justice.

## 2. Review of Literature

**Ghosh-Jerath, S., et al. (2018)** This study assessed dietary diversification and nutritional status among Oraon tribal women in Jharkhand. It found that while there was high awareness of indigenous foods, actual consumption and household food security were low. Women who consumed indigenous foods had

higher intake of key micronutrients. The study underscored the potential of indigenous foods in improving nutrition, despite the prevalence of chronic energy deficiency among 40% of the women.

**Singh, K., & Dewan, R. (2018)** Singh and Dewan examined depression and stress levels among rural tribal migrant women in Ranchi, Jharkhand. The study used Beck Depression Inventory and General Health Questionnaire to measure mental health in 200 women. Results indicated that older women experienced higher levels of depression and stress than younger ones. Additionally, tribal women exhibited higher levels of these conditions compared to non-tribal counterparts.

**Jain, P (2017)** This study documented the use of ethno-medicinal plants by Jharkhand's tribal communities for cancer treatment. Researchers identified 75 plant species used by traditional healers. The study highlighted the rich biodiversity and cultural heritage of Jharkhand, suggesting that these plants hold potential for further research into alternative cancer treatments, thereby supporting the preservation and scientific exploration of indigenous knowledge.

**Chakraborty, (2016)** Chakraborty and Narayan explored the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Jharkhand, emphasizing its importance in addressing indigenous communities' challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, and health issues. The study argued that CSR could effectively complement government efforts, enhancing sustainable development. It highlighted the need for an internationally accepted standard for CSR in indigenous territories, following the United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

**Kumar, (2015)** This study investigated the role of livestock in sustaining tribal livelihoods in Jharkhand. It was found that livestock significantly supplemented family incomes and provided socio-cultural benefits. Data collected from 120 tribal farmers in Ranchi and Dhanbad revealed that livestock offered more annual income compared to other sources. Although respondents had medium extension contacts and mass media exposure, their social participation was low due to geographical isolation.

**Ghosh, P. (2014)** Ghosh explored the interconnection between tribal egalitarian systems, sacred environmental values, and land ownership issues in Jharkhand. The study highlighted how tribal environmentalism evolved from colonial times to the modern era, particularly in response to threats from state economic policies. Tribal communities were shown to mobilize around environmental rights, using their intrinsic values to resist land alienation and protect their ancestral habitats.

**Begrich, R. (2013)** This dissertation analyzed the complex roles of alcohol in the lives of Jharkhand's adivasis. Ethnographic fieldwork revealed that alcohol consumption was intertwined with economic, religious, and social aspects of tribal life. Begrich critiqued the notion of adivasis being culturally predisposed to drinking, instead framing their relationship with alcohol as one shaped by obligations and moral governance, thus challenging simplistic views of addiction and compulsion.

**Kuryakose, S. (2010)** Kuryakose discussed the formation of Indian states and the demand for separate statehood with a focus on regional development. The paper reviewed the historical and ongoing demands for state reorganization based on ethnic identity and regional disparities. It emphasized that reducing regional development imbalances through joint central and state efforts was crucial, rather than relying solely on state reorganization.

### **3. Tribal Identity and Distinction**

Tribal identity and distinction (James, 2015) in Jharkhand are marked by unique languages, cultural traditions, social systems, and a profound connection to their environment. Tribes such as the Santhals, Mundas, Oraons, and Hos speak distinct languages that are integral to their cultural expression and communication, serving as a vital link to their heritage. Each tribe maintains unique cultural practices, festivals, and rituals, such as the Sarhul festival of the Oraons and the Sohrai art of the Santhals, which are essential aspects of their identity. Their social structures and governance systems, like the Parha system among the Oraons, enable communal decision-making and local governance, reinforcing their autonomy and cohesion. Traditional attire and jewelry serve as markers of identity and cultural heritage, symbolizing the distinctiveness of each tribe. Indigenous knowledge related to agriculture, forest management, and medicinal practices demonstrates sustainable living practices passed down through generations. Tribal craftsmanship, including the intricate bamboo crafts of the Mundas and the vibrant Paitkar paintings of the Santhals, highlights their artistic prowess and cultural richness. Spiritual beliefs and practices, centered around nature worship and ancestral spirits, are deeply embedded in their daily lives and rituals. Strong community cohesion and solidarity are evident in communal activities and mutual aid systems, fostering a sense of unity and resilience. Historically, tribes have been at the forefront of resistance movements against external exploitation and cultural erosion, with leaders and movements playing crucial roles in shaping their identity and assertion. Despite facing challenges from modernization, urbanization, and external cultural influences, efforts to preserve and promote tribal identity through education, cultural programs, and legal protections continue to be paramount in maintaining their distinctiveness and ensuring their cultural survival. The tribes of Jharkhand, including the Santhals, Mundas, Oraons, and Hos, are distinguished by their unique languages, traditions, and social systems. Each tribe speaks a distinct language that is an integral part of their cultural identity, such as Santali, Mundari, Kurukh, and Ho. Their traditions are rich and diverse, with the Santhals known for their vibrant Sohrai art and elaborate festivals like Sohrai and Baha. The Mundas celebrate traditional festivals like Mage Parab, which honors their agricultural roots. Oraons observe the Sarhul festival, marking the arrival of spring and symbolizing their deep connection to nature. The Hos, with their distinct tribal dance forms like the Ho Munda dance, express their cultural heritage through music and movement. Social systems among these tribes are organized and community-centric; for instance, the Oraons follow the Parha system, a traditional governance structure that facilitates communal decision-making. The Mundas have their own traditional panchayats (village councils) that oversee social and judicial matters. These social systems, along with their unique languages and traditions, not only define their identity but also reinforce their community cohesion and cultural continuity.

### **4. Rich Cultural Heritage and Natural Resources**

The tribes of Jharkhand, such as the Santhals, Mundas, Oraons, and Hos, are renowned for their rich cultural heritage (Lowenthal, 2013) and abundant natural resources. Their cultural heritage is vividly expressed through their traditional art forms, music, dance, and festivals. The Santhals, for example, are famous for their Sohrai and Khovar wall paintings, which depict themes from nature and mythology. Their music and dance, such as the Dhamsa and Mandar, are integral to their cultural celebrations. The Mundas and Oraons also have vibrant cultural expressions, with the Mundas known for their intricate bamboo crafts and the Oraons for their Sarhul festival, which celebrates the sal tree and the advent of spring. Additionally, the tribes have a deep connection to their natural environment, which is rich in resources

like forests, minerals, and biodiversity. The forests provide not only sustenance through hunting and gathering but also materials for traditional crafts and medicinal plants. This connection to nature is reflected in their spiritual practices, which often involve worshipping elements of the natural world and maintaining ecological balance. The natural resources in Jharkhand, including its mineral wealth, have historically supported the livelihoods of tribal communities, though they also face challenges from external exploitation. This combination of cultural richness and natural resource abundance defines the unique identity of Jharkhand's tribes and underscores their resilience and adaptability.

### **5. Historical Exploitation and Resistance**

Jharkhand's tribes, including the Santhals, Mundas, Oraons, and Hos, have a long history of exploitation and resistance. During the colonial era, British policies and land revenue systems disrupted their traditional ways of life, leading to widespread land alienation and economic hardship. The introduction of the Zamindari system and the exploitation of natural resources by the British and later by post-independence Indian industrial policies further marginalized these communities. In response, the tribes of Jharkhand have a storied legacy of resistance. The Santhal Rebellion of 1855-56 and the Munda Ulgulan (Great Rebellion) led by Birsa Munda in the late 19th century are prominent examples of their struggle against colonial oppression. These uprisings were driven by a deep sense of injustice and a desire to reclaim their land and autonomy. Post-independence, the demand for a separate Jharkhand state was another significant movement, reflecting their ongoing fight for recognition and rights. This struggle culminated in the formation of Jharkhand as a separate state in 2000, providing a political platform to address their issues and preserve their cultural heritage. Despite the formation of the state, the tribes continue to face challenges related to land rights, displacement due to mining and industrial projects, and socio-economic inequalities. However, their history of resilience and continuous advocacy for their rights underscores their enduring spirit and determination to overcome exploitation.

### **6. Role of Leaders Like Jaipal Singh Munda and The Jharkhand Party**

Leaders like Jaipal Singh Munda (Kumar, 2010) and the Jharkhand Party played a crucial role in the movement for the formation of Jharkhand state and in championing the rights of tribal communities. Jaipal Singh Munda, a charismatic and influential leader, was a pivotal figure in advocating for the distinct cultural and political identity of Jharkhand's tribes. Educated at Oxford, where he also captained the Indian hockey team to victory in the 1928 Olympics, Jaipal Singh brought a global perspective to the local tribal issues. Jaipal Singh Munda founded the Adivasi Mahasabha in 1938, which later evolved into the Jharkhand Party in 1949. The party's primary agenda was the creation of a separate state of Jharkhand, encompassing tribal-dominated regions from Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh. Jaipal Singh's eloquence and deep understanding of tribal issues helped him garner significant support for the movement.

The Jharkhand Party, under Jaipal Singh's leadership, highlighted the economic exploitation and cultural marginalization of the tribal people. The party sought to address these issues through the demand for a separate state that would ensure better governance and development tailored to the unique needs of the tribal population. Jaipal Singh Munda's efforts were instrumental in bringing the tribal identity and their issues to the national forefront. Though the immediate post-independence period saw setbacks, with the Jharkhand Party merging with the Indian National Congress in 1963, the movement for a separate state did not die. It laid the foundation for future movements and inspired subsequent leaders to continue the

struggle. The eventual creation of Jharkhand as a separate state in 2000 can be traced back to the groundwork laid by Jaipal Singh Munda and the Jharkhand Party. Their legacy lives on in the continuing efforts to improve the socio-economic conditions of Jharkhand's tribal communities, emphasizing the importance of preserving their unique cultural heritage and ensuring their rights and development within the Indian federation.

## **7. Recognition of The Powerful Role of Tribal Identity in Regional Politics**

The recognition of tribal identity's powerful role in regional politics, particularly evident in states like Jharkhand, underscores its profound impact on governance, representation, and policy formulation. Tribal identity serves as a cornerstone for political representation, as seen in the election of tribal leaders and the formation of parties advocating for tribal rights. Movements for state formation, rooted in the assertion of regional and tribal identities, highlight the quest for self-governance and cultural preservation. Additionally, tribal identity shapes policy formulation, fostering specific programs aimed at tribal welfare and development. Moreover, it facilitates alliance building, cultural assertion, and negotiating power in political decision-making, emphasizing the significance of tribal identity in fostering inclusive governance and addressing the needs of tribal communities (Lacher, 2011).

## **8. Conclusion**

The formation of Jharkhand as a separate state stands as a testament to the enduring struggle and resilience of tribal communities in asserting their identity and rights. Leaders like Jaipal Singh Munda and movements like the Jharkhand Party played instrumental roles in championing tribal causes. The recognition of tribal identity's powerful role in regional politics highlights the importance of inclusive governance and tailored development programs. Moving forward, it is imperative to continue preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of Jharkhand's tribes while addressing socio-economic disparities and ensuring their rightful place within the Indian federation.

## **References**

1. **Kumar, M., Gupta, J., Radhakrishnan, A., & Singh, M. (2015).** Socio-economic status and role of livestock to improve livelihood of tribes of Jharkhand. *Education*, 86(16), 71-67.
2. **Ghosh, P. (2014).** Tribal culture and Environment: Reconstructing Theory and Changes towards Autonomy Movement in Jharkhand, India. *Palli Charcha*, 48
3. **Singh, K., & Dewan, R. (2018).** Depression and Stress among Tribal Migrant Rural Women of Ranchi District in Jharkhand. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 23(1), 1-8.
4. **Begrich, R. (2013).** *Inebriety and indigeneity: The moral governance of Adivasis and alcohol in Jharkhand, India* (Doctoral dissertation, Johns Hopkins University).
5. **Kuriyakose, S. (2010).** Articulation of Regional Identity and Demand for Separate Statehood in India. *Rajagiri Journal of Social Development*, 2(1), 49-64.
6. **Kuriyakose, S. (2010).** ARTICULATION OF REGIONAL IDENTITY AND DEMAND FOR SEPARATE STATEHOOD IN INDIA. *Rajagiri Journal of Social Development*, 2(1).
7. **Jain, P., Sharma, H. P., & Chaudhary, S. (2017).** Ethno-Medicinal Plants used by Tribal Communities of Jharkhand for Prevention and Remedy of Cancer. *International Journal of Agriculture Innovations and Research*, 6(2), 2319-1473.

8. **Chakraborty, U. K., & Narayan, B. (2016).** Corporate Social Responsibility for Sustainable Development of Indigenous People in Jharkhand: A Case Study of Tata Steel.
9. **Ghosh-Jerath, S., Singh, A., Lyngdoh, T., Magsumbol, M. S., Kamboj, P., & Goldberg, G. (2018).** Estimates of indigenous food consumption and their contribution to nutrient intake in Oraon tribal women of Jharkhand, India. *Food and nutrition bulletin*, 39(4), 581-594.
10. **Kumar, M., Gupta, J., Radhakrishnan, A., & Singh, M. (2015).** Socio-economic status and role of livestock to improve livelihood of tribes of Jharkhand. *Education*, 86(16), 71-67.
11. **Carrin, M. (2013).** Jharkhand: Alternative citizenship in an “Adivasi state”. In *The modern anthropology of India* (pp. 106-120). Routledge.
12. **James, P. (2015).** Despite the terrors of typologies: The importance of understanding categories of difference and identity. *Interventions*, 17(2), 174-195.
13. **Lowenthal, D. (2013).** Natural and cultural heritage. In *The Nature of Cultural Heritage, and the Culture of Natural Heritage* (pp. 79-90). Routledge.
14. **Lacher, W. (2011).** Families, tribes and cities in the Libyan revolution. *Middle East Policy*, 18(4), 140-154.
15. **Kumar, B. (2010).** Ethnic Demands and the Jharkhand Movement. *Rajagiri Journal of Social Development*, 1(2), 4-18.