

TALES FROM TRIBAL LAND - Abstract

Author's Bio:

Khushi Kesari, a postgraduate scholar at the University of Delhi, is currently the Program Officer at the History Lab: Community, Heritage, & Material Culture at the Advanced Study Institute of Asia at SGT University. Her passion lies in exploring culture and heritage, a fascination that drives her to engage in writing, designing, and researching within this realm. Over the years, she has worked with numerous organizations, delving into topics ranging from the historical significance of clothing to traditional festivals and culinary heritage, to name a few. She has contributed to developing two significant Cultural digital platforms, with another project underway. In her leisure time, Khushi finds solace in indulging in street food and strolling through heritage sites, revelling in the stories of ordinary people who inhabit these historic spaces.

Details of the Tribe:

Name of the tribe in focus: Baiga Tribe, Madhya Pradesh

About: The Baiga, an ethnic group primarily located in Madhya Pradesh, are officially recognized as Scheduled Tribes in several Indian states, including Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, and others. In Madhya Pradesh alone, their population amounts to 414,526. The Baiga population is concentrated in districts such as Dindori, Mandla, Jabalpur, and Shahdol within Madhya Pradesh, with significant numbers also residing in the Kawardha and Bilaspur districts of Chhattisgarh.

Belonging to the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), formerly known as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs), the Baigas are among the 75 vulnerable tribes in India. They speak the local dehati language, having lost their original language. Encountered by the British in the Dindori district, the Baigas once lived in remote jungles, far from civilisation. Over the past two centuries, they have

transitioned from secluded forest dwellers to residing on the outskirts of villages, experiencing significant loss and neglect along the way.

The Baigas have sub-castes, including the Bharotiyas, Binjhwaras, Nahads (Langotias or Narotiyas), Rai and Kadh Bhaina. The Nahads, Bharotiyas, and Binjhwaras are predominantly found in the border areas of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Bharotiyas are often small landholders, while Binjhwaras resemble Scheduled Caste Gonds in lifestyle. The Nahads, also known as Langotias, are the most marginalised subgroup, struggling to integrate into mainstream society. Determining their population is challenging due to categorisation issues in surveys.

The Baigas have historically lived in harmony with nature, and today, their lives remain intertwined with forest ecosystems. Originally nomadic hunter-gatherers practising shifting agriculture, they possess extensive knowledge of medicinal plants, earning them the moniker "Baiga," derived from the Hindi word for healer. This wisdom is passed down through oral traditions. Presently, the Nahad Baigas rely on forest resources, crafting bamboo products and collecting honey, though some have turned to farming. Due to limited agricultural opportunities, the Bharotiyas in Baihar and Birsia depend on wage labour and government assistance. In Mandla and Dindori, they face challenges similar to landless families. Baiga settlements are often isolated, lacking basic infrastructure like roads and electricity.

Context of the story:

The narrative unfolds in the contemporary era, following a traveller named Jason, who embarks on a journey across India to document the lifestyles of diverse tribal communities. During his travels in Madhya Pradesh, Jason mistakenly identifies the Baigas as Bhils. However, this misconception leads him on an intriguing journey, delving into the rich folklore and culture of this often-overlooked tribe.

Rathudiya ji, a tribal resident, engages in conversation with our fellow traveller, recounting the tales of the "nanga baiga" and "nangi baigin," along with the legend of the Magician. He provides insights into the local cultural customs and extends an invitation for our traveller to stay with them for an extended period, immersing deeper into their way of life. The story is read in a diary entry format, where we read from Jason's perspective.

These folktales have been transmitted orally across generations, lacking any written documentation. Older members of tribal communities share them with the younger generation and are often exchanged between different tribes.

The theme of the Story:

- Origin Myths & Creation Stories
- Gods, Spirits, and Deities

Title: Whispers of Creation: Tales from the Land of Baiga
