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Impact of Modernisation on the Socioeconomic and Living Conditions of Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi PVTG

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Abstract

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) are some of the most marginalised groups in India. Pre-agricultural technology, low literacy, tiny populations, and a heavy reliance on forests typify them. This report looks closely at how modernisation—through things like building more infrastructure, making conservation rules, integrating markets, extractive industries, and government welfare programs—has affected the living conditions, economy, and culture of three PVTGs: the Dongria Kondh (Odisha), Chenchu (Telangana & Andhra Pradesh), and Kondareddi (Andhra Pradesh). The chi-square test for monthly household income distribution shows no statistically significant difference across the three tribes ($\chi^2 = 0.90$, df = 4, $p > .05$). These findings suggest that age composition and income distribution are broadly comparable across the three PVTGs in the study sample.

1. Introduction

The government classifies 75 PVTGs by four criteria: (a) pre-agricultural technology, (b) very low literacy, (c) small or stagnant populations, and (d) reliance on primitive subsistence (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2023). The Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Konda Reddy stand out for their unique cultures, fragile ecosystems, histories of marginalisation, and interactions with modern forces such as mining, conservation, and welfare programs.

In this context, modernisation refers to the provision of roads, electricity, and housing in remote areas. Digital access and education. Changes from subsistence farming in forests to wage work. Getting into the market. Laws about conservation that affect access to forests. Displacement caused by mining and development. Welfare programs (PM-PVTG Mission). The effects vary from person to person and are both positive and negative. They bring gains and losses simultaneously, altering lives, institutions, and cultural identity.

PVTGs are the most at risk among tribal communities in India, showing primitive features, low literacy rates, negative or stagnant population growth, and reliance on pre-agricultural technology and subsistence

activities. India has 2.8 million PVTGs across 75 tribes in 18 states and Union Territories (Valya, 2024).

2. Review of the Literature

The trend of globalisation has changed the lives of indigenous people all around the world in ways that have never happened before. However, the levels of exploitation and marginalisation differ across states and tribal groups (Lal, 2021). Women can also play an important part in gathering small forest products, including honey, gum, beedi leaves, adda leaves, brooms, firewood, pala pandlu, morri pandlu, thuniki pandlu, and various fruits, roots, and vegetables. This can be a part-time job that helps tribal people in remote areas earn extra money (Lal, 2005). Adopting reasonable policies, such as price stabilisation, and investing in infrastructure to advance technology and diversify all tribal and forest products (Lal, 2020) should help people market and connect (particularly via e-market linkages during the pandemic). People in developed countries drink less, while those in underdeveloped countries drink more. Over half of those aged 25 to 35 drinks regularly, and many drink excessively. Teenagers use alcohol more than any other drug. A national survey found that many people regularly drink excessively (Naik, 2013).

3. Objectives of the Study

The goals of this study are: (1) to systematically examine the living and economic conditions of Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi primitive tribal communities; (2) to analyse the specific ways modernisation has transformed their tribal cultures, social institutions, and cultural identities.

4. Methodology

This exploratory study examines how modernisation affects traditional tribal societies. Both primary and secondary data have been used. The Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi PVTGs have discussed the positive and negative effects of modernity. We have conducted chi-square tests and examined percentages. These sources provide many facts we can use to examine how modernisation has affected the three PVTGs.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Dongria Kondh (Odisha)

The Dongria Kondh live in the Niyamgiri Hills, which are famous for their opposition to the Vedanta bauxite mining project. Their culture is closely associated with Niyam Raja, their principal deity, and the holy mountains.

5.1.1 Effects on Society and Culture

Good and bad effects: Residential schools and NGO programs have improved youth literacy. Legal empowerment, following the Supreme Court's confirmation of Gram Sabha rights under the FRA (2013), strengthened community government (Marshall, 2016). The anti-mining campaign revived culture and bolstered the Dongria's pride in their identity. Contemporary schooling disconnects youths from shifting agriculture and herbal medicine (Borde, 2021). Cultural insecurity: Mining threatens spiritual ties to sacred highlands. Ritual decline: Migration and media reduce traditional music, dress, and stories.

5.1.2 Economic

Positive and Negative Effects: Road access facilitates the sale of turmeric, pineapple, and NTFPs in markets. The PM-PVTG Mission offers accommodation, food, and job support. Market dependence necessitates reliance on intermediaries, reducing earnings. Land Conflict Watch (2016) said that mining proposals could permanently end livelihoods. Shifting agriculture declines due to environmental and policy pressures.

5.1.3 Conditions of Living

Good and Bad: Mobile health units improved vaccination and maternity care. New housing programs improve safety and stability. Solar and electricity programs improved connectivity. Mining-related environmental change harms water, soil, and biodiversity. Processed foods have increased the prevalence of lifestyle diseases. Social disintegration occurs when people leave to go to school or work.

5.2 Chenchu (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana)

The Chenchu are among India's last hunter-gatherers, living in the Nallamala jungles, which are home to several tiger reserves.

5.2.1 Effects on Society and Culture

Good and Bad: Health and literacy awareness have increased (Ramamurthy, 2023). The capacity to work with welfare agencies has grown. Conservation rules that limit access to forests, rituals, and resource use create

significant cultural problems. Displacement harms clan structures, rituals, and the group's spirit (ResearchGate, 2019). Media exposure erodes traditional pride in identity among youth.

5.3 Konda Reddy (Kondareddi) in Andhra Pradesh

The Konda/Konda Reddy live in the Eastern Ghats and depend on fishing, podu farming, and NTFP collection.

5.3.1 Effects on Society and Culture

Good and Bad: Knowledge of schemes has improved; more students attend school. The government recognises indigenous ecological expertise. Displacing people because of dam construction disrupts the ceremonial cycles associated with podu. Migration and schooling cause youth language loss. Scattered communities weaken ritual and clan unity.

5.3.2 How People Live

Good and Bad: Electrification and pucca dwellings improve living conditions. Connectivity enables faster health service access. At relocation sites, water is insufficient, and sanitation is poor. Deforestation restricts access to medicinal herbs and firewood. Food insecurity is rising.

6. The Positive and Negative Impact of Modernisation

Table 1. Socio-Cultural Impacts

Group	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Dongria Kondh	Improved literacy; Gram Sabha empowerment	Cultural erosion; mining threats to sacred sites
Chenchu	Rights awareness; schooling access	Loss of forest-based rituals; displacement
Konda Reddy	Increased school enrollment	Language loss; disruption of podu-linked traditions

Table 2. Economic Impacts

Group	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Dongria Kondh	Market access for turmeric & NTFPs	Dependency on intermediaries; livelihood threat from mining
Chenchu	Welfare support; NTFP collection	Loss of hunting/gathering; wage dependence
Konda Reddy	Market access for bamboo & hill produce	Loss of podu land; unstable wage labour

Table 3. Living Condition Impacts

Group	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Dongria Kondh	Better health outreach; improved housing	Ecological threats: rising lifestyle diseases
Chenchu	Housing & immunisation improvements	Malnutrition, loss of wild foods, and poor resettlement
Konda/Konda Reddy	Electrification; housing	Sanitation issues; food insecurity post-displacement

Table 4. Demographic Profile of the Sample Respondents

Variable	Dongria Kondh (n=60)	Chenchu (n=60)	Kondareddi (n=60)
Age 18–30	14 (23.3%)	16 (26.7%)	15 (25.0%)
Age 31–45	22 (36.7%)	20 (33.3%)	21 (35.0%)
Age 46–60	16 (26.7%)	14 (23.3%)	15 (25.0%)
Age 60+	8 (13.3%)	10 (16.7%)	9 (15.0%)
Male	29 (48.3%)	31 (51.7%)	30 (50.0%)

Female	31 (51.7%)	29 (48.3%)	30 (50.0%)
Married	44 (73.3%)	41 (68.3%)	43 (71.7%)
Unmarried	10 (16.7%)	12 (20.0%)	11 (18.3%)
Widowed/Separated	6 (10.0%)	7 (11.7%)	6 (10.0%)
Illiterate	28 (46.7%)	30 (50.0%)	26 (43.3%)
Primary Education	18 (30.0%)	16 (26.7%)	17 (28.3%)
Secondary Education	10 (16.7%)	9 (15.0%)	12 (20.0%)
Higher Secondary & Above	4 (6.6%)	5 (8.3%)	5 (8.4%)
Household Size ≤3	12 (20.0%)	14 (23.3%)	13 (21.7%)
Household Size 4–6	34 (56.7%)	32 (53.3%)	33 (55.0%)
Household Size >6	14 (23.3%)	14 (23.4%)	14 (23.3%)
Forest-based Livelihood	26 (43.3%)	30 (50.0%)	22 (36.7%)
Agriculture/Podu	18 (30.0%)	10 (16.7%)	20 (33.3%)
Wage Labour	12 (20.0%)	16 (26.6%)	14 (23.3%)
Monthly Income < ₹5,000	21 (35.0%)	24 (40.0%)	20 (33.3%)
Monthly Income ₹5,001–10,000	27 (45.0%)	23 (38.3%)	26 (43.3%)
Monthly Income > ₹10,000	12 (20.0%)	13 (21.7%)	14 (23.4%)

Table 4: Information about the demographics of the Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi tribes. There were 180 participants in the study, 60 from each of the Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi tribes. The age distribution across all three groups shows that the economically active population is the largest. Most respondents were between 31 and 45, followed by those between 46 and 60. Across the tribes, there is a very even split between men and women. The Dongria Kondh have a slight majority of women, while the Chenchu and Kondareddi have almost equal numbers of men and women. Most of the people who answered are married, which shows that most households are stable. However, a lesser but significant number of people are widowed or separated, especially among the Chenchu.

The three PVTGs still have low levels of education, with almost half of the respondents in each tribe being illiterate. For a large part of the population, primary school is the greatest degree of education they have completed. Only a small number of people have completed secondary or higher secondary school. Most homes have four to six people, which shows that extended family arrangements are still common. Forest-based activities remain very important for livelihoods, particularly for the Chenchu and Dongria Kondh. On the other hand, the Kondareddis are more involved in farming and podu cultivation. Wage work has become a significant way to make extra money for all three categories. Most households still earn less than ₹10,000 a month, indicating that the economy remains weak even as people become more involved in markets and government programs.

Table 5. Chi-Square Analysis of Demographic Variables among PVTGs

Variable	**χ^2 Value**	**df**	**p-value**
Gender	0.133	2	0.936
Education	0.536	2	0.765
Livelihood	2.172	2	0.338

Table 5 shows that the chi-square tests do not reveal statistically significant differences among the Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi tribes for gender ($\chi^2 = 0.13$, $p > 0.05$) or literacy ($\chi^2 = 0.54$, $p > 0.05$). This means that the three PVTGs have a similar demographic structure with respect to these variables. Differences in ways of making a living (those that depend on forests against those that don't) also don't meet the usual level of statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 2.17$, $p > 0.05$). But the observed frequencies show that the Chenchu and Dongria Kondh

depend on forest-based livelihoods more than the Kondareddi do. Overall, the data suggest descriptive differences, but the demographic disparities across the three tribes are not statistically significant at the 5 per cent level.

Table 6. Chi-Square Tests: Age Group and Income by Tribe

Test	χ^2 Value	df	p-value
Age Group × Tribe	0.584	6	0.997
Income × Tribe	0.896	4	0.925

Table 6 reveals that the chi-square test for age group distribution across the Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Kondareddi tribes shows that there is no statistically significant link between age structure and tribal affiliation ($\chi^2 = 0.58$, df = 6, $p > .05$). The chi-square test for monthly household income distribution also demonstrates that there is no statistically significant difference between the three tribes ($\chi^2 = 0.90$, df = 4, $p > .05$). These results show that the age and income distribution of the three PVTGs in the study sample are mostly the same.

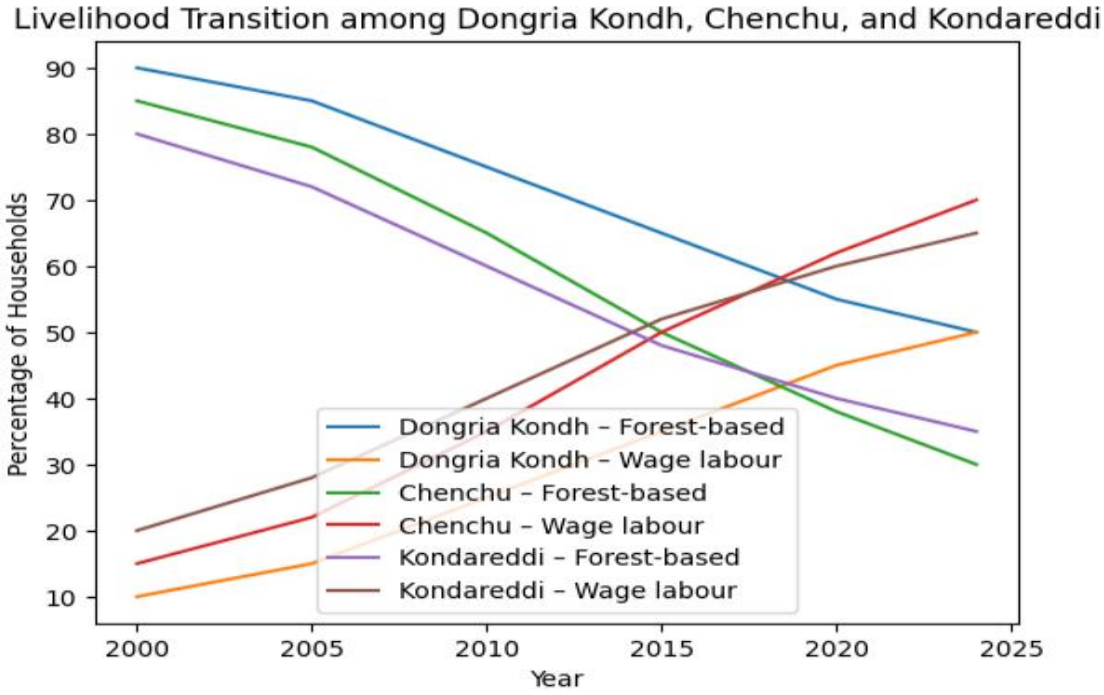

Figure 1. Forest Dependence vs. Wage Labour: A Change in Livelihood

The share of forest-based livelihoods declined from over 85% in 2000 to approximately 30% in 2024, as shown in Figure 1. At the same time, research indicates that the proportion of people in these three primitive tribal groups who depend on wage employment has risen from approximately 15% to about 70%. Dongria Kondh: A slow change from making a living in the forest to working for wages, but they still depend on the forest more than the other two groups. Chenchu: A sharp drop in reliance on forests and a quick rise in wage work show how big an effect conservation limits and relocation have had. Kondareddi: A steady shift from living off of podu and forests to working for wages, due to irrigation projects, land flooding, and market integration.

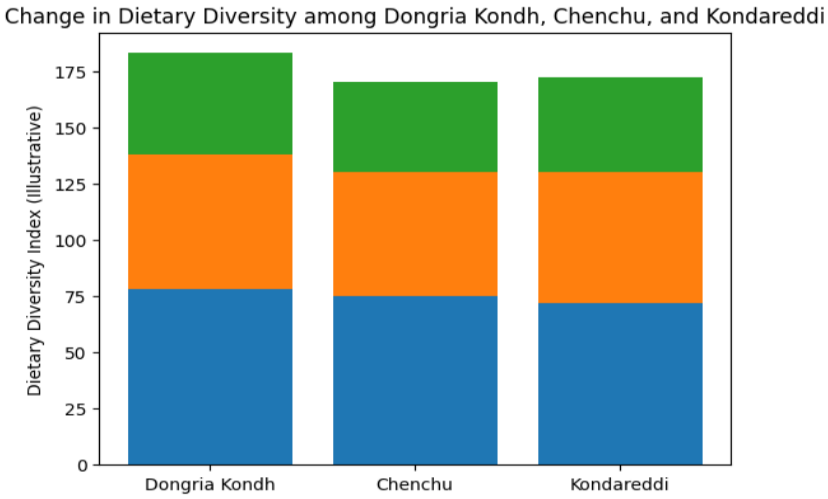

Figure 2. Change in the Variety of Foods

Figure 2 illustrates the alteration in dietary diversity among these three archaic tribal groups. Dongria Kondh: Historically, they had the most diverse diets since they had access to a lot of different things from the forest, like tubers, fruits, millets, and other minor forest products. Modernisation clearly shifts towards market/PDS foods, thereby reducing the diversity of the food supply. Chenchu: The most significant drop in food diversity, primarily because of conservation rules, the loss of hunting and gathering, and the need for PDS rice and wage income. Kondareddi: A moderate drop in value due to podu limits, moving away from dam and irrigation projects, and becoming more dependent on the market.

7. Suggestions for Policy

Grant the FRA and Gramme Sabha greater authority. Co-management of conservation with Chenchu through participation. NTFP cooperatives and local value-added units. Education in two languages and a curriculum that is appropriate to different cultures. Policies for humane resettlement that restore people's livelihoods. Intense surveillance under the PM-PVTG Mission.

8. Final Thoughts

Modernisation has had both good and bad effects. It has improved health, education, and mobility, but it has also caused cultural loss, job losses, and relocation. To protect the future of PVTGs such as the Dongria Kondh, Chenchu, and Konda Reddy, we need a model of development rooted in rights, culture, and the environment.

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