



# Social, Political And Economic Issues Affecting Tribal Communities In The KBK Region

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**Abstract-** This study investigates the complex social, political, and economic issues that tribes in India's traditionally neglected KBK (Kalahandi, Balangir, Koraput) regions are facing. The study reveals recurrent patterns and trends that have impacted the socio-political and economic landscape of the area through the use of historical analysis and archival research. The result highlights these communities' tenacity and stresses the need for more comprehensive and successful policy initiatives to lessen their enduring hardships. Additionally, The study examines how globalization affects tribes in both positives and negative ways, especially in light of recent economic reforms in India. Even with these improvements, problems in rural areas especially in the KBK districts like poverty and economic inequality still exist. In order to address the ongoing struggles of Scheduled Tribe communities in India, which are primarily characterized by economic and social marginalization. A primitive existence, geographic isolation, and educational backwardness, the study also emphasizes the need for more inclusive policy measures.

**Keywords:** KBK districts, Odisha, tribal, economic issue

## I. INTRODUCTION

The KBK region, comprising Kalahandi, Bolangir, and Koraput districts in Odisha, is marked by significant socio-economic challenges, particularly for its substantial tribal population. This article delves into the sociopolitical economy of the KBK region, focusing on the issues faced by tribal communities, including marginalization, economic exploitation, and the impact of government interventions. The study aims to understand the systemic factors contributing to the ongoing hardships of the tribal population and the effectiveness of resistance movements in advocating for their rights.

## II. RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

The KBK region in southern Orissa endures deep-rooted poverty that has persisted despite numerous interventions since 1987. This chronic poverty highlights significant human rights issues and contributes to social unrest, including Naxalism, which threatens both state and national stability. Despite various studies recommending infrastructure improvements and productivity growth, they often overlook the fundamental causes of persistent poverty and the inefficacy of current alleviation schemes. This research seeks to address these gaps by evaluating the shortcomings of existing poverty alleviation programs.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review highlights MGNREGA's role in poverty reduction, with studies like Azam (2012) and Dutta et al. (2014) emphasizing its positive impact on rural wages and income generation. However, Pankaj and Tankha (2010) note regional disparities, with corruption and middlemen limiting its effectiveness in underdeveloped areas like the KBK region.

The literature review of the article "Effects of socio-economic, demographic and lifestyle variables on overweight and obesity among rural Rajbanshi post-menopausal women of India" highlights the global rise

in obesity, with a particular focus on its prevalence in developing countries, including India. Studies by Popkin (2001), WHO (2016), and others emphasize the increasing obesity rates, particularly among post-menopausal women. Research specific to India, such as by Das and Bose (2006) and Subramanian et al. (2007), confirms this trend. The review underscores the need for targeted public health interventions, especially considering the socio-economic and demographic factors affecting rural population.

#### IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- Socioeconomic Status: Examine poverty, land ownership, education, and health among tribal communities.
- Evaluate Policies: Analyse the impact of government programs on tribal livelihoods.
- Investigate Exclusion: Explore the marginalization of tribal communities in politics and decision-making.
- Study Resistance: Understand tribal movements protecting rights and resources.
- Suggest Interventions: Recommend policies to enhance tribal socio-economic conditions and inclusion.

#### V. METHODOLOGY

**Research Design:** The paper is devoted to the historical examination and qualitative research design. It aims at understanding the way the sociopolitical and economic conditions of native aboriginals in the KBK area have been evolving over time. secondary and tertiary sources as the part of data collection process, historical sources and archival research. The study has to be conducted using both primary and secondary sources.

Primary data will be obtained through first-hand witness account of events which have happened in the past in the KBK region. The process of retrieving secondary material will include the review of academic literature on the history of the region, sociopolitical and economical status of the area, and specifically, the tribal communities in KBK and India in general. This will include reading of books, journals and research papers.

##### Data Analysis

- Thematic Analysis: Identify recurring pattern and trends in the socio-political of tribal communities.
- Comparative Analysis: Compare historical data with contemporary conditions to assess changes over time and the impact of the policies and intervention.
- Context Analysis: Situate the KBK region's history context of India's tribal policies and socio-economic development.

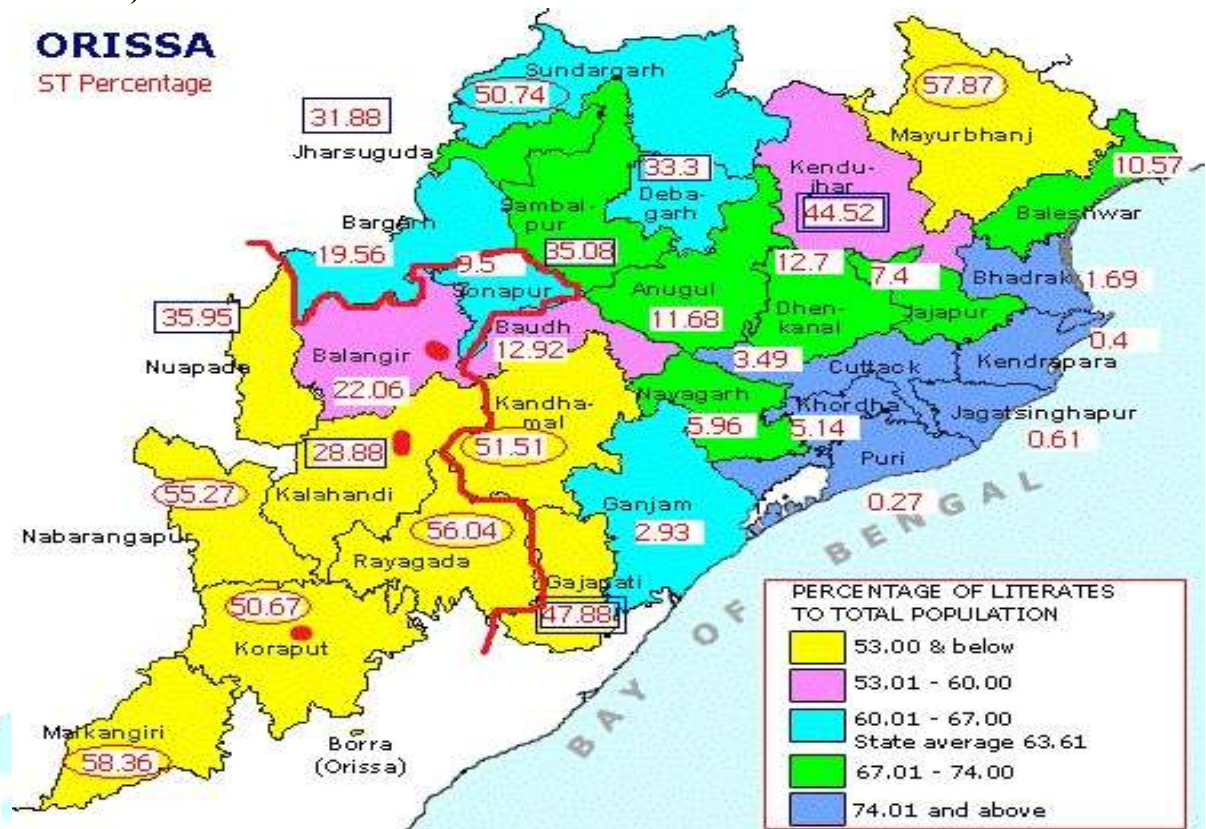
#### VI. HYPOTHESIS

Despite various government interventions, persistent systemic issues and marginalization continue to hinder poverty alleviation in the KBK region, while resistance movements and globalization have only partially mitigated these challenges.

##### History of the KBK Region

The former districts of Koraput, Balangir, and Kalahandi, known collectively as the KBK districts, were reorganized into eight districts-Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Rayagada, Balangir, Subarnapur, Kalahandi, and Nuapada- in 1992. Located in the southwestern part of Odisha, comprising the Deccan Plateau and the Eastern Ghats, these mineral-rich highland districts, abundant in flora and fauna, remain among the most underdeveloped regions in Odisha.

## Demographic Profile Schedule Tribal in KBK region Map-1 (Google Sources)



Source: eOdisha.org, Table 1: Demographic and Literacy indicators in the KBK districts, 2011

District	Pop. Density	Population Indicators					Literacy Rate	
		Total	Female (%)	Rural (%)	ST (%)	SC (%)	Total (%)	Female (%)
Koraput	156	1379647	50.79	83.6	50.5	14.2	41.1	32.4
Malkangiri	105	613192	50.4	91.9	57.8	22.5	39.9	31.5
Nawrangpur	230	1220946	50.46	92.8	55.79	14.52	38.5	29.7
Rayagada	136	967911	51.2	84.8	55.9	14.4	42.1	33.4
Bolangir	250	1648997	49.6	88.03	21.05	17.8	56.2	46.5
Sonepur	261	610183	48.9	91.8	9.3	25.6	65.2	56.2
Kalahandi	199	176869	50.08	92.2	28.5	18.1	50.8	40.2
Nuapada	158	610382	50.5	94.4	33.8	13.4	49.04	38.4
KBK Districts	181	8628127	50.2	89.4	38.6	17.05	47.7	38.26
Odisha	269	41974218	49.4	83.3	22.8	17.1	63.7	56.12

(Source: Calculated from Primary Census Abstract, Census of India, 2011, Orissa. This table reflects the demographic and literacy indicators for the KBK districts as per the 2011 Census data.)

### The KBK Region's Path to Poverty Alleviation in Odisha

The Government of Odisha has focused on reducing regional disparities, especially in the KBK region, which faced severe poverty and starvation deaths in the 1980s. The Area Development Project (ADAPT) initiated in 1988 was discontinued in 1989, leading to the Long-Term Action Plan (LTAP) in 1995 to address ongoing poverty.



**Table 2: Work force structure of KBK region and Odisha**

The KBK region shows limited occupational diversification. While the state saw a shift from primary to secondary sectors, the KBK region lagged, with the primary sector workforce only slightly decreasing from 85.15% in 1971 to 84.38% in 1991, and the secondary sector workforce stagnating at around 5%.

Dist./State	Total Main Workers		Primary Sector		Secondary Sector		Tertiary Sector	
	1971	1991	1971	1991	1971	1991	1971	1991
KBK	34.05	37.99	85.15	84.38	4.88	4.89	9.97	10.73
Odisha	31.22	32.78	80.35	75.83	6.47	7.51	13.18	16.66

(Source: Orissa Development Report 2002)

**Table 3: Agricultural Indicators of KBK Districts (2006-07) Districts/State**

Districts	Area under Food Grain Production (Thousand Hectares)	Yield of Food Grain (Kg/Hect.)	Total Food Grain Production (Thousand Metric Tons)	Percentage of Irrigated Area	Fertilizer Consumption (Kg/Hect.)
Koraput	264.58	1217	322.08	31.9	30
Malkangiri	137.65	1098	151.20	28.76	25
Nawarangpur	247.66	1488	368.47	14.2	70
Rayagada	154.29	1182	182.36	20.17	33
Bolangir	356.97	1049	374.54	14.5	32
Sonepur	168.09	1768	297.22	50.9	34
Kalahandi	460.88	930	428.74	34.91	51
Nuapada	207.94	795	165.39	21.75	34
Odisha	6839.86	1213	8297.98	32.37	47

(Source: Orissa Agricultural Statistics 2006-07)

### Agriculture in the KBK Region

Although 39 percent of the total geographical area in the KBK region is under cultivation, agriculture in this region is not productive or high-yielding (Table-4) due to the region's topography. Most KBK districts fall under the Eastern Ghat High Land agro-climatic region, which is characterized by hills and forests, resulting in poor agricultural output. This region also suffers from a lack of irrigation, with only 26 percent of the total area being irrigated compared to 33 percent for the state (Orissa Agricultural Statistics 2006-07). Agricultural productivity in the KBK region is significantly lower than the state average (Table-4). Contributing factors include the prevalence of primitive agricultural practices such as low fertilizer consumption, limited use of High-Yielding Variety (HYV) seeds, inadequate farm implements, and a lack of cropping pattern diversification (Monoculture) (ODR 2002). Natural calamities such as heavy monsoon rains, floods, and droughts also contribute to low agricultural production. Banik (2005) notes that despite rainfall being similar to other regions of Odisha, the main issue is the late arrival of the monsoon and uneven distribution of rainfall.

The KBK Districts: Geographical and Administrative Divisions

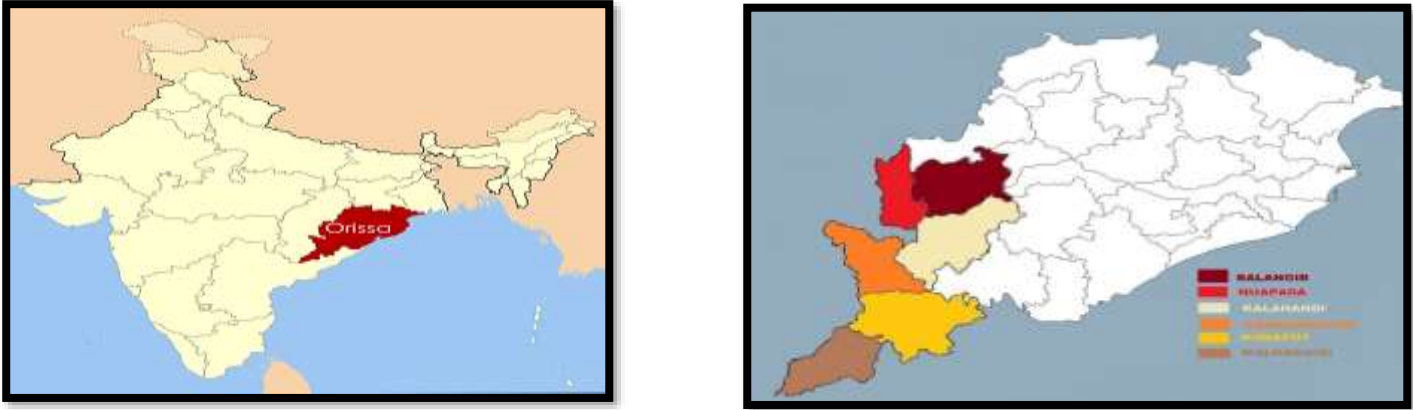


Table 4: Administrative Divisions of the KBK Districts

Districts	Area (sq. km)	Number of Blocks	TSP	Subdivisions	Tehsils	GPs	Villages
Koraput	8,807	14	14	2	7	226	2,028
Malkangiri	5,791	7	7	1	3	108	1,045
Nawrangpur	5,291	10	10	1	4	169	901
Rayagada	7,073	11	11	2	4	171	2,667
Bolangir	6,575	14	-	3	6	285	1,794
Sonapur	2,337	6	-	2	4	96	959
Kalahandi	7,920	13	2	2	7	273	2,236
Nuapada	3,852	5	-	1	2	109	663
KBK Districts	47,646	80	44	14	37	1,437	12,293
Odisha	155,707	314	118	58	316	6,134	50,295

(Source: District Statistical Handbook 2007, Panchayati Raj Department, Government of Odisha and ST & SC Development Department, Government of Odisha.)

Tribal Resistance in the KBK Region

The Niyamgiri Movement, led by the Dongria Kondh tribe, is a notable example of tribal resistance in the KBK region. It arose in opposition to a multinational corporation's bauxite mining plans in the sacred Niyamgiri Hills. The Dongria Kondh organized protests, legal challenges, and international advocacy to protect their land and culture. Similarly, the Kutia Kondh tribe in Bolangir resisted large-scale land acquisitions for industrial projects, highlighting the importance of land rights and the negative impacts of industrialization. In Malkangiri, the Bonda community fought against displacement caused by a dam project, using grassroots methods like sit-ins and petitions. Field observations in Koraput and Kalahandi showed ongoing poverty and inadequate access to essential services. The struggles of these tribal communities underscore the need for more inclusive development strategies that genuinely address their rights and well-being.

Socio-Political Structure and Exclusion

The findings reveal that the socio-political structure in the KBK region remains heavily skewed against the tribal population. Despite legal protections, tribal communities continue to be marginalized in political processes, with power concentrated in the hands of non-tribal elites. This exclusion manifests in various forms, from lack of representation in local governance to the unequal distribution of resources and benefits from government programs.

### Economic Exploitation and Livelihood Challenges

The analysis shows that the economy of the KBK region, heavily reliant on agriculture and forest-based activities, is fraught with challenges for tribal communities. Land alienation, environmental degradation, and inadequate support for traditional livelihoods have led to widespread poverty and food insecurity. The depletion of forest resources, coupled with displacement due to industrial and mining projects, has further exacerbated the economic vulnerabilities of tribal people.

### Dadan Migration in KBK

Dadan labour migration occurs in the KBK region, where local agents, Sardars, recruit poor migrant labourers called Dadan. Sardars, familiar with locals, contact prospective labourers during Nukhai and provide an advance amount in exchange for a six-month work term. This system is prevalent in brick kilns in Andhra Pradesh and informal sector work across South India. However, Dadan faces poor working conditions, limited access to education and health facilities, and limited bargaining power due to their social, cultural, and linguistic exclusion.

India has a large problem with annual distress migration, especially from western regions like Balangir, Bargarh, Kalahandi, and Nuapada. When there is a shortage of rural labour following harvest festivals, this movement frequently starts. Workers usually move to southern cities like Hyderabad and Mumbai to work in brick kilns and construction. Every year, some 850,000 workers move, with 40,000 of those migrants moving through authorized contractors in recent years. In a single year, more than 5,400 Odisha labourers left the state, primarily to work in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman. At least 403 migrant labourers lost their lives while working outside the state between 2015 and 2024. A State Action Plan for Inter-State Migrant Workers and the establishment of the first Mobile Migrant Resource Centre are only two examples of the welfare and policy initiatives the government has put in place.<sup>1</sup>

### Government Interventions and Their Impact

While government interventions such as MGNREGA and the KBK Special Plan have provided some relief, the study found that these programs are often plagued by inefficiencies and corruption. The benefits frequently fail to reach the most marginalized tribal communities, and the overall impact on improving their socio-economic conditions has been limited. The study highlights the need for more transparent and accountable governance to ensure that developmental programs effectively address the needs of tribal people.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Despite numerous government initiatives, poverty, underdevelopment, and social marginalization continue to be major problems in the KBK region. Chronic poverty has been firmly established by its distant location, reliance on subsistence farming, and declining revenue from non-timber forest products. Its underdevelopment is made worse by other elements like low industrial growth, insufficient market development, and subpar health and educational outcomes.

A change to more inclusive and participatory development practices is necessary to address these problems. Building necessary rural infrastructure to increase connectedness and economic activity, focusing interventions on high-ST populations, and encouraging transitions from agriculture to non-agricultural sectors are important strategies. Improving irrigation systems, converting agricultural to high-value, high-input systems, and providing improved marketing facilities to support traditional industries and artisans are also critical.

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- <sup>1</sup> The New Indian Express. (2024, April 6). *Election brings a dilemma for seasonal migrant workers in Odisha.*
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