

A POLICY BRIEF



**CENTRE FOR MULTIDISCIPLINARY DEVELOPMENT  
RESEARCH (CMDR), DHARWAD**

*(A National Institute of Research, Teaching and Training, supported by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR),  
Ministry of Education, Government of India and Government of Karnataka)*

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**CHAMARAJANAGARA UNIVERSITY  
CHAMARAJANAGARA**

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***Jointly Organised***

A Seminar on

**Holistic Empowerment and  
Sustainable Development of Tribal  
and Marginalised Communities**

13<sup>th</sup> December, 2025

## Echoes from the Margins: Towards Inclusive Development of Tribes and Nomadic Communities

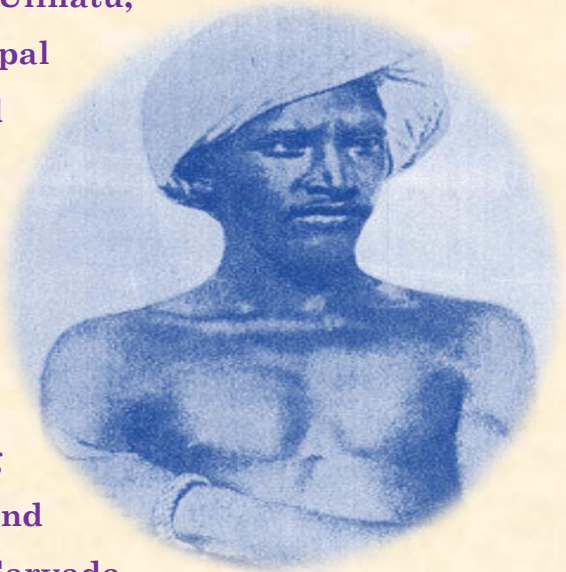
### Context and Purpose:


Karnataka is home to a significant population of Scheduled Tribes, including nomadic communities, as well as Scheduled Castes and other marginalised groups. Despite their rich cultural heritage and diverse indigenous knowledge systems, these communities continue to face persistent challenges in health, education, livelihoods, and social inclusion.

To address these issues, the Centre for Multi-Disciplinary Development Research (CMDR), Dharwad and Chamarajanagara University organised a state-level seminar titled “Holistic Empowerment and Sustainable Development of Tribal and Marginalised Communities” on 13 December 2025. The seminar was dedicated to celebrating **Bhagavan Birsa Munda Jayanti** as **Jan Jatiya Gaurav Divas**.

### Brief note on Bhagavan Birsa Munda

Born on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1875 in Ulihatu, Jharkhand, he began his education at Jaipal Nag and Germa Missionary School and later changed his name to Birsa David. Later realised the policies of the then British government regarding unfair land-grabbing from local communities and returned as Birsa Munda. He started the agitation “Ulgulan”, meaning strike against the British government and extended it to Khunti, Tamar, Sarvada, Khadagaon etc., regions of Jharkhand. Looking into the severity of his agitation, he was put in jail by British officers. In 1900, he was declared





dead in Jail, but the reasons behind the death of Bhagavan Birsa Munda are still unknown. The results of agitation of Bhagavan Birsa Munda include enforcement of “Chotanagpur tenancy Act (1908)”, ensuring the non-transfer of land belonging to Tribes to others. PESA (Panchyats (Extension to Scheduled Areas)) 1996 to ensure the rights of tribal communities on the natural resources. Hence, Bhagavan Birsa Munda is worshipped as “Dharati ka Aba”, meaning father of the earth.


Janjatiya Gaurav Divas is celebrated every year on 15th November to honour the birth anniversary of Sri. Bhagwan Birsa Munda was an admirable leader in the nation's freedom movement. His life stands for courage, resistance, and a strong commitment to social justice and cultural pride. Across India, these celebrations not only remember his fight against the British but also highlight the important role tribal communities play in building the nation, caring for the environment, and preserving cultural diversity.

Against this backdrop, the seminar provided a platform for meaningful dialogue by bringing together tribal representatives, nomadic community members, academicians, policymakers and civil society organisations. The deliberations focused on identifying key challenges, sharing ground-level experiences, and exploring policy-oriented solutions to holistically develop and empower tribal communities in Karnataka.

### **Recognising the Positive Steps:**

Participants noted that the government has made several positive efforts in support of tribal welfare. Ashram schools, scholarships and targeted welfare programs have helped improve access to education. Health initiatives, especially those focused on malnutrition and other diseases, are addressing the specific needs of these communities through nutrition programmes.

Efforts to support forest-based livelihoods and promote skill development have also created better opportunities. Institutional mechanisms and committees, including those examining backward communities, demonstrate the State's commitment to inclusive development.



These initiatives have laid an important foundation. However, the discussions made it clear that gaps remain between policy intent and lived realities. For instance, although ashram schools are established to improve tribal education, in several districts, students still study in buildings with inadequate classrooms and a shortage of teachers, which affects the quality of learning. Similarly, despite targeted health schemes, some remote tribal settlements lack regular visits from healthcare workers, and treatment for specific conditions such as sickle cell anaemia is not always accessible or timely. These examples illustrate the gap between well-intentioned policy frameworks and the persistent barriers faced by communities on the ground.

## Tribal Welfare Transformation





## **Understanding the Problem - Concerns of the Community:**

### **Socio-Cultural Marginalisation**

- The colonial label of “criminal tribes” continues to influence perceptions, and Adivasis are still often viewed with suspicion.
- Gradual erosion of indigenous/ Tribal languages, traditions and cultural practices
- Lack of institutional mechanisms for documentation and promotion of tribal heritage

### **Education and Skill Development**

- High dropout rates among tribal and especially nomadic and migrant children
- Limited availability of education in tribal languages/ mother tongue
- Infrastructural and administrative challenges in Ashram schools, including low remuneration for teachers
- Absence of comprehensive and sector-specific tribal skill development systems


### **Health and Nutrition**

- Declining nutritional standards due to changes in traditional food systems
- Limited accessibility to healthcare services in remote areas
- Inadequate recognition and integration of traditional medicinal knowledge (GI tags)

### **Livelihood and Economic Development**

- Lack of structured markets for forest produce
- Limited value addition and branding of tribal products
- Inadequate mechanisms to safeguard community ownership over indigenous knowledge-art

### **Governance and Implementation Gaps**

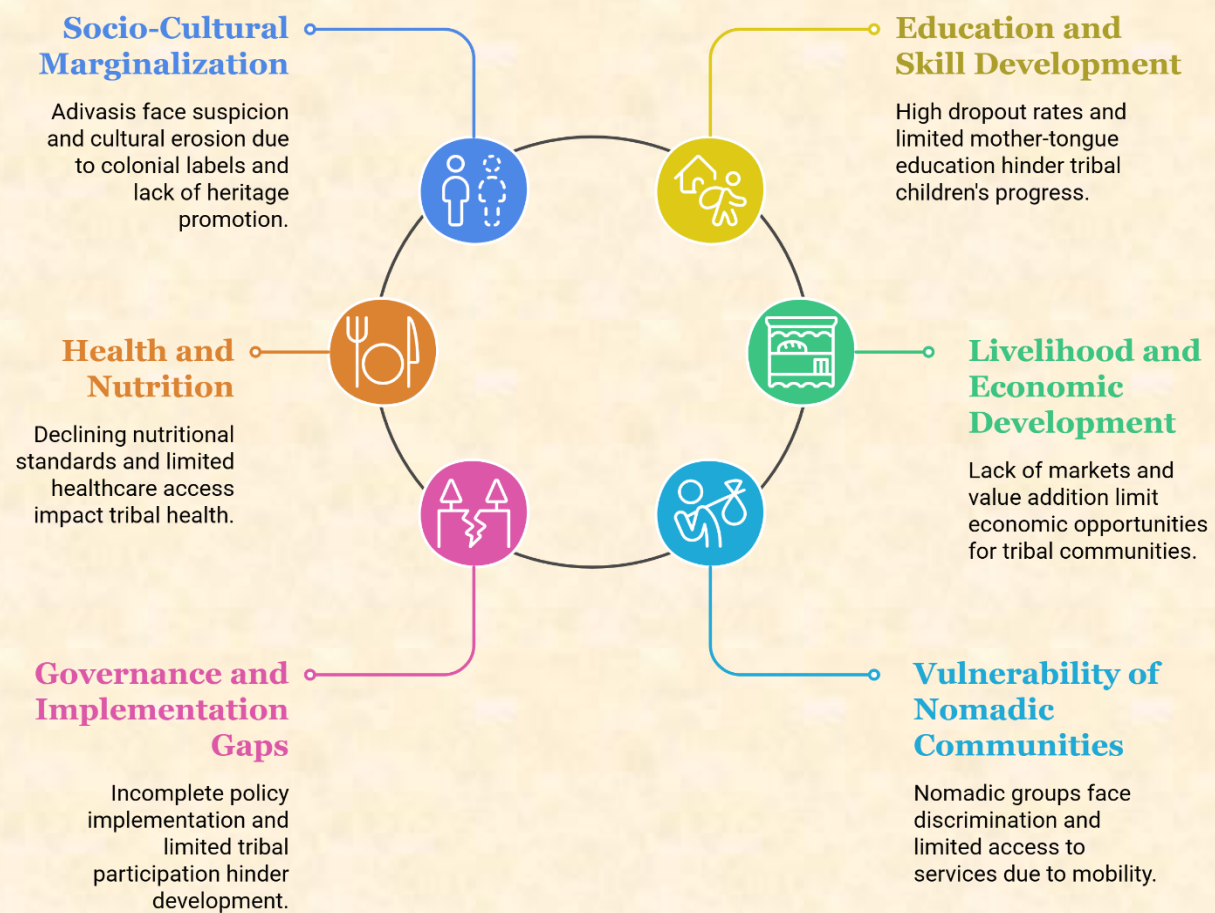
- Incomplete implementation of the policy recommendations of the various commissions
  - Limited participation of tribal communities in planning and decision-making processes
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- Need for improved inter-departmental coordination in planning, execution and evaluation of programmes, schemes

### Vulnerability of Nomadic Communities

- Increasing instances of social discrimination and atrocities
- Presence of highly marginalised micro and sub-groups
- Limited access to education, healthcare and welfare services due to mobility
- Ashram schools evolved from earlier night schools, but teachers there receive low salaries.

## Community Concerns







*Ashram schools are helpful but face challenges, including poor infrastructure and low teacher remuneration. To address these challenges, the government should recruit and train teachers fluent in tribal languages, upgrade the physical infrastructure in ashram schools, and provide additional incentives, such as difficulty-area allowances, including salary and professional development opportunities, for educators working in these settings. Flexible schooling options, such as mobile classrooms and bridge courses for migrant children, can also help to reduce dropout rates and increase continuity in learning. Providing culturally relevant curricula and learning materials that reflect tribal heritage and perspectives would further enhance both engagement and educational outcomes.*


### **Policy Suggestions:**

The Policy brief generated from seminar outputs is designed to bridge the gap between research evidence and action, particularly bureaucrats shifting towards evidence-based, participatory development in the lives of tribal and nomadic communities. These briefs translate key findings from seminars into actionable, realistic and politically feasible recommendations.

- ❖ In line with the orders of GoI No. 3/1/2017-E-II(B) dated 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the Special Compensatory (Remote locality) allowance, Tribal area allowance, Bad climate allowance, Sunderban allowance, etc., the GoK and GoI should identify/delineate the difficult areas, and/or remote areas in Karnataka. Similar allowances must be provided to motivate officers posted in such areas to stay back and work for a designated period for the welfare of the community.
  - ❖ Need for immediate attention against atrocities against nomadic communities.
  - ❖ Nomadic groups, in particular, highlighted their vulnerability, ranging from lack of access to basic services to increasing instances of discrimination
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and violence. Within these groups, some micro-communities remain extremely marginalised and invisible in policy frameworks.

- ❖ The Tribal Development Corporation need to be established to pay special attention towards
    - Tribal Literature
    - Tribal Fine Arts and Culture
    - Tribal medicines – GI Tags for Tribal Products and Services
    - Sports Training for Tribals and Nomadic Communities
  - ❖ Community knowledge should support traditional learning. Their indigenous knowledge systems and skills must be recognised and given priority.
  - ❖ Research needs to be conducted on the prevalence of Sickle Cell disease in tribal and nomadic communities
  - ❖ The lack of a comprehensive training system across 24 sectors has limited community development to the present level.
  - ❖ After independence, due to forest conservation laws, the traditional food practices of tribal communities have been changed, leading to declining health and increased vulnerability to diseases, including non-communicable diseases
  - ❖ Community participation is essential for development. Tribal medicinal knowledge should contribute to their own economic growth, rather than benefiting outsiders.
  - ❖ Traditional healers like Nagamma, who know 64 types of medicines, need to be validated, recognised and encouraged by the AYUSH ministry.
  - ❖ An exclusive structured market system involving Tribals should be created for forest produce to improve the economic condition of tribal communities.
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# Marginalisation of Nomadic and Tribal Communities in Karnataka




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- ❖ Providing quality education in their mother tongue (Tribal language) – along with regional and national languages is the most powerful tool for their empowerment.
  - ❖ The delegates of the seminar expressed that changes in traditional food systems (Partly due to forest regulations and introduction of Public Distribution System) have affected their nutrition and overall well-being. At the same time, their rich knowledge of traditional medicine remains under-recognised and underutilised.
  - ❖ There is a growing concern that indigenous knowledge is being exploited by individuals and institutions with vested interests without transferring the due intellectual property benefits to the native communities.
  - ❖ Limited or no participation of communities (many times, the communities are not taken into account) in decision-making processes, which affects the relevance and effectiveness of policies intended for them.
  - ❖ Efforts should be initiated to educate students in all types of schools, either government or private schools (State board, CBSE, ICSE, NIOS, etc.), on tribal culture by celebrating tribal festivals like National/State festivals.
  - ❖ Appropriate directions must be issued to District Social Welfare Officers to identify the local Tribal leaders and encourage discussions in academic institutions.
  - ❖ Launch a mass awareness programme to promote the recognition of tribal communities as an integral part of society, ensuring they are treated on par with urban and metropolitan populations
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*Prior to the establishment of the Backwards Class Commission under L.G. Havanur (1972–1975), which aimed to classify communities into distinct groups based on social, economic, and educational status, tribal and nomadic communities were categorised broadly under a single designation. Following the Commission's recommendations, distinguishing between various tribal communities, nomadic tribes, denotified tribes, semi-nomadic tribes and Vimuktha Jati nomadic tribes, were placed into sub-categorisation lists. However, the claim that this has led to division and a need for renewed unity as these groups are recognised individually and marked by cultural distinctions.*

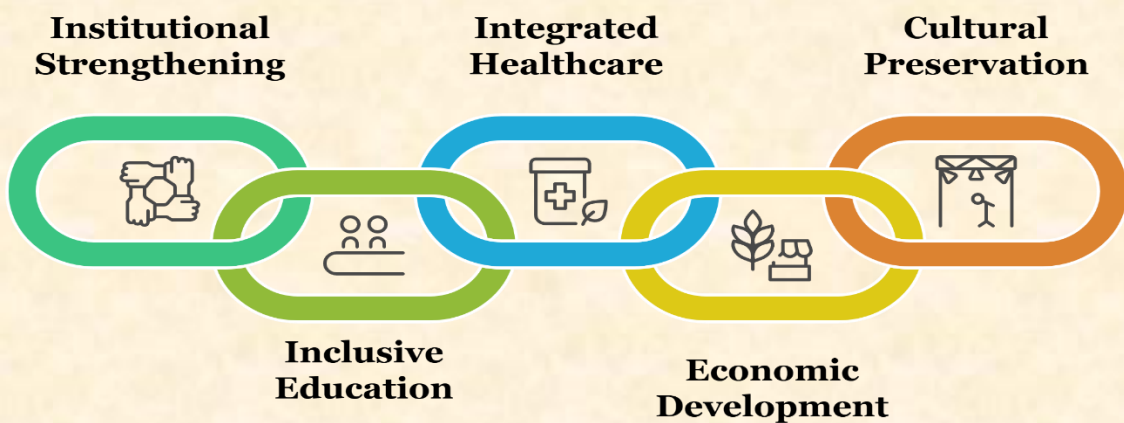
### **Way Forward: Policy Directions:**

Based on input from the tribal, nomadic community and academicians, the following policy suggestions have been outlined for action:

- Policy formulation for tribals must move beyond welfare schemes to empowering the communities to ensure dignity, participation and cultural respect.
  - Participation of representatives of Tribal and nomadic communities must be made compulsory while framing any programmes or policies for these communities.
  - Strengthen institutions dedicated to tribal development by appointing people belonging to these communities to key positions, including the creation of bodies that can focus on culture, arts and economic advancement.
  - Education systems must become more inclusive by incorporating tribal culture and languages, ensuring continuity for migrant children and improving the quality of residential schooling.
  - Healthcare approaches should recognise and integrate traditional medicinal knowledge while addressing modern health challenges.
  - Support local healers by promoting tribal medicine as a viable economic product that can serve the purpose of health and livelihood goals.
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- Economic development requires better market linkages for forest produce, support for skill development and mechanisms that ensure communities retain ownership over their knowledge (IPR) and community property resources (CPR).
- Preservation of cultural identity by publicising tribal literature, music, and art forms with systematic documentation and institutional support.
- Education should be imparted in tribal languages, as successfully implemented in Jharkhand state.

### **Empowering Tribal Communities**



- Celebrating the birth anniversaries of tribal leaders like Bhagwan Birsa Munda, along with other contributors to tribal identity and welfare, across all educational institutions may further strengthen community pride and visibility. Participation of tribal and nomadic communities will make them proud and create a sense of togetherness.
- The Government should adopt a differentiated approach towards tribal communities by recognising their distinct identity and ensuring due respect for their culture, belief systems, values, traditions, practices, languages, and geographical context.
- Targeted efforts should be undertaken to provide urban-level basic amenities and infrastructure within tribal habitations, rather than relocating communities from their natural environment.

- To promote indigenous healthcare systems, AYUSH-validated tribal and alternative healing practices may be integrated into Primary Health Centres (PHCs), Government hospitals and, where feasible, private healthcare institutions.
- Research institutions and universities should undertake appropriate measures to facilitate the protection of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) pertaining to Tribal (Indian) Knowledge Systems, with due recognition to the collective community ownership, and ensure that the resulting economic benefits are equitably shared with the concerned tribal communities.

## **Strengthening Tribal Identity and Welfare**

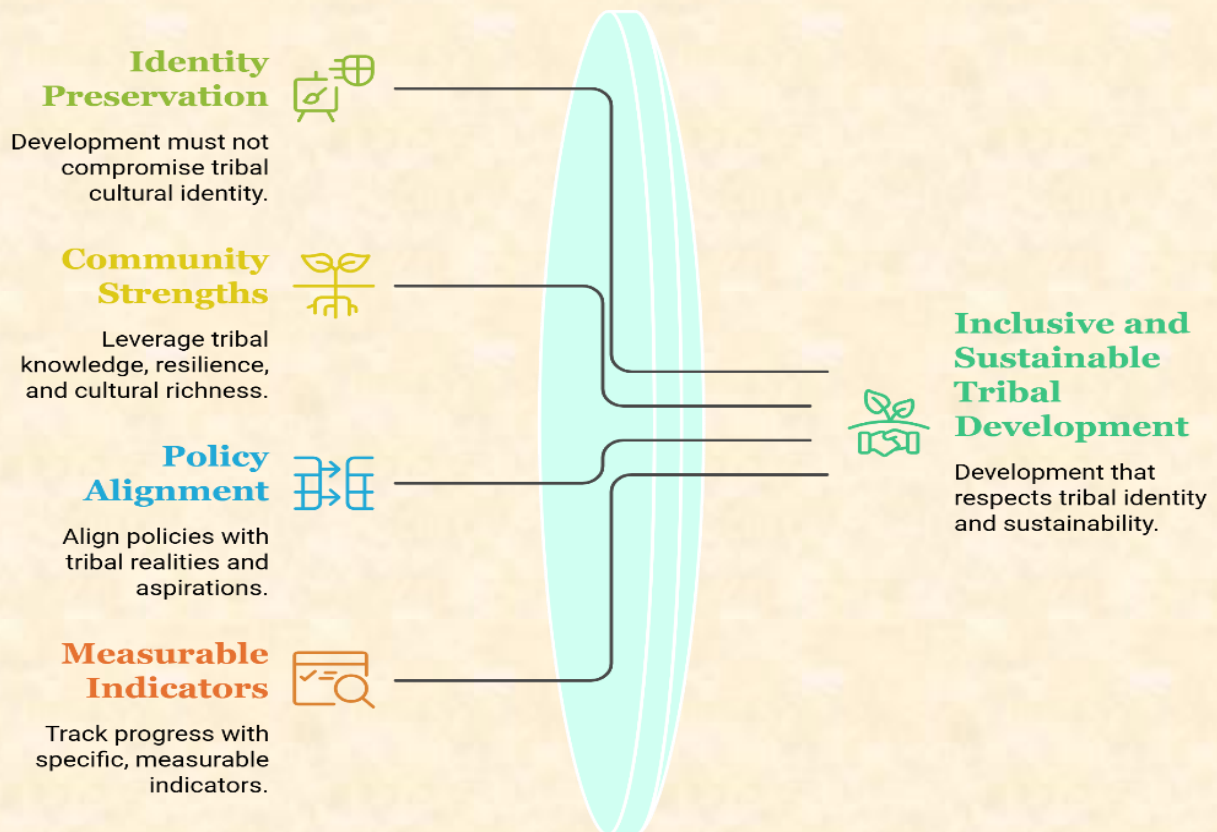


### **Conclusion:**

The deliberations in the seminar made it clear that tribal and nomadic communities do not seek mere inclusion; they respectfully seek to integrate on their own terms. Therefore, tribal development must not come at the cost of identity. Instead, it should build upon the strengths of these communities, their knowledge, resilience, and cultural richness. By aligning policy with these realities, Karnataka has the opportunity to create a model of development that is not only inclusive but also sustainable.

To ensure tangible, trackable progress in these areas, it is recommended that specific, measurable indicators be adopted. These may include school retention and transition rates among tribal students, percentage of tribal children accessing mother-tongue education, regularity of healthcare worker visits in remote settlements, coverage of preventive health screenings for diseases, enrollment in government livelihood schemes, the extent of community participation in local governance forums and documentation of cultural heritage activities. Establishing and regularly monitoring such indicators can help policymakers and stakeholders assess the impact of interventions and ensure that policies truly address the needs and aspirations of tribal and nomadic communities.

## Pathways to Tribal Development



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