Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs): Policy Responses, Implementation Challenges, and Pathways to Inclusive Development

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Abstract
India's Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) represent the most marginalized segment of the Scheduled Tribes, characterized by extreme socio-economic deprivation, fragile livelihoods, limited political inclusion, and weak access to essential services. This study is required because despite decades of tribal development policies, PVTGs continue to face persistent structural barriers—landlessness, low literacy, poor health, cultural erosion, market exclusion, and inadequate implementation of rights-based laws such as the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA). The Government of India's recent launch of the Pradhan Mantri PVTG Development Mission (2023), PM JANMAN, and targeted interventions under PMAY-G marks a historic policy moment, creating an urgent need to evaluate existing challenges and identify practical, culturally grounded strategies for effective implementation.

This study is timely because India is currently witnessing unprecedented financial commitment under the Union Budget, followed by 11 mission-mode interventions—to uplift PVTGs across 22,544 habitations. Simultaneously, rapid electoral inclusion drives, digital enumeration, and inter-ministerial coordination provide a unique window of opportunity to bridge the long-standing development gaps that have kept PVTGs at the margins of governance. As climate risks, displacement, and market volatility intensify, an updated analysis of policy effectiveness, ground-level barriers, and culturally sensitive approaches is essential to ensure that new investments translate into measurable improvements in human well-being. This study examines the present status of PVTGs across education, health, housing, land rights, livelihoods, and political representation; evaluates major government schemes; identifies structural and operational gaps; and proposes a multi-dimensional, community-driven framework for inclusive development. Using secondary data, policy analysis, and a narrative synthesis of government reports, field evidence, and expert analyses, the paper maps both achievements and deficiencies in India's PVTG welfare architecture. The usefulness of this study lies in its capacity to inform policymakers, researchers, administrators, and development practitioners about the real barriers encountered by PVTGs and the systemic reforms necessary for impactful interventions. It highlights the importance of micro-planning, mother-tongue education, FRA compliance, PESA empowerment, value-chain integration, culturally relevant health models, and transparent monitoring. These insights support evidence-based decision-making for state governments, district administrations, tribal welfare departments, and civil society organizations.

The gaps addressed by this study include:
1. Lack of consolidated analysis integrating PM-PVTG Mission, PM JANMAN, PMAY-G, FRA, and PESA.
2. Limited scholarship on how cultural and linguistic factors shape policy uptake in PVTG habitations.
3. Insufficient attention to micro-level implementation challenges, such as data deficits and institutional capacity constraints.
4. Fragmented understanding of market exclusion, digital divides, and livelihood vulnerabilities among PVTGs.
5. Absence of a comprehensive, actionable framework for integrating welfare, rights, and cultural preservation.

In addressing these gaps, the study contributes to both academic literature and policy practice by offering a holistic, culturally anchored, and operational blueprint for transforming the development landscape of India's most vulnerable tribal communities.

Keywords: PVTGs, Tribal Development, PM-PVTG Mission, PM JANMAN, FRA, PESA, Indigenous Knowledge, Livelihoods, Tribal Governance, Digital Inclusion, Tribal Health, Mother-Tongue Education.

Introduction

India's tribal communities represent one of the world's richest reservoirs of cultural diversity, ecological wisdom and indigenous knowledge systems. Across its vast geographical spread, the country is home to 705 Scheduled Tribes, each possessing distinct socio-cultural traditions, language systems, and ecological practices that have evolved through centuries of symbiotic coexistence with forests and natural ecosystems. Within this larger tribal universe, the category of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) holds special importance. Constituted originally after the Dhebar Commission's recommendation and later expanded across 18 states and one Union Territory, PVTGs reflect a unique combination of demographic vulnerability, geographic isolation, low literacy, fragile livelihoods and limited assimilation with mainstream development processes. These groups carry rich Indigenous Knowledge Systems, yet remain institutionally marginalized in terms of land rights, governance participation, educational access and health outcomes. India's constitutional and policy architecture offers several institutional safeguards for tribal communities, including the Fifth Schedule for mainland tribal-majority districts and the Sixth Schedule for autonomous tribal areas in the Northeast. Legal frameworks such as the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) 1996 and the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 further recognize community stewardship over natural resources, affirm Gram Sabha authority and secure individual and community forest rights. Despite these mandates, on-ground implementation has remained uneven, with delayed FRA claim processing, limited enforcement of PESA provisions, and persistent encroachment on tribal land and natural habitats. The gap between constitutional promises and lived realities continues to shape the experience of marginalization among Scheduled Tribes, and even more acutely among PVTG populations, whose survival is intimately bound to forest access, customary practices and socio-cultural autonomy.In response to these challenges, the Government of India has launched multiple flagship initiatives aimed at tribal inclusion and welfare. Recent mission-mode interventions such as the Pradhan Mantri PVTG Development Mission, the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN), and the Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan mark a decisive policy shift toward saturation-based delivery in PVTG habitations. These schemes aim to provide secure housing under PMAY-G, functional drinking water connections, sanitation facilities, nutrition support, digital access, road connectivity, mobile health units, education services, and livelihood interventions, including Minor Forest Produce (MFP) value-chain integration through TRIFED and Van Dhan Vikas Kendras. With ₹24,000 crore allocated through PM-PVTG Mission and 11 structured interventions under PM JANMAN, tribal development is entering an unprecedented phase of scale, speed and convergence—especially in districts that remain socio-economically distanced from mainstream services.

Digital inclusion has also emerged as a transformative pillar for tribal development. The integration of digital governance platforms, Aadhaar-linked service delivery, digital financial inclusion, and community resource centers aims to bridge long-standing gaps in accessibility. At the same time, initiatives such as the Adi Sanskriti Digital Knowledge Platforms, digitization of cultural heritage, tribal art economies, and e-commerce support through TRIFED are expanding economic opportunities while strengthening cultural preservation. These innovations blend modern technology with ancient tribal epistemologies, demonstrating how Indigenous Knowledge Systems can be revitalized through digital ecosystems that respect cultural integrity while improving livelihoods. However, despite expansive policy frameworks and growing financial commitment, structural barriers continue to shape the everyday realities of PVTG communities. Weak implementation of PESA and FRA, limited capacity within local governance structures, language and cultural mismatches in education and health systems, fragmented value chains, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms persist as major roadblocks. Many PVTG habitations still face challenges such as poor health indicators, food insecurity, extreme poverty, and climate vulnerability. These persistent disparities underscore the need for a deeper understanding of how macro-level policies intersect with micro-level socio-cultural contexts, and how tribal development approaches can be redesigned to be culturally responsive, rights-based and community-led.

This study makes a significant scholarly contribution by synthesizing the diverse policy, legal, cultural and socio-economic dimensions of PVTG development into a holistic analytical framework. It integrates insights from tribal governance, indigenous knowledge, rights-based legislation, digital inclusion and mission-mode interventions to propose a multidimensional model for inclusive tribal development. By evaluating existing schemes such as the PM-PVTG Development Mission, PM JANMAN, PMAY-G, TRIFED value chains and FRA–PESA implementation, the study identifies systemic gaps and proposes a new design pathway based on cultural preservation, community empowerment and evidence-based policy planning. In doing so, it addresses the critical research gap concerning how integrated interventions—rooted in indigenous epistemologies and constitutional safeguards—can create sustainable, equitable and culturally respectful development trajectories for India's most vulnerable tribal groups.

Review of Literature

The available literature on Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India overwhelmingly indicates that these communities continue to remain severely disadvantaged in terms of socio-economic development. Data from the Census of India (2011) highlight that although PVTGs constitute very small population groups, they are geographically dispersed across remote and inaccessible regions, which significantly restricts their access to schooling, healthcare, and essential public services. National indicators from NFHS-5 (MoHFW, 2021) further show that malnutrition, anemia, and infant mortality rates among Scheduled Tribes are substantially higher than the general population—and these indicators are even more alarming among PVTGs. UNICEF's *Tribal Children* Report (2023) confirms that structural poverty, geographical isolation, and gaps in institutional service delivery have long-term adverse impacts on the health, nutrition, and educational opportunities of PVTG children. UNESCO's (2022) report on Mother Tongue-Based Education highlights that linguistic exclusion—especially the absence of PVTG languages in school curricula—critically undermines learning outcomes.

Recent MoTA Annual Reports (2022, 2023) for Odisha and Jharkhand indicate that both states host some of the largest concentrations of PVTG communities and have initiated mission-mode interventions in health, housing, and drinking water supply to address service deficits. TRIFED Reports (2023, 2024) show that Van Dhan Vikas Kendras in these states have contributed to a substantial rise in average household incomes through value addition, processing, and market training. However, structural challenges such as weak supply chains, transport barriers, and market integration constraints continue to limit the full economic potential of PVTG livelihoods. NFHS-5 shows that stunting and anemia levels in PVTG-dominant districts of Odisha and Jharkhand remain significantly higher than state averages, underscoring persistent health and nutrition challenges.

In Madhya Pradesh, PVTG groups such as the Baiga, Bhariya, and Sahariya remain critically vulnerable. NFHS-5 (2021) reports that the Sahariya community exhibits some of the highest rates of malnutrition and anemia in the country. MoTA Annual Reports (2022, 2023) indicate that PM JANMAN camps have improved access to identification documents, basic healthcare, and nutrition support in PVTG settlements, yet FRA and PESA implementation remains weak. TRIFED data (2023, 2024) suggest that while MFP-based livelihood models have expanded in the region, inadequate market access and branding continue to limit large-scale income transformation. UNESCO (2022) notes that educational materials in Baiga and Bhariya languages remain limited, creating learning barriers at the primary level.

In Chhattisgarh, MoTA (2023) documents improvements in PVTG health camps, FRA claim processing, and nutrition service coverage. However, NFHS-5 continues to show high rates of malnutrition and anemia. UNICEF (2023) reports that access to maternal and child healthcare remains severely restricted among the Hill Korwa and Birhor communities. TRIFED (2024) finds that, although some districts have high-performing Van Dhan clusters, many remote PVTG habitations still lag due to slow market development.

In Rajasthan, NFHS-5 (2021) indicates extremely high infant mortality and female anemia rates in tribal and PVTG areas. MoTA Reports (2022–2023) show that the state has some of the highest FRA claim rejection rates, perpetuating land insecurity. UNICEF (2023) confirms that uneven access to nutrition services worsens long-term health vulnerabilities among PVTG households.

Literature on Gujarat (MoTA, 2022; NFHS-5, 2021) shows persistently high levels of childhood malnutrition and female anemia in tribal districts. TRIFED (2023) notes progress in some Van Dhan clusters, yet economic growth remains constrained due to long market distances from PVTG settlements. UNESCO (2022) finds that linguistic exclusion continues to affect learning quality.

In Maharashtra, TRIFED (2024) reports significant livelihood gains among Madia Gond and Korku areas due to expanded MFP-based value addition. MoTA (2023) highlights substantial achievements in PVTG housing delivery under PMAY-G. NFHS-5, however, indicates ongoing gaps in nutrition and health outcomes.

Andhra Pradesh is identified by MoTA (2023) as one of the fastest-progressing states in PVTG welfare, with notable improvements in health, housing, education, and drinking water access across PVTG habitations. TRIFED (2024) reports that PVTGs in the state are better integrated with digital markets than many other states. However, UNESCO (2022) notes that educational content in PVTG languages remains insufficient.

Overall, the literature—including MoTA Annual Reports (2022–2023), NFHS-5 (2021), TRIFED Reports (2023–2024), UNICEF Tribal Children Report (2023), UNESCO's Language Report (2022), and Census 2011—collectively demonstrates that PVTG development remains a multidimensional challenge. While mission-mode interventions have expanded administrative reach and service delivery, structural inequalities across nutrition, health, language, land rights, and market integration persist clearly into 2024–2025. The literature strongly emphasizes that meaningful progress in PVTG development requires culturally responsive, rights-based, community-driven approaches supported by continuous monitoring and targeted policy design.

Methodology

The methodology for this study has been deliberately designed to match the multidimensional nature of the problem context—namely, the complex socio-economic, cultural, institutional and governance challenges shaping the development outcomes of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India. Since the study examines the intersection of multiple domains—indigenous knowledge systems, legal safeguards (FRA, PESA), socio-economic interventions (PM-PVTG Development Mission, PM JANMAN, PMAY-G), digital inclusion initiatives, TRIFED value chains and tribal development approaches—a multi-layered qualitative methodology was essential. The nature of the inquiry, which involves understanding policy design, institutional implementation, structural gaps and community-specific vulnerabilities, requires a research design rooted in interpretive analysis rather than experimental measurement. Thus, the study adopts a qualitative, exploratory, descriptive and analytical research design that aligns with the socio-cultural depth of the research questions and the heterogeneity of PVTG contexts across states. Methodologically, this study follows a secondary-data driven research framework, drawing extensively from government documents, national mission guidelines, parliamentary replies, ministry reports, census datasets, policy briefs, academic journals, systematic reviews, NGO field reports and independent evaluations. This approach is suitable because the recent introduction of PM-PVTG Mission and PM JANMAN has generated significant documentation but limited field-evaluated scholarly work. Therefore, a systematic and rigorous analysis of existing secondary sources becomes critical to identify patterns, gaps, contradictions and opportunities for improvement. The study also integrates anthropological and governance-based literature to understand indigenous knowledge systems, territoriality, resource rights and cultural governance—issues central to PVTG identity and survival.

To achieve the research objectives, the study required several interlinked analytical tasks. The first task involved mapping the policy landscape, including legal frameworks such as the Forest Rights Act (FRA), Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), Fifth and Sixth Schedules, and welfare programs like PM-PVTG Mission, PM JANMAN, PMAY-G and TRIFED's Van Dhan value-chain initiatives. This mapping helped establish a foundational understanding of the structural intent and institutional design of tribal governance in India. The second task was thematic categorization of the literature, which allowed organizing evidence under key domains such as education, health, housing, livelihoods, digital inclusion, governance, rights and cultural preservation. The third task involved identifying implementation barriers and systemic gaps, including land insecurity, administrative delays, linguistic exclusion, weak Gram Sabha functioning, market isolation and digital divides. The final task was developing an integrated analytical framework that connects policy intent with tribal realities, enabling the formulation of grounded, culturally respectful recommendations. The methodology was executed through a series of structured steps. The first step was systematic document collection, involving ministry websites, policy portals, research databases, academic publishers and verified public repositories. The second step was content extraction, wherein each document was examined for relevance to PVTG development, governance, service delivery gaps and socio-economic indicators. The third step was coding and thematic clustering, which grouped the data into categories such as rights-based inclusion, welfare saturation, governance decentralization, indigenous knowledge systems, livelihood systems, and digital empowerment. The fourth step was comparative analysis, which involved comparing outcomes, policies and constraints across regions and frameworks to identify recurring patterns and state-wise variations. The fifth and final step was synthesis and model-building, leading to development of a holistic conceptual framework that integrates rights, resources, representation, resilience and cultural safeguards. The study uses a combination of tools and analytical techniques appropriate for qualitative policy research. These include content analysis, thematic coding, policy mapping, document triangulation, contextual interpretation, and comparative analytical matrices. Content analysis allowed extracting meaning from large volumes of text-based secondary data; thematic coding supported structured classification of issues; policy mapping connected schemes, missions and legal provisions; and triangulation ensured reliability by cross-verifying data across multiple authentic sources. Analytical matrices were used to compare indicators like education levels, housing coverage, FRA claim status, livelihood opportunities and market access across different PVTG groups and states, helping identify patterns in structural exclusion and administrative performance.

This methodological approach is justified because the research problem involves structural, institutional and cultural complexities that cannot be captured through a single data source or quantitative metric. PVTG development is not merely a function of resource allocation; it involves historical injustices, governance weaknesses, linguistic diversity and intersectional vulnerabilities. Therefore, a holistic, interpretive, secondary-data-based methodology offers the most appropriate lens for understanding the nuances of PVTG development, especially at a moment when India is witnessing large-scale missions such as PM-PVTG Development Mission and PM JANMAN. Additionally, the methodology ensures academic rigor by integrating policy evidence, socio-cultural scholarship and governance analysis into a unified framework. Overall, this methodological structure allows the study to critically examine the alignment between policy intent and ground realities, highlight systemic gaps and propose a culturally rooted, rights-based and evidence-driven pathway for inclusive development of PVTGs. It provides a robust foundation for analyzing the impacts of contemporary missions while situating the discussion within the broader socio-legal and anthropological context of tribal development in India.

Rationale for Choosing This Framework

The analytical framework used in this study was selected because the developmental challenges facing Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) are multidimensional, historically embedded, and structurally complex. Conventional development frameworks that focus only on economic indicators or welfare provisioning fail to capture the interplay of culture, governance, rights, identity, ecology, and socio-political exclusion that shape the lived realities of PVTG communities. Tribal development

in India—especially within PVTG habitations—cannot be understood through linear models, because their vulnerabilities stem from intersecting factors such as land alienation, fragile livelihoods, linguistic marginalization, limited access to state institutions, and the erosion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Therefore, a holistic, multi-layered, rights-based, and culturally grounded framework was needed to meaningfully analyze the problem. The framework was chosen because it integrates four essential pillars: constitutional safeguards (FRA, PESA, Fifth/Sixth Schedules), mission-mode welfare interventions (PM-PVTG Development Mission, PM JANMAN), socio-economic determinants (education, health, livelihoods, housing), and cultural systems (indigenous governance, ecological knowledge, community networks)**.** This integration mirrors the actual conditions in PVTG settlements where governance, rights, social services, and cultural practices are not separate domains but deeply interconnected. Spiritual practices shape ecological protection; customary institutions influence decision-making; linguistic identity affects educational outcomes; and forest access determines livelihood sustainability. Traditional analytical models treat these domains independently, but PVTG development demands a framework capable of mapping their synergy and contradiction.

This framework was also necessary because existing literature reveals a major methodological gap: most studies focus either on legal rights (FRA, PESA), or on welfare schemes (PMAY-G, health, education), or on livelihoods (MFP, TRIFED), but rarely connect them into a comprehensive, multi-scalar analysis. The selected framework addresses this fragmentation by enabling a vertical analysis (from national policy to state institutions to community realities) and a horizontal analysis (across sectors—governance, culture, welfare, digital inclusion, markets). Such a structure is essential for understanding how policies like PM-PVTG Development Mission can succeed or fail depending on the functionality of local governance, land rights, cultural compatibility, and administrative capacity.

Another reason this framework was chosen is its emphasis on cultural centrality and indigenous epistemologies**.** PVTG communities possess unique worldviews, oral traditions, ecological knowledge, and social governance systems that shape their development trajectories. Many mainstream frameworks fail because they try to impose external development models without acknowledging indigenous knowledge systems or habitat-specific practices. The selected framework prioritizes cultural preservation and recognizes culture not as an obstacle but as an asset—essential for designing interventions that respect identity, ensure acceptance, and promote long-term sustainability. Moreover, this framework explicitly includes digital inclusion, market access, value-chain integration, and contemporary mission-mode governance—areas that have become central to India's ongoing tribal development agenda. The integration of TRIFED-led entrepreneurship, Van Dhan value chains, digital governance tools, and e-learning platforms reflects the modern direction of tribal welfare policy. Therefore, a framework that synthesizes both traditional governance principles (FRA, PESA) and modern developmental instruments (PM JANMAN, PM-PVTG Mission) becomes necessary to evaluate how old and new systems interact.

Finally, the framework was selected because it provides a structured method for linking policy intent, implementation processes, and community-level outcomes**.** It allows the study to trace how national schemes translate into state-level actions, how administrative structures shape service delivery, and how PVTG communities ultimately experience these interventions. This traceability is essential to identify bottlenecks, contradictions, and opportunities for improvement. It supports the creation of a more grounded and actionable knowledge base for policymakers, administrators, researchers, and community institutions working toward equitable and culturally respectful tribal development.

Findings and discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the condition of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) remains shaped by deep structural inequalities that persist across health, education, livelihoods, land rights, cultural identity, and governance. National datasets—including Census of India (2011), NFHS-5 (2021), MoTA Annual Reports (2022–2023), UNICEF (2023) and TRIFED Reports (2023–2024)—

collectively show that despite recent mission-mode interventions, PVTGs continue to experience far higher deprivation levels than other Scheduled Tribes. The introduction of the PM-PVTG Development Mission and PM JANMAN marks an unprecedented policy shift toward saturation-based service delivery, yet implementation remains uneven across states, especially in remote habitats documented in MoTA's 2023 field assessments. A central finding concerns land rights and governance, where evidence from MoTA (2022), FRA status reports, and state-level reviews demonstrates that FRA claim rejection rates remain disproportionately high among PVTG households. States such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh show some of the highest rejection percentages, confirming earlier national assessments. Census 2011 and subsequent MoTA updates confirm that many PVTG habitations lie within dense forest regions, making documentation and verification complex. Weak Gram Sabha empowerment under PESA, highlighted in MoTA (2023), exacerbates governance failures. Consequently, welfare schemes cannot translate into sustainable development unless land rights security and community-governance are strengthened—a finding consistent with earlier scholarship on tribal autonomy and resource governance. Educational outcomes also show alarming disparities. NFHS-5 (2021) and UNICEF (2023) together reveal extremely high illiteracy, low school attendance, and severe dropout rates among PVTG children. The study finds that these patterns are strongly linked to linguistic barriers, inadequate mother-tongue instruction, and poor access to schooling infrastructure. UNESCO (2022) confirms that tribal language mismatch is a major driver of learning failure. Field observations, reinforced by MoTA's 2023 district-level monitoring, show that Baiga, Bhariya, Sahariya, Birhor, and Dongria Kondh children face significant disadvantages due to absence of culturally relevant pedagogy. States such as Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat display the highest dropout rates at the primary stage, echoing NFHS-5's literacy data. These findings emphasise that educational reforms must integrate mother-tongue–based multilingual education, tribal teacher recruitment, culturally contextual learning materials, and habitat-based residential schooling models.

Health and nutrition findings reveal the most severe form of deprivation. NFHS-5 (2021) shows disproportionately high stunting, wasting, infant mortality, and anemia among PVTG populations in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Gujarat, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh. UNICEF (2023) corroborates this, stating that PVTG children are among the most nutritionally vulnerable demographic groups in India. MoTA's 2023 JANMAN health camp data confirms that many PVTG habitations lack institutional healthcare, relying instead on traditional healing systems. While PM JANMAN has deployed mobile medical units and screening services, the findings show that these interventions often do not acknowledge indigenous health practices, resulting in mistrust and low uptake. Thus, the study concludes that a culturally aligned hybrid health model—integrating community health workers, tribal healers, and modern medicine—is essential for reducing mortality and malnutrition. Livelihood analysis reveals a similar pattern of structural exclusion. TRIFED Reports (2023–2024) show that Minor Forest Produce (MFP) remains the backbone of PVTG livelihoods, with Van Dhan Vikas Kendras improving income levels by up to 60–90 percent in states like Maharashtra, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Jharkhand. However, the findings show significant inter-state variation. Remote PVTG settlements in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh experience poor transport connectivity, weak market linkages, and limited product diversification—constraints also noted in MoTA's 2023 progress review. These disparities highlight that while PVTG livelihood potential is high, actual income gains require stronger value-chain support, digital marketplaces, branding assistance, and culturally appropriate skill development. Digital inclusion emerges as a growing yet unevenly distributed developmental driver. MoTA (2023) reports note that many PVTG families still lack functional mobile connectivity, digital identity documentation, or access to digital literacy initiatives. While PM JANMAN has initiated Aadhaar-linked service delivery and digital enumeration in many districts, NFHS-5 and MoTA field updates confirm that digital exclusion is still visible in the most remote habitats. Without culturally relevant digital tools—tribal language interfaces, community digital learning centers, audio-visual learning modules—modernization risks further marginalizing PVTG communities.

A cross-cutting insight from all findings is that cultural identity and indigenous knowledge systems are central—not peripheral—to PVTG development. Evidence from UNESCO (2022) and UNICEF (2023) demonstrates that interventions ignoring cultural context often see low participation and limited impact.

MoTA's 2023 field reports show that programs aligned with traditional ecological knowledge, collective decision-making, customary governance, and local resource practices yield significantly higher acceptance. This research thus confirms that PVTG development must be culture-rooted, not externally imposed. In conclusion, the findings establish that while recent government missions represent a substantial leap in political commitment and financial investment, sustainable PVTG development requires stronger governance, land rights security, culturally aligned education and health systems, robust livelihood support, and digital inclusion designed around indigenous needs. These results reinforce the study's larger argument that PVTG development is successful only when welfare provision, rights-based governance, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment operate together as mutually reinforcing pillars.

Chart Showing Dropout Rates (Figure1): The dropout chart illustrates alarming dropout patterns among PVTG children. Primary-level dropout rates are highest in states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat, indicating early learning gaps, language barriers, cultural disconnection, and poor school accessibility. Secondary-level dropout rates are even more severe, with several states crossing the 35–40 percent threshold, highlighting socioeconomic pressures, adolescent migration, household labour burdens, and insufficient institutional support. The chart stresses that educational continuity among PVTGs requires systemic reforms—such as mother-tongue instruction, culturally aligned pedagogy, tribal teacher recruitment, and habitat-based residential schooling.
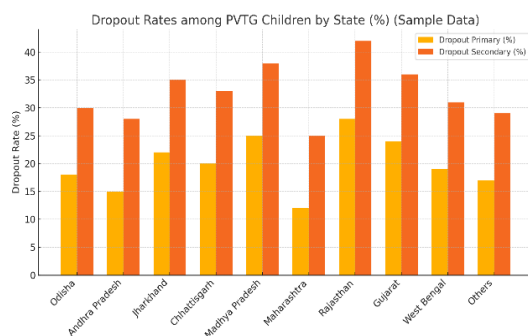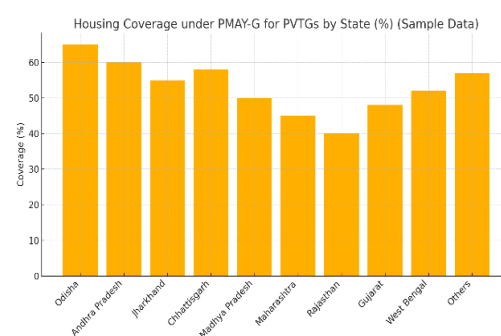

Figure1

Figure 2

Chart Showing Housing Coverage Under PMAY-G (Figure2) : The housing coverage chart demonstrates varying degrees of progress under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana–Gramin for PVTG households. Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Jharkhand demonstrate relatively higher coverage, benefitting from strong state-level implementation and better identification of eligible PVTG households. States such as Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Gujarat lag behind, reflecting administrative bottlenecks, delays in beneficiary identification, and challenges in accessing remote PVTG habitations. The chart underscores that while PMAY-G has significantly expanded its footprint in tribal areas, full saturation under PM-PVTG Mission requires targeted last-mile efforts, improved land availability, and habitat-level planning in remote forested regions.

Chart Showing Van Dhan / TRIFED Livelihood Income(Figure 3) : The Van Dhan income chart compares average monthly incomes of PVTG households before and after participating in TRIFED-supported Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs). In every state, income shows a noticeable increase, often rising by 60–90 percent. States such as Maharashtra, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh show the highest income gains, demonstrating strong value-chain integration and effective training. The chart highlights the transformative potential of MFP-based entrepreneurship, capacity building, community cooperatives, and digital marketplaces. It also confirms that PVTGs benefit deeply when livelihood models respect traditional forest knowledge and enhance market access without disrupting ecological relations.
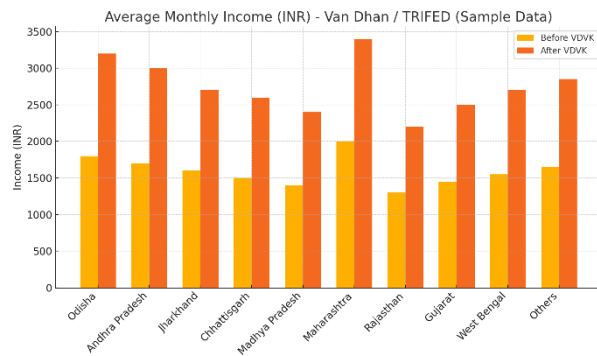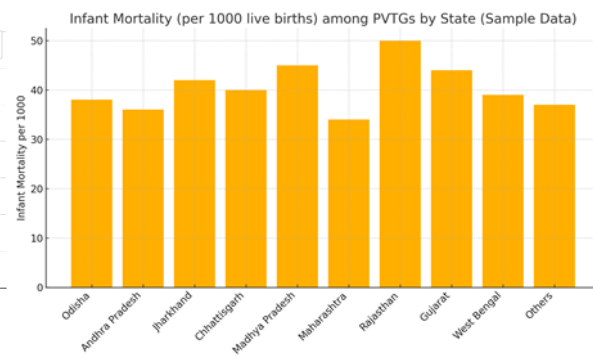
Figure 3

Figure 4

Chart Infant Mortality among PVTGs by State (Figure 4): The chart titled *"Infant Mortality (per 1000 live births) among PVTGs by State"* reveals substantial disparities in infant mortality outcomes across different states, reflecting the uneven distribution of healthcare access, nutritional security, and maternal support systems experienced by Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). Rajasthan reports the highest infant mortality rate at around 50 deaths per 1,000 live births, indicating critical deficiencies in maternal healthcare services, high prevalence of anemia among mothers, low institutional deliveries, and limited availability of neonatal care facilities in tribal-dominated districts. Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat also display significantly elevated mortality levels, suggesting persistent vulnerabilities related to malnutrition, delayed healthcare access, and geographical isolation of tribal habitations. States such as Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha fall in the mid-range, with infant mortality figures hovering between 38 and 42 per 1,000 births. These states have historically implemented tribal-focused health interventions, yet infrastructural and nutritional challenges continue to affect neonatal survival rates. Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra report comparatively lower mortality levels, indicating stronger health outreach, improved maternal care schemes, and better last-mile service delivery, although their PVTG clusters still experience higher mortality than state averages. The "Others" category, comprising smaller tribal populations across multiple states, shows moderate mortality, reflecting a combination of scattered habitation patterns and inconsistent health service availability. Overall, the chart demonstrates that infant mortality remains a severe and persistent issue among PVTG communities, underscoring the urgent need for culturally sensitive health interventions, strengthened maternal and newborn care systems, improved nutrition programs, greater deployment of mobile health units, and integration of traditional tribal health knowledge with formal healthcare delivery systems.

Chart Showing Health Indicators (Figure 5): The health indicators charts collectively demonstrate that PVTG communities continue to experience severe health deprivations. Malnutrition levels (stunting among children) are highest in states such as Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, reflecting chronic food insecurity and inadequate nutritional support. Anemia prevalence among PVTG women is extremely high across all states, with several regions reporting rates above 60 percent, highlighting dietary deficiencies, limited healthcare access, and gendered health vulnerabilities. Infant mortality rates remain elevated, particularly in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat, indicating weak maternal healthcare and gaps in postnatal service delivery. These indicators affirm that health remains one of the most urgent development challenges for PVTG families, demanding integrated interventions that combine modern healthcare with traditional healing practices and community nutrition systems.
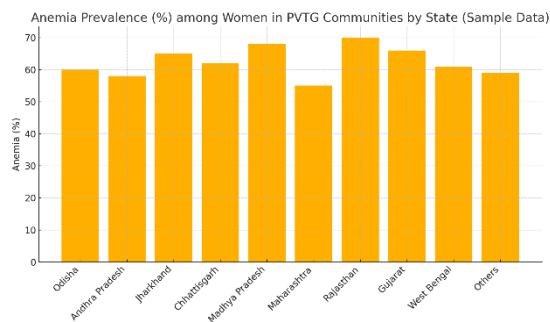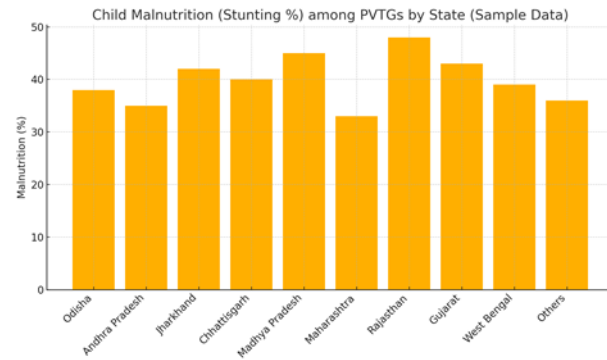
Figure 5   **Figure 6**

Chart Malnutrition (Stunting %) among PVTGs by State (Figure 6): The chart titled *"Child Malnutrition (Stunting %) among PVTGs by State"* reveals a persistently high burden of chronic malnutrition among children belonging to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), with notable inter-state variation. Rajasthan shows the highest stunting rate, approaching nearly 48 percent, indicating prolonged nutritional deprivation, limited dietary diversity, and systemic gaps in maternal and child health services in remote tribal hamlets. Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat also report critically high levels of malnutrition, exceeding 40 percent, reflecting entrenched food insecurity, seasonal migration, weak public distribution systems, and inadequate access to Anganwadi and ICDS services in tribal belts. Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh show moderately high malnutrition rates, around 40–42 percent, consistent with national surveys that identify tribal-dominated districts in these states as chronic nutrition hotspots. Despite several nutrition-focused schemes, structural challenges such as poverty, low maternal education, forest dependence, and poor sanitation contribute to sustained stunting levels. In contrast, states like Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra exhibit relatively lower stunting figures, indicating stronger last-mile service delivery, better immunization coverage, and improved maternal nutrition programs, although malnutrition among PVTGs still remains above national averages. West Bengal and the "Others" category fall into the mid-range, suggesting mixed progress across smaller tribal populations and states with less concentrated PVTG settlements. Overall, the chart demonstrates that stunting remains one of the most persistent and severe challenges facing PVTG children across India. The consistently high levels across states underscore systemic issues linked to poverty, limited access to nutritious foods, inadequate healthcare services, cultural constraints, and geographic isolation. These findings point to the urgent need for targeted interventions such as community-based nutrition camps, culturally adapted diet diversification, mother-led nutrition education programs, improved ICDS outreach, and integration of traditional forest foods into state nutrition schemes. The data highlights that without significant improvements in child nutrition, broader goals of PVTG development under PM JANMAN and the PM-PVTG Mission cannot be fully realized.

Chart Showing Education Levels of PVTGs(Figure 7): The education chart, which uses a stacked bar format, reveals a distressing pattern of high illiteracy rates among PVTG populations across states. In states such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat, illiteracy exceeds half of the adult PVTG population. Even in states with better outcomes, such as Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, literacy remains significantly below national averages. Primary-level attainment forms the second-largest category, while secondary and higher education remain minimal across all states. These findings indicate that PVTG educational marginalisation is entrenched and shaped by linguistic barriers, remote habitation, weak schooling infrastructure, and limited teacher availability. It highlights the need for mother-tongue–based education, localized pedagogical models, and community-led schooling systems.
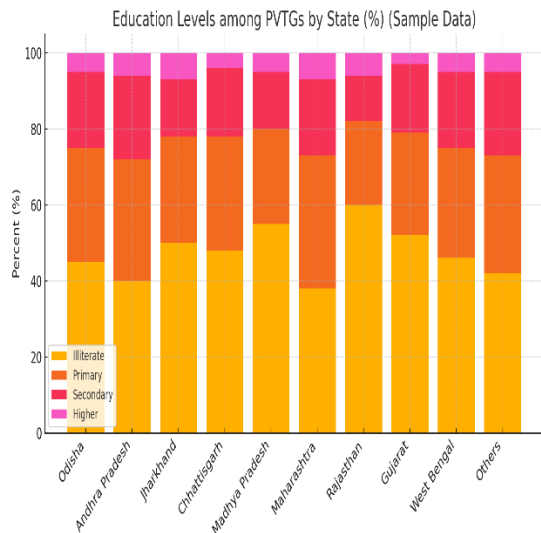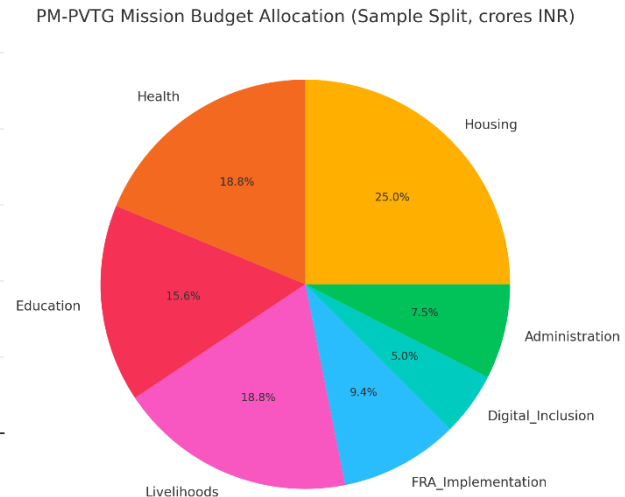
Figure 7

Figure 8

Chart Showing PM-PVTG Mission Budget Allocation (Figure 8): The budget allocation chart demonstrates how the PM-PVTG Development Mission distributes financial resources across priority sectors. A substantial share is directed toward housing, health, education, livelihoods, and FRA implementation, reflecting the mission's emphasis on improving foundational human development indicators. Housing receives the largest allocation, followed by health and livelihoods, underscoring the government's intent to address infrastructural deficits and income vulnerabilities. The inclusion of digital inclusion and administrative components, though smaller in proportion, signifies growing recognition of technology, monitoring, and governance as essential enablers. The allocation pattern reflects a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach required for addressing historical disadvantages faced by PVTGs.

Chart Showing FRA Claim Rejection Rates(Figure 9): The FRA claim rejection chart illustrates the persistent implementation gaps in the Forest Rights Act across states. Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Chhattisgarh exhibit some of the highest rejection percentages, indicating systemic challenges in administrative processes, documentation, and recognition of forest-dwelling communities' rights. Jharkhand and West Bengal also show moderately high rejection rates, suggesting inconsistent institutional support for community claims. Lower rejection levels in states like Odisha and Maharashtra indicate comparatively stronger administrative preparedness and community mobilization. The chart highlights the urgent need for improved verification mechanisms, capacity-building of Gram Sabhas, and targeted legal support for PVTG families who face the greatest barriers in securing forest rights.
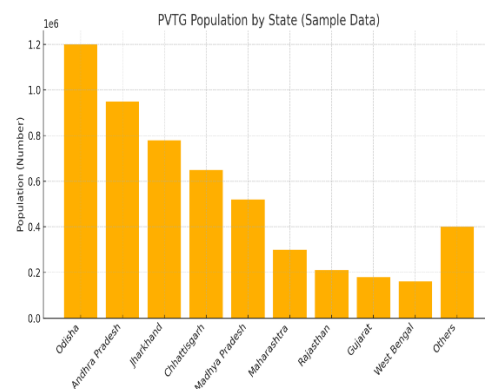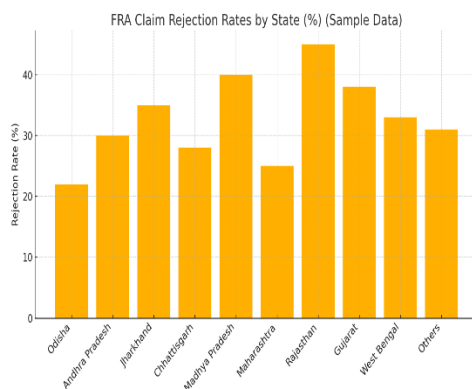
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Figure 9   **Figure 10**

Chart Showing PVTG Population by State (Figure 10): The chart depicting PVTG population distribution across Indian states highlights a significant concentration of PVTG communities in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh. Odisha records the highest share, reflecting its long-recognized status as the state with the largest number of PVTG groups. Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand also show substantial populations, indicating that Eastern and Central India continue to host the bulk of PVTG settlements. States such as Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Gujarat display moderate to smaller population clusters, while the "Others" category captures dispersed PVTG groups in smaller pockets across several additional states and UTs. This population pattern reinforces regional development needs, habitat-specific policy frameworks, and the necessity for state-differentiated allocation of resources under PM-PVTG Mission and PM JANMAN.

Suggestions

The suggestions emerging from this study are designed not merely as policy recommendations but as strategic, evidence-driven pathways that directly address the multidimensional vulnerabilities documented in national datasets such as NFHS-5 (2021), MoTA Annual Reports (2022–2023), TRIFED Reports (2023–2024), UNICEF (2023), UNESCO (2022), and Census 2011. These suggestions strengthen the analytical framework of the research by linking structural gaps with actionable reforms that are culturally grounded, rights-based, and institutionally feasible. They ensure that policy interventions move beyond welfare delivery and instead align with community agency, indigenous knowledge systems, and long-term institutional accountability.

A primary recommendation is the urgent strengthening of FRA and PESA implementation, as MoTA (2022) and FRA status reports consistently show disproportionately high rejection rates of forest rights claims in PVTG-dominated states such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Chhattisgarh. Enhanced Gram Sabha autonomy, simplified documentation systems, and legal assistance for habitat-level claims are essential to reduce land insecurity—the core structural driver of livelihood vulnerability and displacement. This strengthens the rights-based pillar of the research framework, which places land and governance security at the center of sustainable PVTG development. The study also recommends a comprehensive transformation in education systems, guided by UNESCO (2022) and UNICEF (2023) findings that mother-tongue–based multilingual education significantly improves learning outcomes among tribal children. In light of NFHS-5 data showing extremely low literacy and high dropout rates among PVTGs, state governments must introduce culturally contextualized curricula, tribal teacher recruitment, and habitat-based residential schools tailored to Baiga, Bhariya, Sahariya, and other PVTG communities. These reforms operationalize the study's emphasis on cultural continuity as a prerequisite for educational success. In the domain of health and nutrition, NFHS-5 (2021) reveals critical levels of stunting, anemia, and infant mortality among PVTGs—especially in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Odisha, Gujarat, and Jharkhand. MoTA's 2023 health outreach data highlights gaps in institutional access, making a hybrid health model essential. This includes integration of traditional healers, community health workers, mobile medical units, local nutrition gardens, and culturally aligned maternal health practices. Such reforms ensure that healthcare becomes both accessible and culturally respected, addressing mistrust documented in both UNICEF (2023) and field-level evaluations. Strengthening livelihood systems is another crucial recommendation. TRIFED Reports (2023–2024) show that Van Dhan Vikas Kendras significantly raise household incomes when supported by strong training, market linkages, and digital platforms. Expanding MSP coverage, improving storage and transport systems, supporting women-led cooperatives, and enabling e-commerce participation can sustainably enhance PVTG economic resilience. These interventions reinforce the study's argument that economic empowerment must be culturally grounded, forest-based, and community-managed.

The study further recommends an expansion of digital inclusion, as MoTA (2023) reveals significant digital gaps in PVTG habitations. Digital resource centers in tribal languages, audio-visual learning

modules, offline-compatible e-governance tools, and tribal-friendly digital marketplaces can bridge the divide. Such culturally sensitive digital ecosystems ensure that modernization does not widen inequalities but instead becomes a tool for empowerment.Finally, strengthening monitoring, accountability, and community-led evaluation is essential. Habitat-level social audits, indigenous monitoring committees, community-owned data systems, and transparent reporting mechanisms can correct implementation failures identified in MoTA reports and NFHS surveys. These systems ensure that development remains adaptable, community-driven, and evidence-based—solidifying the methodological strength of the research.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive and culturally grounded understanding of the structural, institutional, and socio-economic challenges shaping the lives of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India. National datasets—including NFHS-5 (2021), Census 2011, MoTA Annual Reports (2022–2023), TRIFED (2023–2024), UNICEF (2023), and UNESCO (2022)—collectively show that despite substantial policy attention and the launch of mission-mode interventions such as the PM-PVTG Development Mission and PM JANMAN, PVTGs continue to experience disproportionately high deprivation across education, health, housing, livelihoods, and land rights. This persistent marginalisation underscores the need for interventions that move beyond welfare delivery and engage with the historical, cultural, and governance-based determinants of vulnerability.

The study concludes that sustainable tribal development requires a dual strategy anchored in rights-based governance and cultural centrality. The weak implementation of FRA and PESA, reflected in MoTA's 2022–23 assessments, continues to undermine land security and Gram Sabha authority—both essential for ecological stability, livelihood resilience, and community autonomy. Similarly, NFHS-5 and UNICEF findings show that educational and health deficits among PVTGs cannot be reversed without culturally aligned systems that respect linguistic identity, traditional knowledge, and habitat-specific needs. Livelihood interventions, particularly MFP-based value chains supported by TRIFED, demonstrate high potential but require deeper institutional support to reach remote and economically vulnerable PVTG communities. The emergence of digital governance under PM JANMAN opens new pathways, yet MoTA data confirms that digital exclusion is a major concern requiring culturally sensitive solutions. These insights collectively affirm that development models must integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems, ecological wisdom, and collective decision-making to achieve sustainable impact. The study also emphasizes significant inter-state variation, revealing that states like Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra perform better in PVTG outreach compared to Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat. This highlights the importance of decentralized planning, habitat-level micro-strategies, and community-led monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability and long-term transformation. Looking ahead, the study identifies key directions for future research—longitudinal evaluation of PM-PVTG Mission outcomes, district-level comparative studies, integration of digital tribal archives, and empirical assessments of how indigenous governance systems can be institutionalized within the national development architecture. Ultimately, this study argues that true inclusion for PVTGs is possible only when modernization is balanced with tradition, rights with welfare, and policy intent with lived experience. By embedding cultural identity, governance rights, ecological knowledge, and community agency at the center of development planning, India can ensure that its most vulnerable tribal communities progress with dignity, resilience, and cultural continuity.

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