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Research Article

Present Scenario of the Banjara Community in India: Friction Between Survival and Assimilation

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Abstract

The Banjara community, historically celebrated as the nomadic caravan traders of India, stands at a critical socio-economic and cultural crossroads. This paper examines the modern contemporary scenario of the Banjara (Lambada/Sugali) people, capturing the intense friction between the preservation of an indigenous identity and the systemic pressures of mainstream assimilation. Historically criminalised by colonial legislation, the community faces severe developmental challenges in the post-independence era. Methodologically, utilising recent legal updates, state-wise reservation datasets, and socio-economic evaluations, this study analyses how shifts from nomadic pastoralism to sedentary labour affect community structure. The paper explores the fragmented constitutional categorisation across different states, ongoing legal disputes regarding internal reservation, and the dilution of their language (Gor Boli) and cultural landscape (Tandas). The findings indicate that while modern affirmative action has provided some avenues for mainstream mobility, it has simultaneously triggered internal sub-categorisation battles and rapid cultural erosion. Ultimately, the paper outlines strategic policy frameworks required to achieve a balanced synthesis between structural empowerment and heritage preservation.

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INTRODUCTION

The present scenario of the Banjara community in India represents a critical transition from their historical nomadic trading identity to a settled, modern lifestyle. This shift is marked by significant socio-economic struggles, intense political mobilization for reservation rights, and a complex battle to preserve their cultural heritage. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

A comprehensive breakdown of what this current scenario means across different spheres reveals distinct challenges and ongoing shifts.

The Banjara community, alternatively known as Lambada, Lambani, or Sugali, constitutes one of India's most vibrant yet historically marginalized nomadic groups. Originating from the nomadic traders who transported essential commodities across the subcontinent via vast bullock caravans, their historical mobility was severely disrupted by modern infrastructure and oppressive British policy. The introduction of the colonial Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 structurally outlawed their way of life, casting a long shadow of social stigmatization that persists today. [1, 2, 3]

In modern India, the Banjaras are caught in an ongoing friction between survival and mainstream integration. As modern economic structures compel them to settle into sedentary agrarian or urban labor, the community faces double-edged pressures. Survival demands entering mainstream educational and economic structures, yet assimilation frequently leads to the loss of their distinctive oral histories, language, attire, and autonomous governance. [1, 2, 3]

THE LEGAL AND RESERVATION MATRIX

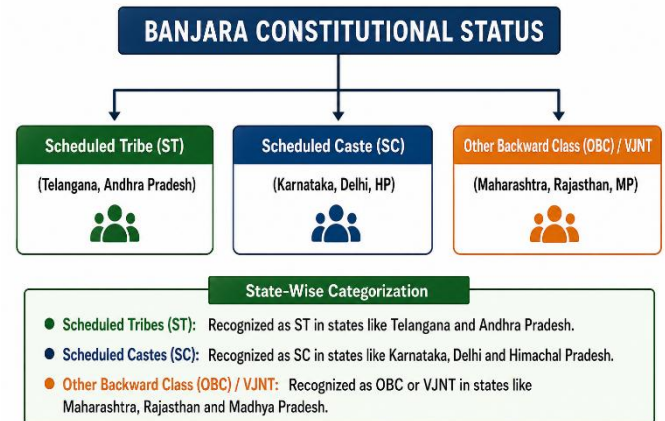
The current scenario is heavily defined by protests and legal debates regarding how the government classifies the community. The Banjara community does not have a uniform status across India, leading to deep political friction: [1, 2, 3]

The ST Status Demand in Maharashtra: Banjaras are currently listed as Vimukta Jati / Nomadic Tribes (VJNT) in Maharashtra. However, following recent state decisions granting Kunbi status to Marathas using historical Nizam-era documents, the Banjara community has launched intense statewide agitations. They demand inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category, citing the *Hyderabad Gazette*, which historically documented them as a tribe. [1, 2, 3]

Internal Reservation Disputes in Karnataka: In Karnataka (where they are classified as Scheduled Castes), the community is actively protesting recent government decisions regarding internal SC quotas. They argue that the revised sub-categorisation dilutes their percentage of reservation, leading to widespread protests. [1, 2, 3]

Southern vs. Northern Status: They are recognized as Scheduled Tribes (ST) in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, Scheduled Castes (SC) in Karnataka and Delhi, and Other Backward Classes (OBC) or Nomadic Tribes in states like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. [1, 2, 3]

A defining characteristic of the modern Banjara experience is the extreme fragmentation of their constitutional status across state borders. This regulatory discrepancy prevents uniform national development and sparks localized socio-political tensions. [1, 2, 3]



Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Scheduled Castes (SC): Categorized under SC lists in

Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh.

Other Backward Classes (OBC) / Nomadic Tribes (VJNT): Classified under OBC or Vimukta Jati and Nomadic Tribes in

Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. [1, 2]

Contemporary Judicial & Political Controversies

The Internal Reservation Quota Feud: In Karnataka, the implementation of internal reservation policies—derived from the H.N. Nagamohan Das Committee recommendations—has triggered massive Banjara protests. The state's restructuring reallocated sub-quotas within the SC category, placing Banjaras alongside other "touchable" communities into a capped 4.5% or 5% sub-pool. Banjara leadership has forcefully rejected this system as unscientific, arguing that a flat sub-allocation dilutes their share relative to their real population. [1, 2, 3, 4]

The ST Status Agitation in Maharashtra: Triggered by government resolutions that leveraged the historic 1931 *Hyderabad Gazette* to grant Kunbi (OBC) certificates to Marathas, the Banjara community has mobilized extensive protests across districts like Beed, Jalna, and Thane. Community leaders demand that since the same historical *Hyderabad Gazette* documents Banjaras as a tribal entity, they should be transitioned from the VJNT category into the Scheduled Tribes (ST) pool to secure higher quota protection. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Inter-Tribal Friction in Telangana: The inclusion of Lambadas in Telangana's ST list remains contested under a Special Leave Petition (SLP) in the Supreme Court. Indigenous, forest-dwelling tribes (like the Gonds and Koyas) contend that the relatively advanced, migratory Lambada population disproportionately claims educational and employment

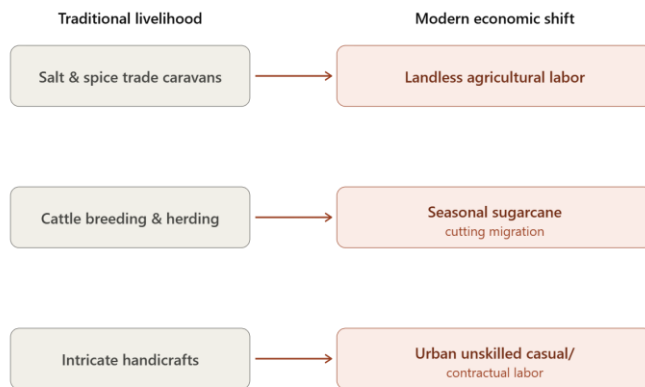
opportunities. This creates an ongoing systemic push for stricter cut-off criteria. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND LIVELIHOOD SHIFT

The structural transition from an economy rooted in long-distance logistics to one confined by fixed borders has forced a massive transformation in the Banjara livelihood matrix. [1, 2] Sedentrization of the Tandas

The traditional Banjara settlement, the Tanda, was originally a temporary, self-governing encampment designed for quick assembly and disassembly. Today, *Tandas* have transformed into static, isolated rural settlements. Due to a historical lack of formal land titles (*Patas*), many *Tandas* remain revenue-deprived outposts lacking basic state infrastructure such as paved roads, clean drinking water, and nearby secondary schools. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Livelihood Adaptation Matrix



Economic Vulnerabilities & Distress Migration

With pastoral herding shrinking due to deforestation and land privatization, the modern Banjara economy relies heavily on casual or contract manual work. Entire families undergo seasonal distress migration to work in sugarcane fields, brick kilns, and urban construction sites. This economic instability drives a high rate of school dropouts among Banjara youth, who are frequently pulled out of state schools to assist in family subsistence labor. [1, 2, 3, 4]

CULTURAL EVOLUTION AND MAINSTREAM DILUTION

The transition from nomadic isolation to sedentary mainstreaming has initiated a complex phase of cultural erosion and adaptation. [1, 2, 3]

Linguistic Vulnerability of Gor Boli: The native tongue of the community, Gor Boli (or Gor Mati Boli), is an unscripted Indo-Aryan dialect that survives entirely through oral traditions, folk songs, and community tales. As formal education and media rely on dominant regional state languages (such as Telugu, Kannada, or Marathi), the younger generation is losing fluency

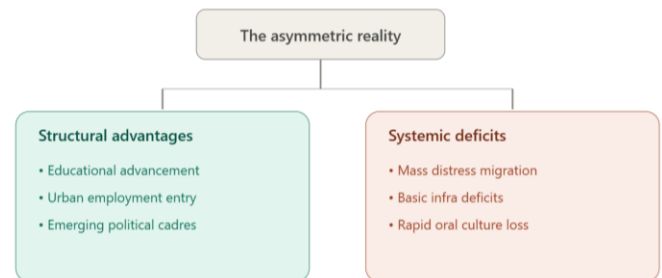
in *Gor Boli*. Intellectuals are actively campaigning to secure its recognition as an endangered language and push for its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. [1, 2, 3]

The Mainstream Religious Shift: Historically, Banjara spiritual practices revolved around nature-centric rituals, animism, and distinct community figures like Sant Sewalal Maharaj. In the contemporary socio-political environment, targeted assimilation drives by mainstream organizations have accelerated the integration of *Tandas* into conventional Hindu formats. While this fosters greater social acceptance, community elders express concern that it systematically replaces unique tribal customs with mainstream religious rituals. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Visual and Material Culture Decay: The traditional attire of Banjara women—characterized by heavy, intricate, hand-stitched mirror-work garments paired with thick ivory or silver bangles—served as a vital marker of identity and family assets. Because these five-kilogram garments are impractical for daily manual construction labor or formal school environments, they are increasingly restricted to ceremonial usage. Similarly, the ritual art of tattooing, once used to ward off misfortune, is fading among the youth. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The contemporary landscape of the Banjara community highlights a profound structural paradox. Affirmative action policies have enabled a small segment of the community to secure higher education, administrative positions, and political leadership. However, this upward mobility has exposed the community to complex external and internal challenges. [1, 2, 3, 4]



Language Attrition

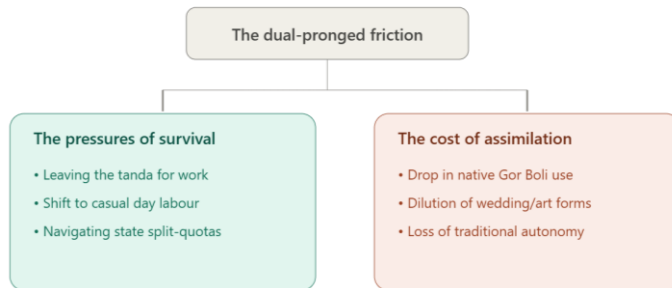
Data shows that developmental achievements are highly unequal. While urbanized Banjaras navigate the reservation framework effectively, rural *Tanda* inhabitants remain isolated and economically vulnerable. Furthermore, because their constitutional status is fragmented into different categories from state to state, the community lacks a unified voice at the national policy table. The results of this study show that assimilation is outpacing empowerment, leaving the community vulnerable to losing its distinct cultural identity before achieving full socio-economic equity. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

In his extensive academic corpus—most notably in *The Gor Banjara Secured the Constitution for India* (2026) and his sociological field studies—Dr. Lalith Kumar Dharavath maps the modern crisis of the Gor Banjara community. He diagnoses

it as a profound, structural friction between survival and assimilation. [1, 2, 3]

Dr. Dharavath argues that the globalized, modern Indian state presents a devastating paradox: to *survive* economically, the Banjara must assimilate into mainstream systems, but this very assimilation is actively stripping them of their unique civilisational identity. [1, 2]

The Anatomy of Friction: Survival vs. Assimilation Dr. Dharavath breaks down this socio-cultural tension across four primary operational areas:



1. Spatial Disruption: The Tanda vs. Urban Migration
The Survival Imperative: Forced by severe rural distress, landlessness, and the economic stagnation of isolated *Tandas* (hamlets), younger Banjaras migrate to megacities or sugar-cutting corridors for seasonal survival. [1, 2]

The Assimilation Cost: Leaving the *Tanda* disrupts their traditional communal living framework. The authority of the Nayak (traditional community head) and the spatial protection of the community are lost as families disperse into undifferentiated urban slums or labor camps. [1, 2, 3]

2. Linguistic Decay: Gor Boli vs. Dominant Scripts
The Survival Imperative: To secure entry-level formal jobs, access public education, and navigate state bureaucracy, youth must prioritize regional state languages (like Marathi, Telugu, or Hindi) over their mother tongue. [1, 2]

The Assimilation Cost: Because Gor Boli (Gormati) is entirely an oral language without its own official script, it faces severe systemic erasure. Dr. Dharavath warns that as youth assimilate to survive, the community is losing its rich store of oral histories, proverbs, and spiritual folklore. [1, 2, 3]

3. Cultural Erosion: The Commodification of Textile & Custom
The Survival Imperative: Traditional Banjara women's attire—highly intricate, heavy garments featuring mirror work and geometric quilting—is often abandoned by younger women to escape societal discrimination, ease daily manual work, and lower marriage costs in integrated societies. [1, 2, 3]

The Assimilation Cost: Dr. Dharavath's work shows that under globalization, traditional ceremonies like the *Teej* festival or ancestral marriage customs are being replaced by non-Banjara

traditions. This dilutes their indigenous identity to fit a standardized, non-tribal social template. [1, 2]

4. Legislative Fracture: The Reservation Identity Trap
The Survival Imperative: Families must rely on whatever local affirmative action category their state offers (ST in Telangana, VJNT in Maharashtra, SC/OBC elsewhere) to gain a foothold in higher education and government employment. [1, 2]

The Assimilation Cost: This fragmented classification forces the community to articulate its political identity differently depending on local state borders. It prevents a unified, pan-India socio-political consolidation and separates them from their distinct, overarching historical narrative as indigenous trade logisticians. [1, 2]

Dr. Dharavath's Strategic Resolution

To resolve this friction, Dr. Dharavath's analysis framework argues that the state must build structures that allow survival without forced erasure. Instead of forcing the community to shed its history to succeed, public policy should focus on:

Constitutional Integration: Moving toward a uniform, pan-India Scheduled Tribe (ST) categorization via the Registrar General of India (RGI) to stabilize their political legal profile across borders.

Institutional Preservation: Funding dedicated digital archiving hubs, community-run museums, and text adaptation strategies to preserve the oral history of Gor Boli.

Socio-Economic Anchoring: Legalizing *Tandas* into formal revenue villages to bring infrastructure directly to their traditional settlements, removing the desperate need to abandon their ancestral lands for survival. [1, 2]

CONCLUSION

Summary of the Present Scenario

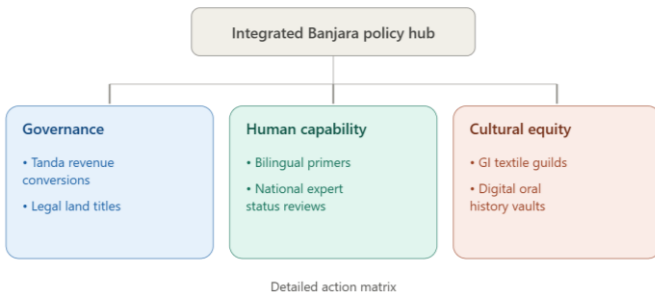
In short, the present scenario means the Banjara community is in a **state of friction between survival and assimilation**. They are aggressively fighting for equitable constitutional safeguards (reservations) to ensure a better economic future, while simultaneously struggling against the fast-paced erosion of their distinct linguistic, social, and culture.

The current situation of the Banjara community reveals that their path toward mainstream socio-economic integration has come at a high cost to their indigenous heritage. To address this friction between survival and identity loss, state policy must shift from a framework of passive assimilation to one of active, targeted preservation.

Policy Recommendations

To transform these strategic recommendations into an actionable, state-level policy roadmap, the following implementation matrix outlines the administrative mechanisms, statutory pathways, and inter-departmental collaborations required for execution.

Policy Implementation Roadmap



1. Administrative Regularisation & Land Titling

Statutory Mechanism: Invoke the provisions of the respective state's Land Revenue Code to issue an omnibus notification declaring *Tandas* (hamlets) as distinct, independent Revenue Villages.

Land Mapping: Deploy low-altitude drone-based LiDAR mapping to establish precise perimeter grids of the residential areas (*Gaothans*), bypassing traditional, slow-moving physical surveying methods.

Asset Allocation: Issue formal ownership certificates (*Gharthan Pattas*) jointly in the names of spouses, immediately unlocking access to institutional housing credit and state-backed rural development funds.

2. Linguistic Archiving & Bilingual Primary Education

Pedagogical Transition: Design a bilingual transition model under the guidelines of the National Education Policy (NEP). Children in early childhood care and education (ECCE) through Grade 3 will learn via Gor Boli oral instruction paired with the dominant regional script.

Resource Development: Mandate the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) to collaborate with Banjara community elders to translate standard text into

bilingual primers (e.g., Gor Boli phonetics side-by-side with Telugu, Marathi, or Devnagari scripts).

Localised Staffing: Prioritise the recruitment and placement of local, bilingual para-teachers (*Shiksha Mitras*) within identified Banjara clusters to eliminate the classroom language barrier.

3. Unified Categorisation Review (National Commission)

Constitutional Framework: Request the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to establish a national-level expert committee under Article 340 (or via a Presidential Commission under Article 338A) to study the community's legislative fragmentation (ST vs. VJNT vs. SC/OBC).

Empirical Data Aggregation: Conduct an expansive, pan-India socio-economic audit matching the multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI) of the Banjara community against regional benchmark groups.

Harmonisation Strategy: Present a unified report to the Registrar General of India (RGI) to evaluate structural pathways toward a more streamlined, equitable reservation framework that prevents regional disenfranchisement when families migrate across state lines.

4. Cultural Safeguards & Creative Economy

Geographical Indication (GI) & Intellectual Property: Register specific regional styles of traditional Banjara embroidery (featuring *Sandia*, *Pheti*, and mirror-and-shell patchworking) to protect local artisans from mass-produced counterfeit garments.

Artisan Cooperatives: Found village-level, women-led micro-enterprises. These hubs will connect directly to state handloom corporations and digital e-commerce channels, ensuring that at least 70% of the retail consumer price flows back to the actual craftswoman.

Digital Archives: Setup state-funded, community-curated digital oral history vaults. These vaults will actively record, transcribe, and preserve vulnerable folk songs, *Teej* festival rituals, and the historical ballads of Sant Sevalal Maharaj.

Phased Operational Timeline

Pillar	Short-Term (0–12 Months)	Medium-Term (12–36 Months)	Long-Term (36+ Months)
Governance	Drone mapping & draft revenue village notifications.	Distribution of <i>Gharthan Pattas</i> ; allocation of Gram Panchayat budgets.	Complete integration of civic services (water, electricity grids).
Education	Composition of bilingual primers by SCERT.	Pilot testing of bilingual curriculum in high-density Banjara hubs.	Full scale integration into the regional primary school board.
Categorisation	Setting up the expert committee and defining its Terms of Reference.	Multi-state field data collection and public hearings.	Submission of final harmonization framework to Parliament.
Culture	Filing for GI tags; setting up digital archiving units.	Launching artisan cooperatives and setting up direct market links.	Handing over management of regional museums to community trusts.

Summary of the Present Scenario

In short, the present scenario means the Banjara community is in a **state of friction between survival and assimilation**. They are aggressively fighting for equitable constitutional safeguards (reservations) to ensure a better economic future, while simultaneously struggling against the fast-paced erosion of their distinct linguistic, social, and culture.

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Prof. Lalith Kumar Dharavath is a Professor at Osmania University, Hyderabad, Telangana, India. He is engaged in higher education, academic development, and scholarly activities. Through his teaching and academic contributions, he supports students' intellectual growth and promotes knowledge advancement, research, and excellence in the academic community.