

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 2019
TO BE ANSWERED ON 11.12.2025

INCLUSION OF KURMI COMMUNITY IN ST LIST

2019. SHRI CHANDRA PRAKASH CHOUDHARY:

Will the Minister of TRIBAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the number of times the proposals to cover Kurmi community in the list of Scheduled Tribes (ST) has been received from the Government of Jharkhand so far;
- (b) whether Kurmi community was described as aboriginal tribes and Kurmi community of Chotanagpur region was considered different from Kurmi of Bihar as per the 1931 census report and if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether Kurmi community was excluded from the ST list when the same was being prepared in 1950 and if so, the details thereof along with the reasons therefor;
- (d) the process likely to be followed to cover Kurmi community in the ST list; and
- (e) whether the recommendation to cover several communities in the ST list from the State Government of Jharkhand is pending with the Union Government and if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRIBAL AFFAIRS
(SHRI DURGADAS UIKEY)

(a): The Government of Jharkhand had sent a proposal dated 08.12.2004 and 06.01.2005 for inclusion of Kurmi/Kudmi (Mahto) community in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Jharkhand. The proposal was not accompanied by Ethnography Report and hence the State Govt. was requested to send the proposal with Ethnography Report. Later, the Government of Jharkhand had sent ethnographic report in respect of Kurmi/Kudmi (Mahto) but the report did not recommend the inclusion of 'community in the STs list of Jharkhand.

(b) & (c): The information provided by the Office of the Registrar General of India in this regard as per **Annexure**.

(d) & (e): Government of India on 15.6.1999 (further amended on 25.6.2002 and 14.9.2022) has laid down the modalities for deciding the claims for inclusion in, exclusion from and other modifications in Orders specifying Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes lists. As per the modalities, only those proposals which have been recommended and justified by the concerned State Government / UT Administration and concurred with by Registrar General of India (RGI) and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)

are to be considered and legislation amended. All action on the proposals is taken as per these approved modalities. Examination of proposals for inclusion, exclusion and modification of a community, as per approved modalities is a continued process. Many such proposals may, therefore, remain under examination at different levels.



Census of India, 1931

VOLUME VII

BIHAR AND ORISSA

PART I.—REPORT

By W. G. LACEY, I.C.S.,

*Superintendent of Census Operations,
Bihar and Orissa.*

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APPENDIX V. The Kurmis of Chota Nagpur.

Mention has been made in Chapter XII of the claim to Kshatriya status advanced by the Kurmi caste. It was at first supposed that this claim was confined to those Kurmis who reside mainly in Bihar proper and in the United Provinces and whose traditional pursuits are cultivation and domestic service. For census purposes it has always proved impossible to distinguish this community from the *Kurmi Mahtos* of the Chota Nagpur plateau, as their habitat is not in all cases a reliable guide; in the census tables therefore they all appear together simply as "Kurmis". It has, however, generally been assumed in previous census reports that the Kurmi Mahtos are a semi-aboriginal people, whose ancestors were allied to the Santal and Bhumij tribes. Instructions were accordingly issued on the present occasion that a return of Kurmi-Kshatriya might be accepted in the case only of the Bihar community. These instructions gave rise to a flood of protest. The "All-India Kurmi-Kshatriya Association" took up the cudgels on behalf of the Kurmi Mahtos, and stoutly affirmed that "they and the Kurmi-Kshatriyas of the western provinces are the same, proofs of which, if necessary, can be produced before the Government." It must be confessed that, when invited to produce these proofs, the Association showed no great eagerness to respond and eventually took refuge in the following generalities which, besides being unsupported by evidence or illustration, would undoubtedly be contested by many persons who have considerable experience of the Kurmi Mahtos:—“(1) The sections and sub-sections are similar. (2) The occupations are the same. (3) The habits and customs are similar.” But the favourite authority of those who maintain the kinship of the two communities is Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872), in which the following passages occur:—

"In the Province of Chota Nagpur the ancestors of the people now called Kurmis appear to have obtained a footing among the aboriginal tribes at a very remote period, and in more than one part of Manbhum have supplanted them. There are traditions of struggle between them and Kolarian aborigines of these regions, and, though the latter generally managed to hold their own, we find in some places Kurmi villages established on sites which, we know from the groups of rude stone pillars or cenotaphs still conspicuous, were once occupied by Bhumij or Mannas, and in others vestiges of ruined temples appertaining to Hindu or Jaina settlements, both most likely belonging to successive generations of Kurmis, amidst villages that have for ages been occupied by Bhumij....

"Though the Kurmis include so many noble families, their social position in Bengal is not high. They are not even *jalacharaniva* or a tribe from whose hands a Hindu of the higher castes would drink water, but in Bihar this honour is accorded to them. The social customs and religious observances vary much in different districts. Where they are found in common tenancy with non-Aryan tribes, they conform to many usages which they must have acquired from the latter, and, following their examples, swerve considerably from orthodox Hindu practices. The Kurmis employ Brahmins as priests in all ceremonies except marriages."

Finally he describes them as "unquestionably Aryan in looks" and thinks it probable that they are the descendants of some of the earliest of the Aryan colonists of Bengal.

2. An entirely different view was taken twelve years later by Risley in his *Traces and Castes of Bengal*. In his opinion Dalton's remarks about their physical appearance "referred only to the Kurmis of Bihar, and the caste bearing the same name in Chota Nagpur and Orissa belonged to an entirely different type." He found them to be "short, sturdy and of very dark complexion.....closely resembling in feature the Dravidian tribes around them In Manbhum and north of Orissa it is difficult

to distinguish a Kurmi from a Bhumij or a Santhal, and the latter tribe, who are more particular about food than is commonly supposed, will eat boiled rice prepared by Kurmi; and according to one tradition they regard them as half brethren of their own sprung from the same father, who begot the Kurmis on the elder and the Santhals on the younger of two sisters. The distinct and well-preserved totemism of the caste is noticed at length below." After finding that "the sections in use among the Kurmis of Chota Nagpur are purely totemistic and that a large portion of the totems are capable of being identified", he comes to the conclusion that "the Chota Nagpur Kurmis are derived from the Dravidian stock and are perhaps a Hindooed branch of the Santhals."

3. In Volume V (ii) of his *Linguistic Survey of India* Sir George Grierson writes that the Kurmis of Chota Nagpur are an aboriginal tribe of Dravidian stock and should be distinguished from the Kurmis of Bihar who spell their name differently with a smooth instead of a hard *r*. These two quite distinct tribes have been mixed up in the census." Many of these people speak a language of their own, commonly known as *Kurmali*, although, as Sir George Grierson points out, in Manbhum this language is not confined to the Kurmis alone but is spoken by people of other tribes also. In Bamra state, where it is spoken by undoubted aborigines, it is known as *Sadri Kol*. This language is a corrupted form of *Magahi*, but, to quote again from Sir George Grierson, "in this belt Magahi is not the language of any locality. It is essentially a tribal language"—just as *Mal Paharia*, a corrupted form of Bengali, is the language of the aboriginal tribe bearing that name. With regard to the spelling of Kurmi with a hard *r*, it has been verified from the local officials that this differentiation is observed still. It may possess real significance, but the general tendency in Chota Nagpur to make the *r* hard is a circumstance that should be borne in mind.

4. In the District Gazetteer of Manbhum (1910) Mr Coupland writes that the distinction between the Kurmis of Bihar and those of Chota Nagpur, "which is now generally accepted, is exemplified in this district by the fact that marked traces of the characteristic Kolarian village system remain, the *Mahto* or village headman of the Kurmis corresponding exactly with the *Manjhi* of the Santhals, the *Sardar* of the Bhumij and the *Munda* of the Ho races." The Kurmi *Mahtos* are included among the tribes exempted from the Indian Succession-Act. By a printing error the name appeared in the original notification (issued about 20 years ago) as "Kurmi, Mahto" and in the revised notification which was issued very recently the word "Kurmi" only is retained. There is no doubt that, until quite recent years, the two communities were agreed in repudiating any connection with one another. The Bihar contingent would commonly allude to their namesakes of Chota Nagpur as the "Kol-Kurmis" and the latter were no less spirited in asserting their independent identity. Not only inter-marriage, but inter-dining was entirely out of the question. Even to-day, although it will presently be seen that these restrictions have been formally abolished by resolutions passed in solemn conclave, and although it is probably true that the Kurmis of Chota Nagpur no longer take the same pride in their ancestry that they used to do, no authentic case has come to notice of inter-marriage between the two peoples. The Superintendent of the Leper Hospital at Purulia writes that "a Kurmi constable from North Bihar at present resident in this hospital was very scornful when I suggested his eating with our local Kurmi patients." The same correspondent states that, in spite of Risley's observations about the (then) prevalent totemism of the caste, he himself had for years been unable to find a Kurmi with a totem name. "Within the last few months, however, at a village 21 miles from here I was assured by a fairly educated villager, very proud of being a Kurmi, that his name was *Bok* (paddy bird)—obviously a totem name."

5. The question at issue has in late years been agitated in courts of law. In the case of *Ganesh Mahto v. Shub Charan Mahaio*, which was taken to the High Court (A. I. R. 1931 Patna, 305), both parties were

Chota Nagpur Kurmis and they both admitted that they were aboriginal by race, the dispute being in regard to the succession law by which they were governed. It was eventually held that, where parties to a suit admitted that originally they were aborigines but their families had subsequently become Hindus and had adopted the Hindu religion, it was upon the party alleging that they were not governed by the ordinary Hindu law of inheritance and succession to prove any special custom or rule of custom prevailing among, e.g., the Kurmi Mahtos of Chota Nagpur. This ruling, while of considerable interest in itself, clearly does not help to establish the kinship between the two Kurmi castes. More pertinent to this question is the decision in *Kritibash Mahton v. Budhan Mahtani* (6 P. L. T., 604, 1925) that the term *aboriginal* in Chota Nagpur denotes race only and implies nothing as to religion; on the other hand, the term *Hindu* has in Chota Nagpur reference only to religion. There can be no question but that the Kurmi Mahtos are completely Hinduized and have been for many years. They are in general much better educated, much more prosperous and enterprising, than the other aboriginal tribes or the low-caste Hindus, and they have succeeded in retaining their self respect in a degree which is uncommon among primitive tribes converted to Hinduism. It is doubtless this circumstance which is now leading them not only to identify themselves with the Hindu caste which happens to bear the same name but also to join with that caste in affirming their Kshatriya origin.

6. Whatever the motives may be, there has certainly been a great deal of agitation in this behalf during the last decade. In the year 1923 caste *subhus* were held in more than one centre of Manbhum district and various resolutions were passed. It was decreed that Kurmis should no longer eat chickens or drink wine; Kurmi women should not work as casual labourers for persons belonging to other castes; they (the women) should wear a second garment and should not go to the *bazar* by themselves but should always be accompanied by menfolk of their own caste; when a Kurmi died, his *sradh* ceremony should take place on the twelfth day after death, as with the Kshatriyas of Bengal, instead of on the tenth day as heretofore. The 17th session of the "all India Kurmi Kshatriya conference" was held at Muzaffarpur in the year 1929, and three delegates from Manbhum were present as representatives of the Chota Nagpur Kurmis. "There it was settled that there is no difference between the Kurmis of Chota Nagpur and the Kurmis of Bihar proper. The three delegates returned home from the conference after taking the sacred thread." This was followed in the same year by another large *subha* at Ghagarjuri in Manbhum, which was attended by a representative of the Kurmis of the United Provinces, and on this occasion "it was settled that the Kurmis of Chota Nagpur and Kurmis of U. P. and Behar are akin to each other and there will be inter-dining and inter marriages among the said Kurmis"; also that "the Kurmis of Chota Nagpur would join closely with the *all-India Kurmi Kshatriya Association* and will be guided by the directions of it." At this gathering "it was explained that the Kurmis are Kshatriyas and they have right to wear sacred thread, and some fifty Kurmis wore the sacred thread in the conference with the help of genuine Brahman priests." The correspondent from whom the foregoing extracts are quoted, himself a Kurmi Mahto and a member of the legal profession, adds that "thereafter the Manbhum Kurmis began to take *jangupabit*, though less in number". His ingenuous narrative continues:—"The Kurmis' conference caused a great sensation among the Kurmis, and the caste got the courage of raising their status. And there was such wonder in the mind of the non-Kurmis of Manbhum that Panchet raja, having come up from the ancient Kshatriya royal family of the district, accepts the Kurmis as Kurmi Kshatriyas. The Panchet raja took great interest in the upliftment of the Kurmis. He advised the social leaders of this community to carry out the resolutions passed in the Ghagarjuri conference, and he gave them power in writing for the purpose, and the mass carried out the resolutions of the Ghagarjuri conference to a great extent". In 1931 the session of the all-India Kurmi Kshatriya conference was held in Manbhum, and was signalized by the

adoption of the sacred thread by more of the local Kurmis—the estimates vary from two hundred to a thousand. The same correspondent notes that “some orthodox Kurmis residing in Para and Barabhum P. S. made protest meetings against the use of sacred thread by Kurmis, but the use of sacred thread is increasing day by day in all parts of the district of Manbhum”

7. It may be questioned whether this movement is calculated to promote the best interests of the Kurmi Mahto community. As aborigines, they receive the benefit of a special measure of protection from the revenue laws of Chota Nagpur; for instance, the transfer of their holdings to non-aboriginals is not permitted. It may be that the true position in this respect is not appreciated by many of them. On the other hand, they may be prepared to forego such privileges for the greater honour and glory which they believe will accrue to them in their new status; and it is quite true that, in view of their material prosperity, they do not stand in the same need of protection as the other aboriginal tribes of the locality. As already stated, it is not possible to give accurate statistics of the Kurmi Mahto community, but something over 660,000 “Kurmis” were enumerated on the Chota-Nagpur plateau, and the overwhelming majority of these (about half of whom were found in Manbhum district) would undoubtedly be Kurmi Mahtos.