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Q1(d)

## Artisan tribes of Jharkhand

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · Anthropology GS 2 · 10 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

### Core demand of the question

- Name the artisan tribes of Jharkhand and their crafts
- Show how craft, caste-like ranking and forest or village economy fit together
- State colonial and industrial disruption
- Keep the note ethnographic, not a tourist list

### Revision summary

Artisan tribes of Jharkhand include Asur and Agaria iron-smelters, Lohra smiths, Mahali bamboo workers, Chik Baraik weavers and Birhor rope-makers.

They occupied a specialised niche in a tribe-caste village system described by Roy, Bailey and Vidyarthi.

Jajmani-like exchange tied craft to cultivators.

Colonial forest law and industrial iron collapsed furnaces and foraging.

Several groups are now PVTGs; craft revival is thin beside wage labour and mining.

### Introduction

Artisan tribes of Jharkhand are Scheduled Tribe and allied groups whose livelihood is specialised craft - iron, baskets, rope, weaving, or ritual objects - inside a multi-ethnic village system. They are not a single tribe and not simply "backward Hindus".

### Body

#### Who they are

Jharkhand's plateau is a tribe-caste continuum (F. G. Bailey, N. K. Bose, Sachchidananda). Alongside Munda, Santal, Ho and Oraon cultivators sit artisan communities: Asur and Agaria (iron smelting), Lohra/Lohar (blacksmiths), Mahali (bamboo basketry), Chik Baraik (weaving), Karmali (ironwork among some Ho-Munda belts), Birhor (rope and hunting), and Turi or similar bamboo workers in some listings. Several are on the PVTG list (Asur, Birhor) because smelting and foraging collapsed.

S. C. Roy described Munda khuntkatti villages that needed the smith and the basket-maker. L. P. Vidyarthi's sacred complex and nature-man-spirit frame placed craft next to forest and field, not outside culture.

## Economy and rank

- **Artisan tribes often held a jajmani-like relation with cultivators:** grain and liquor for ploughshares, arrows, winnowing fans and marriage baskets. Rank was ambiguous. Hindu neighbours might treat them as low occupational castes; tribal kinship still classed them as adivasi. **G. S. Ghurye** would have absorbed them into Hindu society; **Verrier Elwin** would have stressed isolation and craft skill.

Colonial forest law (1878, 1927) and cheap mill iron killed Agaria and Asur furnaces. Mines and steel plants at Jamshedpur and Bokaro pulled labour but rarely preserved craft. Today many artisan households are **wage-poor**, with GI or TRIFED marketing as a thin overlay.

## Why the category matters

Calling them artisan tribes records **occupational specialisation inside tribal society**, against the stereotype that tribes only hunt or slash-and-burn. It also explains why PVTG and OBC lists sometimes compete for the same groups.

## Flow diagram

Cultivator tribes -> Grain and forest  
Artisan tribes -> Iron bamboo cloth  
Grain and forest -> Iron bamboo cloth  
Forest Act mill iron mines -> Artisan tribes

## Conclusion

Jharkhand's artisan tribes specialised in iron, bamboo, rope and cloth within a mixed tribal village. Forest reservation, mill iron and mining broke the old exchange. Policy that treats them only as labour or only as heritage craft misses that double history.

## Facts & figures

### Asur / Agaria

Iron-smelting communities of the Chotanagpur-Surguja belt; Asur is a PVTG in Jharkhand.

### Mahali

Bamboo-working tribe closely linked to Santal and other cultivators through baskets and household ware.

### S. C. Roy

Early ethnography of Mundas and other Chotanagpur groups recorded specialist artisans inside the tribal village.