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Life Stories of Scheduled Tribes

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# Recognise Sarna Religious Code For Tribals: Soren Writes To Modi

**In Numbers**

# 49.4%

Female Literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes

**SUDHIR KUMAR MISHRA** revisits the entire issue that Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren reasoned is absolutely necessary for the protection of the Adivasi community when the demand for a Uniform Civil Code is gaining momentum

## Update

### Srinagar SSP prematurely repatriated to Manipur cadre

With violence perpetuated by militants in Manipur being one of the reasons behind normalcy not returning to Manipur, the Centre has prematurely repatriated Rakesh Balwal, the Senior Superintendent of

September 28, 2023



## Ranchi

Having taken up the matter of recognition to Sarna Religious Code for tribals with Presiden Droupadi Murmu earlier, Chief Minister Hemant Soren has now reached out to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue.

**Maintaining that the population of tribals in Jharkhand has declined by 12 percent (from 38 percent to 26 per cent) in the last eight decades, Soren said: “At present, when the demand for Uniform Civil Code is being raised by some organisations, positive initiative on this demand of Tribal/Sarna community is absolutely necessary for their protection.”**

“The concern of protecting the traditional religious existence of tribals is certainly a serious question. Today, the demand for Tribal/Sarna Religious Code is being raised so that this nature-worshipping tribal community can be confident about its identity,” Soren said in the letter to Modi.

Police of Srinagar, to Manipur cadre. Balwal, a 2012-batch IPS officer, has expertise in handling terror-related cases. Balwal, who is a resident of Udhampur in the Jammu region, has served in the Manipur Police in various capacities, with the last being Senior Superintendent of Police, Churachandpur in 2017. He also served in the Thobal and Imphal areas. He was shifted to Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram and Union Territory (AGMUT) cadre in December 2021. He will now be assigned a new posting in Manipur upon his joining.



## Odisha's Own 'Padman': Tribal Youth On Mission For Safe Periods

© September 13, 2023

Upset over the use of unhygienic clothes by



**Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren**

While the Jharkhand Assembly has unanimously passed a resolution for inclusion of 'Sarna' as a separate religion in the Census, the Jharkhand Chief Minister had on May 25 written to President Droupadi Murmu to help the State gain Central approval for its proposal to include the 'Sarna Code' as a distinct recognised religious category.

Tribal organisations in Jharkhand, Odisha, Bengal and Assam have resorted to blockades and agitation demanding a separate Sarna Religious Code for tribals.

### **What is Sarna?**

It is the religious faith of indigenous people, mainly the Scheduled Tribes. They mainly worship the Nature God such as mountains, forests, cattle, flora and fauna among others. They have their own calendar of festivals, which does not match with those of other faiths. They are also not idol worshippers like Hindus.

### **Who follows Sarna?**

The tribals, who refused to follow any other religious faith such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. They stick to their own customs and traditions, despite the insurgence of Christian

rural female folk during their menstrual cycle in his panchayat, the 26-year-old Kondh is out informing about the importance of using a sanitary pad during menstruation.

*NIRGJAN*  
*RANJAN MISRA* tells his story



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Septe 12, 20



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Septe 7, 202



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missionaries and proponents of different other faiths.

## Why the demand for a separate Sarna Religion Code?

Primarily because they say they are not Hindus. Also, several tribal outfits claim that over 49.57 lakh people based in 29 States and Union Territories across the country had said that their religious faith is Sarna through their 'special mention' in the "Others" column of 2011 census survey. This is much higher than the Jains (44.51 lakh) but who have a separate religious code, they assert. Tribals cite this as discrimination against them.

They argue that the religious and cultural values of tribals cannot be equated with the followers of any other religious faith. They demand that Census 2021, which has got delayed due to the Corona pandemic, adds a separate column for the Sarna Religion Code.

## Where do the Sarna followers reside?

They are largely concentrated in the five States of Jharkhand, Bengal, Odisha, Assam and Bihar though they are present in small numbers in several other States as well.



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**Adivasis Worshipping Sal Tree**

## **How is Sarna different from other faiths?**

It is true that nature is worshipped in almost every religion. One of the oldest Hindu spiritual texts, Rigveda, too is a compilation of hymns dedicated to Nature God – earth, moon, sun, space, rivers, mountains, oceans, rain, fire and herbs. These indigenous people always helped the seers and saints perform their spiritual exercises atop mountains, dense forests and such other secluded places, but rarely adopted their religious faiths.

The prevalent caste system may have been a major deterrent behind it. Adivasis didn't fit into Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra categories – specified by Hindu law-giver Manu.

The social rituals of Sarna during birth, marriage, festivals, death etc are also completely different. After death, several tribes bury the bodies in the courtyard or backyard of their home. They don't go to places like Gaya or any other religious place for "pind daan".

## **What is the stumbling block?**

The BJP and the right wing thought process has it that the Sarnas are 'basically' Hindus and hence, they do not fit the separate religion bill. Further, granting them a separate religious code was not in the spirit of building a Hindu Rashtra. It may

also lead to a split in the Hindu vote bank, they feel.

## **Shot in the arm**

**Jharkhand and West Bengal through a special session in their respective Vidhan Sabhas have passed resolutions that a separate Sarna Code should come into force at the earliest and have forwarded the proposal to the Centre for approval. If a few more States take similar resolutions, it will mount additional pressure on the Centre. The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes had also recommended the addition of this code in the Census 2011.**

## **What's the process of granting religious code?**

Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees Freedom of Religion to every Indian citizen and accordingly, six religious codes namely Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism are functional in the country. Granting a separate religious code is not a State subject. It can only be enacted through a legislation passed by both the Houses of Parliament. Hence, be it the existing BJP-led government or any other dispensation that may take charge in future, the ball will always be in the Centre's court.