

Sahariya Tribe: Adivasis in Transition

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Abstract

Tribals are an important part of any country, yet in most of the under developed and developing countries they are either side lined or marginalized. Their very existence, exuberant, plethoric and extensive indigenous knowledge of natural habitat is dying slowly, but surely, generally at the bottom of the social and economic ladder far from development processes.

The Sahariya tribe generally belongs to Madhya Pradesh (M.P) and Rajasthan but migrated to Bundelkhand region (Lalitpur district) of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) and other states due to displacements from their natural habitat of Kuno Palpur Wild Life Sanctuary (M.P.) and precarious employment opportunities thereafter, without any fruitful outcomes. Firstly, it was reallocation of lions from Gujarat and secondly for construction of dams. In wake, majority of them are therefore forced to leave their native place, striving hard for livelihood and sustainability, and dying due to lack of malnourishment, poverty and minimal immunity level and falling prey to diseases like pulmonary TB etc.

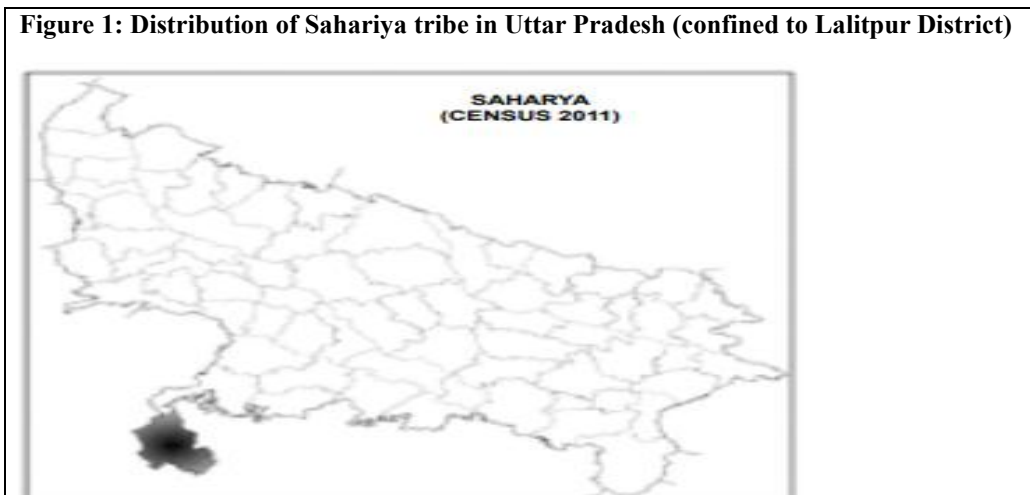
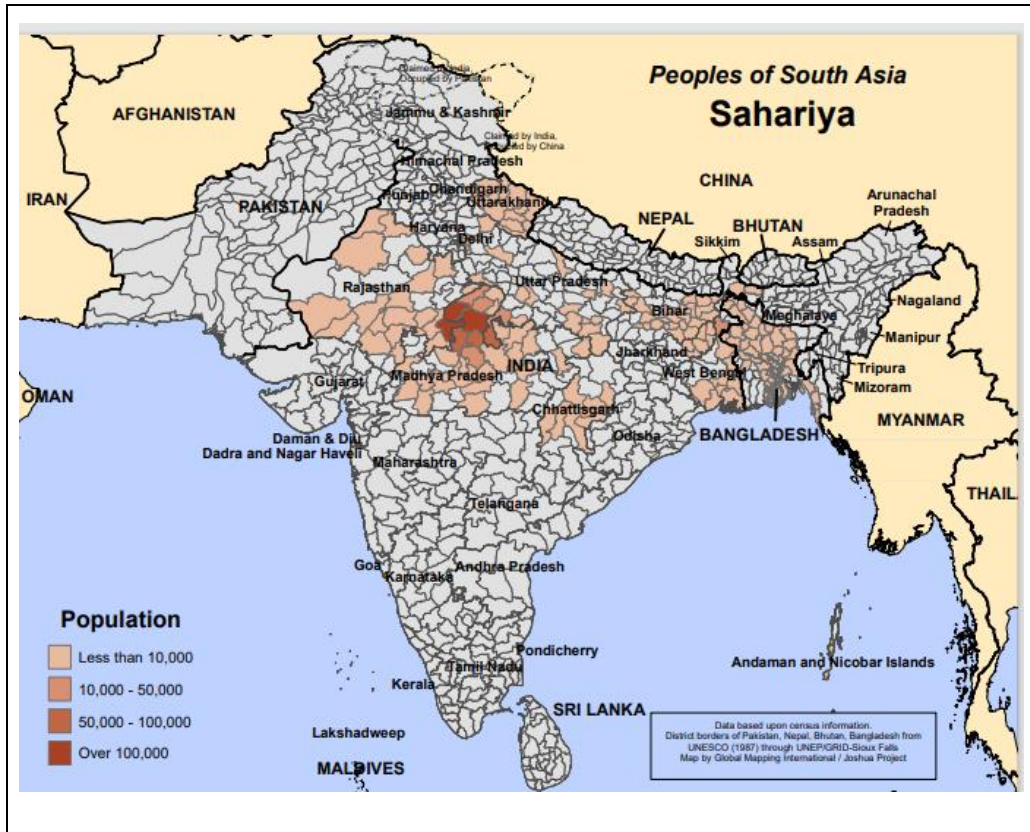
In the State of U.P where tribals account for 0.1% only of the total population, earlier Sahariyas had a schedule caste status, while in adjoining states they are schedule tribe since ages. It is very recently in 2002 that these people were allotted a schedule tribe status by U.P. State government.

The present paper thus is a sincere effort to document and review the wholesome scenario of these Adivasis in their transition form, their displacement, migration, indigenous knowledge, livelihood and sustainable development.

Keywords: - Sahariyas, Displacement, Migration, Indigenous Knowledge, Livelihood and Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Tribal groups across India are often pushed to the periphery of development processes despite their central role in maintaining ecological balance. The Sahariyas—designated as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) in Madhya Pradesh—are an example of such marginalization. Traditionally forest dwellers, they were displaced from their native habitat in Madhya Pradesh due to the creation of Kuno Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary and construction of dams. Many migrated to Bundelkhand in Uttar Pradesh, where they faced landlessness, hunger, and disease.



In Uttar Pradesh, they constitute only **0.1% of the state’s population**, with their largest concentration in Lalitpur district. Prior to 2002, they were classified as Scheduled Caste, which limited their access to tribal-specific welfare schemes. Post-2002 recognition as Scheduled Tribe opened doors to benefits under the **Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP)** and schemes tailored for STs. Since then, the Uttar Pradesh government has attempted to address their vulnerabilities through nutrition schemes, employment programs, and special tribal development projects. This paper documents these transitions, with an emphasis on both the Sahariyas’ resilience and the state government’s interventions. It is one of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) from seventy-five PVTGs in India. The tribe traditionally belongs to Madhya Pradesh (M.P), Rajasthan (Kishanganj, Shahabad, Iklera Sagar of Baran district) and Chattisgarh. This ethnic group presently resides in the North-Western regions of India, that include Gwalior, Shivpuri, Bhind Murayna, Vidisha, Raisen, and Bundelkhand regions of Madhya Pradesh & Uttar Pradesh (mainly Lalitpur). In Madhya Pradesh, Saharia primitive tribal groups are acquainted

as the very widespread “Kolarian” tribe (Thakur and Thakur, 1994). They also inhabit some regions of Rajasthan – Baran district (Kishanganj, Shahabad, Iklera Sagar) and Chattisgarh. Firstly, it was reallocation of lions from Gujarat and secondly for construction of dams. In wake, majority of them are therefore forced to leave their native place, striving hard for livelihood and sustainability, and dying due to malnourishment, poverty and minimal immunity level and falling prey to diseases like pulmonary TB etc. Apart from the above their very existence, exuberant, plethoric and extensive indigenous knowledge of natural habitat & herbs is therefore dying slowly, but surely, generally at the bottom of the social and economic ladder far from development processes.

Origin, History & Myth

Tracing their ancestry with Sabri of Ramayan, the Sahariya, also known as ‘Ban raakha’, Seher, Sair, Sawar, Sahara or ‘Soorain’, have no evident records of their primitiveness. Some claim descent from Baiju Bheel, a worshiper of the Hindu God Shiva. While others are of view that it was the Creator Brahma, who finding Sahariya as incapable, decreed them to reside in forests.

The word Sahariya is thought to be derived from two independent and contrasting words – ‘Sa’ meaning a **Companion** & ‘Haria’ meaning **Tiger**. Together meaning Sahariya are tribal people who live along with tigers. (Tiwari, 1984). Similarly, some others are of the view that this word Sahariya is derived from word **Sehara or wilderness** (National Informatics Centre 2011). In some cases they are thought to be the residents of jungle, as **Sahr** means jungle (Sharma 2005).

Ethnographic Profile & Dialect



Figure 2: Dancing during festival

Sahariya people are dark complexion and medium heighted, often shy in nature, due to their minor and vulnerable status in the society, as a result these people do not like to interact with outer world very easily. Totem & Totemism is generally followed among most of the clans and specific deities like-plant, animal, etc. are worshipped by specific clan members. Some clan members also worship common deities because they believe that these common deities have been begotten from a common origin. The members of this tribe believe in Animism & Folk Hinduism's Gods and Goddesses also, worshipping and celebrating festivals like Veer Teja, Thakkar Baba, Durga, Hanuman, Lalbai, Bejasan, Savni Amavasya, Janmashtami, Raksha Bandhan, Deepavali, Holi and Teja Dashami.

Everyone in their endogamous groups is like brother and sister, therefore marriages have to be arranged from other clans. The community considers every adult member a part of the governing council which is headed by a Patel. They usually speak Munda language, but now they also speak Bundelkhandi and other languages too. At some places their dialect is influenced by the Hindi and Brij language.

Adornments and Raiment

Mostly influenced by Rajasthani culture, the men and women of this tribe are very fond of clothes, dresses, jewelry and ornaments. Males mostly wear Dhoti, Coloured Shirt and Safa or Shafi, as raiments. The Sahariya females dress themselves in Lahanga, Ghagra, Ludga, Petya, Saluki, & Polka. They mostly wear 7 – 8 ornaments. Males usually like

to adorn themselves with Chhelkadi Murki in ears and Kanthi in neck, while women wear "Bor" on head, Fikar potta and Gutti aera in ears, a golden or silver kanta in nose and khagwari in neck.

The Saharias due to their out migration are coming in contact with other people, have resulted in acculturation, where they want to modernize themselves by adorning watches, different variety of clothes, enjoying Bollywood songs and music etc. They do not want to play their traditional music of Chakiya, Languria and Phaag etc. in festivals & celebrations. Most of the houses have mobiles, radio sets and music system, which is diverting their cultural ethos and, in some form, may adversely affect, thus bound to face cultural loss due to western influence

Housing Pattern

The residential area of the Sahariya is separated from the rest of the village and is known as Seharana. The houses are arranged in groups, suggesting an area arrangement like that of prehistoric times.

Findings shows that 53.3 percent of the house type are Kuccha and 41.7 percent are having houses made with khaprel and only 5 percent Sahariya people have pukka house. In spite of having Indira Awas Yojna and the other schemes of government, majority of Sahariya people have kaacha and khaprel type of house. This shows the big lacune in the system which needs to be consider. (Rajpoot, 2022)

Their houses are divided in two parts. One half is used for storage, while the other part is used for cooking, sleeping, grinding purposes and other household chores. The livestock for instance goat, sheep, cow, buffalo, etc. are kept at the backside of the house or in one corner of the house. In most of the house a small open space available known as courtyard. Influenced by the upper caste people, Sahariya women keeps their house decorated with various designs.



Figure 3: A Decorated Sahariya House



Figure 4: A Thatched Hut, With A Small Opening Entrance

Sahariya usually inhabit the interior hilly and plain forest regions, with a stream nearby. The highland remains green with plants and other shrubs during the rainy season, but dry during the summer. As a result, they have no direct contact with modern society people and in this context, they feel themselves as untouchable. Before selecting a site, the magician-cum-priest (**jankar**) is consulted for construction of a house.

The house (tapra) is small and rectangular in shape; the walls are raised with bamboo knitted plates between the wooden pillars and walls are plastered with black soil and cow-dung. The roofs are of two-slope types, low and covered with grass or hand-made tiles (khapra), with no windows and one door for ventilations, with absence of plinth that keeps the floor damp. Each house, has a wooden platform (dhanchi), just at the entrance to keep the pitchers and firewood. The walls of the huts often decorated with lime.

There is a common courtyard in every village. The houses are built up around the village courtyard or open ground which is used for the celebration of marriage and other ceremonies. Due to the shortage of homestead land and population growth, the new huts are constructed small in size, while the huts in remote areas are much bigger and spacious. The huts in the western part have stone walls with flat roofs made of small stone-slabs, whereas the huts in eastern part have mud walls with tiled roofs.

Similarly, the Sahariyas who live in jungle area construct their huts out of bamboo and grass-thatched roofs. The granaries are box type made up of mud with a small opening at bottom and entrance at the top. These granaries (kothi) are used to keep wheat and other grains, with a capacity of 2-3 quintals of grains. Bamboo baskets (tukri) of different shapes and sizes are found in every house for daily use, with grinding stone as an essential item, and include bolt spear, gun, axe and cutter as their weapons.

Aim & Objective

The aim of present study is to review the dynamic shifts and overall scenario of the Sahariya tribe, laying emphasis on their origin, ethnographic profile, distribution, displacement, socio – economic status, livelihood pattern and sustainability. As the paper is based on facts and is descriptive in nature therefore, secondary sources of data, of the three states- Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Lalitpur of Uttar Pradesh, have been used for qualitative purpose.

Literature Review

Study of tribal areas and people have always been the core essence of anthropology, due to which both qualitative and quantitative studies are in enormous numbers, generally based on larger tribes. But the case of Sahariya's is different as they have gained the ST status in 2002 only, Therefore, the number of studies on Sahariya of Uttar Pradesh is few in number and include Bisht et al;(1999), Nigam et al;(2013), Dash B.B., (2015), Singh (2018), Rajpoot AS (2018 &2022), Kumar Dr. S, (2020), Patel et al; (2023), Samonova (2023), to name a few.

Methodology

The present study adopts a **descriptive and exploratory research design** to document the socio-economic, cultural, and health-related conditions of the Sahariya community in Bundelkhand, with a particular focus on Lalitpur district, Uttar Pradesh. This study relies entirely on **secondary research**, utilizing **document analysis and literature review**, for which published research papers, government reports, policy documents, NGO publications, and media articles were systematically examined.

These include sources such as the **Dharti Aba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan reports, MGNREGA data, PMAY implementation documents, Tribal Sub-Plan allocations, and health/nutrition surveys** conducted by the state government. In addition, research papers, NGO reports, and news articles on the Sahariyas' socio-economic conditions, displacement history, and migration patterns were analyzed. This enabled an understanding of both the **structural context and policy framework** affecting the Sahariyas.

Data were analyzed thematically, focusing on **displacement, livelihood, health, education, government interventions, and traditional knowledge**, ensuring a comprehensive review without conducting primary fieldwork. All sources were properly cited to maintain academic integrity.

Livelihood Struggles and Survival

The Sahariyas in Uttar Pradesh face multidimensional poverty due to economic vulnerabilities that are a stark

- **Malnutrition:** A 2011 survey in Lalitpur found over 60% of Sahariya children underweight. Hunger deaths in Sahariya villages of Bundelkhand were reported in 2012–2013.
- **Health:** TB remains rampant due to poor nutrition and immunity. High tuberculosis prevalence is linked to weak immunity and poor living conditions. For instance, in Narhat village (Lalitpur), over 40 TB cases were documented in a population of just 1,200 (District TB Office, 2017).

- **Landlessness & Exploitation:** Most families in Lalitpur have no cultivable land, and thus, are caught in bonded labour at brick kilns, repaying loans for years without freedom. A 2018 NGO survey reported that over **70% of Sahariya households in Lalitpur** migrated seasonally to work at construction sites in Delhi and Kanpur, often under exploitative conditions. The displacement of Sahariyas was triggered by:

- **Relocation of Asiatic Lions:** Villages in the Kuno Palpur area were emptied to create space for the wildlife sanctuary.

- **Dam Projects:** Submersion of fertile lands deprived Sahariyas of traditional farming areas. In Lalitpur district, displaced Sahariya families were promised land and employment after leaving Madhya Pradesh. However, delays and loopholes in rehabilitation packages forced them into daily wage labour at brick kilns and farms. Seasonal migration has become a survival strategy, undermining children’s education and health.

The Sahariya Women

In Indian scenario a girl’s life is tougher than that of boys, but when it comes to a tribal girl like Saharia it is much more huge. Due to poverty and other social /cultural constraints, the men migrate to the nearby states for work and livelihood, leaving behind them their children & women. Woman occupy inferior positions in their family and are devoid of resources and have little say in important decisions that are made. (Samonova, 2023). Their girls get married at the very delicate age of 12 years, and becomes a mother by the age of 15, takes up the household chores from 8 year of age, cooks’ meals – food, looks after her brothers and sisters, fetch water etc. thus, shouldering every responsibility of a family. In Lalitpur district the mortality rate Sahariya female (MMR) is 24 per 1000 and the infant mortality rate (IMR) is 97.4 per 1000.

Women generally become widow at early age as they lose their spouse to various ailments and diseases specially tuberculosis due to occupational hazards as most of them work as labour in stone quarries.

The life of these women is such that when their husbands are working as Hali, they too are forced into it without their will. This goes lifelong, the payments are always made to their husbands and not to them. Loans are generally taken by men of family members, but it is repaid by the women and their children from generation to generation in form of bonded labours. (Samonova, 2023)

These women lag far behind any other normal woman in education, health awareness, control over resources, wages etc. In most of the cases they also face sexual harassment and although certain schemes like MNREGA is working in the area but due to lack of proper implementation of such programs the socio-economic conditions are getting worse. The literacy rate is less than 10 % yet the children have started going to Anganwadis, not regularly, but more boys than girls go to school.

They are in the transitional stage between traditionalism and modernity. The lifestyle of Sahariyas is thus, changing at a very slow pace and are highly influenced by modernization, urbanization and in the influence of modern society. A ray of hope for their betterment are women like Gyarishi Devi, an activist, a Sahariya herself and founding member of Jagruti Sangathan, working for the problem of bonded labour and the backwardness of tribes in Baran District Rajasthan. They are empowered by the Internet connectivity that connects many different women across the Rajasthan in one go. (Vishnuias.com). There are many more women like Reena Sahariya, a sarpanch who continuously works for initiatives of quality health and sanitation better road connectivity and clean drinking water setting up multiple anganwadi centres etc. Similarly Rajkumari of Khandela Village in Rajasthan is known as the Lady Wi-fi due to her knowledge of wireless engineering.

Table 1 — Sahariya tribe: TB and health evidence (tribe-specific studies)

Finding	Figure / conclusion	Source
High burden of pulmonary TB among Saharia (tribe in MP)	Several epidemiological studies document very high TB prevalence in Sahariya communities (reports from Madhya Pradesh research: e.g., IJMR 2015; BMC Infectious Diseases 2019). These studies show much higher TB prevalence in Sahariya PVTG communities than the general population.	Rao et al., IJMR (2015); Rao et al., BMC Infectious Diseases (2019); review articles. PMC+1
Genetic and multifactorial vulnerability	Recent genetic and public-health work has highlighted possible genetic susceptibility combined with malnutrition and poverty as drivers of unusually high TB rates among Sahariya populations in central India. (Emerging 2024–25 literature and press coverage.)	Recent studies/reports (BHU study coverage and related reviews). The Times of India+1

Important: Most **tribe-specific TB prevalence studies** focus on Sahariya populations in parts of **Madhya Pradesh** (their original concentration) rather than the relatively small Sahariya pockets in Lalitpur (U.P.). District-level TB

incidence for Lalitpur (disaggregated by tribe) is not published in a way that directly isolates Sahariya cases. **Tribe-specific** scientific studies from Madhya Pradesh as representative evidence that Sahariya communities have an elevated TB burden that likely affects displaced Sahariyas as well.(NITI AAYOG+1)

Key statistics (Lalitpur district and Sahariya-specific findings)

Table 1 — Core indicators (district level: Lalitpur, UP)

Indicator	Value (most recent publicly available)	Source
Literacy rate (Census 2011)	63.52% (Lalitpur district overall; male 74.98%, female 50.84%)	Census 2011 / Lalitpur district profile. Census 2011 India
Child stunting (children <5 yrs, 2020 estimate)	~ 47% (Stunted children — 85,062 of 182,497 under-5s in Lalitpur, IFPRI/NITI district nutrition profile)	Lalitpur District Nutrition Profile (IFPRI / NITI Aayog), 2022. (NITI AAYOG)
Child underweight (children <5 yrs, 2020 estimate)	~ 35% (Underweight children — 63,582 of 182,497)	Lalitpur District Nutrition Profile (IFPRI / NITI Aayog), 2022. (NITI AAYOG)
Child anemia (children <5 yrs, 2020 estimate)	~ 49% (Anaamong children — 91,821 of 182,497)	Lalitpur District Nutrition Profile (IFPRI / NITI Aayog), 2022. (NITI AAYOG)
Coverage trends for ICDS/ANC/nutrition services (2016→2020)	Several coverage indicators improved (e.g., early initiation of breastfeeding, food supplementation, ANC coverage — see district profile tables)	Lalitpur District Nutrition Profile (IFPRI / NITI Aayog), 2022. (NITI AAYOG)
MGNREGA / district employment data (availability of MIS, participation dashboards)	District-level MGNREGA statistics and performance indicators are available on the national MGNREGA portal for Lalitpur (detailed block/panchayat reports accessible). Specific Sahariya participation not disaggregated publicly.	NetNREGA (District page: Lalitpur). mnregaweb2.nic.in

Efforts of the Uttar Pradesh Government

Table 2: Since 2002, the Uttar Pradesh Government has undertaken several schemes

Initiative	Launch / Key Date(s)	Areas Covered (Districts / Villages etc.)	Key Provisions & Relevance to Sahariya / Tribal Welfare
Dharti Aba Janjati Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan & Dharti Aba Janbhagidari Abhiyan	June 24, 2025 (announced) The Statesman	26 districts in UP; 47 development blocks; specifically includes Lalitpur among the selected districts. The Statesman	Purpose: deliver 25 welfare schemes to eligible beneficiaries in 517 villages by November 15, 2025. Benefits include Aadhaar cards, Ayushman Bharat, PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, Jan Dhan, scholarships, social security etc. This campaign aims for inclusion of tribal communities, so Sahariyas in Lalitpur can avail many of these benefits. The Statesman
ZeroPoverty Campaign (Uttar Pradesh)	Launched October 2, 2024 (Gandhi Jayanti) with roadmap; intensification in early 2025 The Times of India+2sarkariyojna magazine.com+2	State-wide; target is extremely poor families in every Gram Panchayat; villages across rural UP, including tribal areas. Lalitpur not explicitly singled out but likely included given poverty levels there. The Pioneer+1	Goal is to uplift poorest families with welfare scheme benefits, ensure stable income, housing, food, health, etc. Identification of poor families via survey; extending welfare to every qualifying family. Could help Sahariya families who are among the sarkariyojnamagazine.com+1
Special Nutrition Programs/ Shabari	“Shabari Sankalp Nutrition Scheme”	39 districts in UP (including tribal and vulnerable areas) Organiser	Targets malnutrition among women and children; includes supplementary nutrition, health checkups etc.

Sankalp Nutrition Scheme	inaugurated October 23, 2017 Organiser		Sahariyas, being malnourished especially in children & pregnant women, could benefit. However direct data of coverage in Sahariya villages needs more research. Organiser
Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAAGY) / Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub-Scheme (SCA to TSS)	Implemented during 2021-22 to 2025-26 period. Scribd	ST Villages across states/UTs; in UP as well in tribal areas/villages with majority ST population. UP likely to include such villages where Sahariya live. Scribd	Objective is to transform selected villages with significant ST population into model villages: improve health, education, infrastructure etc. Could potentially include Sahariya villages (if selected) to fill infrastructure & social services gaps. Scribd

Suggested examples as to how these are applicable to Sahariyas

Many schemes are general tribal or poverty alleviation programs, which would cover Sahariyas if they are in selected districts or villages.

- Because Lalitpur is included in the **Dharti Aba Janjati Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan**, Sahariya villages in Lalitpur are likely to receive multiple essential scheme benefits under that campaign starting mid-2025.
- Under **Zero Poverty Campaign**, Sahariya families being among ultra poor are likely participants as beneficiaries of ration, healthcare, housing etc. The campaign operates in their Gram Panchayats.
- **Shabari Sankalp Nutrition Scheme** (2017 onward) might have had interventions in districts with Sahariyas, especially in Bundelkhand, but I did not find data confirming village-level coverage for Sahariya households.

Impact:

These initiatives improve **health, nutrition, education, housing, and livelihoods**, reduce migration, and empower the Sahariya community. However, challenges such as awareness gaps and partial implementation remain.

Indigenous Knowledge of the Sahariya

The Sahariyas' traditional knowledge is a **holistic system combining health, nutrition, agriculture, and ecological awareness**. It is crucial for survival, especially in remote or displaced settings. Their huts are traditionally made using mud, bamboo, and cow dung—eco-friendly and temperature resistant. The finest oral traditions of folk songs such as Bira Geet recount ancestral bravery and migrations. However, without forests, such practices are diminishing. Younger generations, engaged in wage labour, show little interest in learning about medicinal herbs, causing cultural erosion, as the **Forest Rights Act (2006)** remains largely ineffective in Bundelkhand as most Sahariyas are landless migrants without forest claims. Thus, while policy exists on paper, ground realities reflect exclusion.

Situations may change if revival of Indigenous Knowledge i.e; documentation of Sahariya herbal medicine through collaboration with AYUSH could preserve cultural identity while creating livelihood opportunities, as done in Rajasthan's Baran district, where NGOs have successfully revived Sahariya herbal healing practices by integrating them into community health programs. A similar model could be replicated in Bundelkhand.

Table 3 (A): Plants & Herbs as used by Sahariyas in various Ailments, Diseases & Illness

S.No.	Plant Name	Part of plant used	Scientific Name	Treatment of Disease / Ailment
1.	Adarak	Rhizome	Zingiber officinale	Cough
2.	Akaura	Roots	Calotropis procera	Rheumatism
3.	Akola		Alangium salvifolium (Lf) Wang	Scorpio sting bite
4.	Amaranthus	Leaves & root powder	Achyranthus aspera	Scorpio sting bite
5.	Chakheri		Sicurinea virosa Ballon	Piles
6.	Chieula	Bark gum	Butea monosperma	For easy delivery
7.	Daria	Crushed roots	Ziziphus nummularia	Cure stool
8.	Ghamra	Leaf juice	Tridax procumbens	Urinary disorders
9.	Haldi	Powder	Curcuma longa	Gastric problems

10.	Kara- bamura	Crushed bark	Acacia nilotica	Loose motion
11.	Kateli	Leaves	Barleria prionitis	To cure corn
12.	Lahsun	Seed juice	Allium sativum L	Gastric troubles
13.	Lal mirch	Dried powder	Capsicum frutescens	Dog bite
14.	Mahua	Dried fruit powder	Madhuca indica	Pain & Jaundice
15.	Mehndi	Crushed leaves	Lawsonia inermis	Headache
16.	Nai (Indian white head)		Enicostema axillare Raynal	Stomachache, Psoriasis
17.	Nimbu	Fruit juice	Citrus limon	Indigestion & Vomiting
18.	Semar	Bark	Bobax ceiba	Cure paralysis
19.	Shankhahuli	Leaves	Evolvulus alsinoides	Gripping
20.	Shankhpushpi	Powder	Convolvulus pluricaulis	Memory enhancement
21.	Shisham	Crushed green leaves	Dalbergia sissou	Cure stone in body

Table 3(B): More Specific Herbs & Shrubs

Plant / Herb	Traditional Sahariya Use	Modern Medicinal Relevance	Example Application
Giloy (<i>Tinospora cordifolia</i>)	Fever, immunity, weakness	Immunomodulatory, anti-inflammatory	Decoction for monsoon fever
Ashwagandha (<i>Withania somnifera</i>)	Strength, stamina	Adaptogenic; reduces stress	For malnourished or elderly
Neem (<i>Azadirachta indica</i>)	Skin infections, wounds, fever and snake bites	Antibacterial, antiviral	Poultices; bath for skin diseases
Safed Musli (<i>Chlorophytum borivilianum</i>)	Nutrition, vitality	Aphrodisiac, immunity boosting	Root powder for children
Khejri (<i>Prosopis cineraria</i>) seeds	Food in scarcity	Protein, antioxidants	Roasted seeds during droughts
Amla (<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i>)	Immunity	Vitamin C, antioxidant	Juice consumed in winter
Tulsi (<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>)	Cough, cold	Antimicrobial, antiviral	Decoction for respiratory issues
Harra (<i>Terminalia chebula</i>)	Digestion aid	Laxative, antioxidant	Powder/decoction for digestion
Bhringraj (<i>Eclipta alba</i>)	Hair care, liver tonic	Hepatoprotective	Extract for scalp or liver health
Mahua (<i>Madhuca longifolia</i>) flowers	Nutrition	Rich in sugars/minerals	Porridge or mixed with milk

Integration with Development Goals:

- **Health:** Reduces reliance on scarce modern healthcare.
- **Livelihood:** Potential for herbal medicine enterprises or eco-tourism.
- **Sustainability:** Promotes biodiversity conservation and preserves cultural identity.

Challenges

Despite the progressive measures introduced by the Uttar Pradesh government, the Sahariya community continues to face a range of socio-economic and cultural challenges. One of the primary obstacles is **partial or uneven implementation of government schemes**. While programs like MGNREGA, PMAY, and Dharti Aba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan provide critical support, many Sahariya families report delayed payments, incomplete registration, or exclusion due to lack of awareness or administrative lapses. **Awareness gaps** exacerbate these challenges, as many members, particularly women and children, are not fully informed about their entitlements or the processes required to access benefits. Another pressing issue is **corruption and leakage in welfare delivery**, which often leads to resources being diverted, leaving the most vulnerable families under-served.

In addition to these systemic issues, the community grapples with **loss of traditional lands and habitats**, which undermines their historical means of livelihood and access to medicinal plants and forest produce. **Malnutrition, poor healthcare access, and high prevalence of diseases** like tuberculosis and anemia remain rampant due to persistent poverty and minimal immunity levels. Displacement and migration have disrupted social cohesion and cultural practices, leading to a gradual erosion of **indigenous knowledge** among younger generations. Education is often interrupted by seasonal migration, which also perpetuates cycles of poverty and limited skill acquisition. Collectively, these challenges underscore the fact that while government **well-monitored** interventions are necessary, they are not sufficient without **holistic**, complementary community-driven and culturally sensitive approaches.

Discussion

The Sahariyas' situation illustrates the **complex interplay between displacement, poverty, government intervention, and cultural preservation**. On the one hand, initiatives like the Zero Poverty Campaign, nutrition schemes, and skill development programs have the potential to **break the cycle of poverty**, reduce migration, and provide sustainable livelihoods within their villages. On the other hand, the community's **rich indigenous knowledge**—spanning medicinal plants, agricultural practices, and ecological conservation—remains underutilized. Integrating this traditional knowledge into formal development strategies could create **dual benefits**: it would preserve cultural heritage while promoting **locally sustainable livelihoods**, such as herbal medicine production, eco-tourism, or small-scale organic agriculture.

Furthermore, the Sahariyas' situation highlights the **critical role of government recognition and inclusion**. The 2002 designation as a Scheduled Tribe enabled access to welfare schemes specifically tailored for tribal development, yet the benefits are only fully realized when combined with **community awareness, capacity building, and infrastructure development**. Education, particularly through Ashram Schools and scholarships, emerges as a vital tool for empowering the younger generation, ensuring that indigenous knowledge is not lost while simultaneously equipping youth with skills to navigate contemporary socio-economic challenges.

This discussion emphasizes that **sustainable development for the Sahariyas requires a multidimensional approach**: addressing immediate needs like nutrition and health, promoting income security through skill-based employment, and valuing cultural knowledge as a resource for ecological and economic resilience. Without such a holistic strategy, interventions risk being temporary fixes rather than transformative solutions.

Conclusion

The Sahariyas of Bundelkhand exemplify both the vulnerabilities and resilience of marginalized tribal communities in India. Displacement, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure have historically hindered their development, but government recognition and targeted initiatives provide an opportunity for meaningful change. Programs focusing on **nutrition, healthcare, employment, housing, and education** have already begun to improve living standards and reduce the pressures of seasonal migration. At the same time, the **preservation and integration of indigenous knowledge**—including medicinal practices, agricultural skills, and environmental stewardship—offers a sustainable pathway to self-reliance and cultural continuity.

However, for such initiatives to be fully effective, challenges related to **implementation gaps, awareness, and social marginalization** must be systematically addressed. Collaborative efforts involving **government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and community leaders** are essential to ensure that the Sahariyas not only survive but thrive. Ultimately, empowering the Sahariyas through **holistic development strategies** that combine modern interventions with traditional wisdom can serve as a model for sustainable tribal development in other marginalized regions of India and beyond.

The **initiatives by the Uttar Pradesh government**, especially the 2025 “Dharti Aba Janjati Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan,” MGNREGA, Shabari Sankalp Nutrition Scheme, PMAY, and Tribal Sub-Plan, provide a **holistic support framework** for the Sahariyas. If fully implemented, they can transform Sahariyas' lives by improving **health, livelihoods, education, housing, social inclusion, and cultural preservation**, ultimately enabling sustainable development.

Conflict of interest: None

Acknowledgement: All the resources of secondary data.

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