



# Nomad's sedentarisation: the critical review of the sedentarisation process of Mariaaiwale of Central Maharashtra

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## **Abstract**

The peripatetic Mariaaiwale tribe has noticed how alterations in their means of subsistence have affected both their mobility and conversely. Traditional nomadism has given way to what is referred to as "civilization" among the society. The settlement for resolving nomadic tribes' problems is suggested by commissions on nomadic tribes. The marginalization of Mariaaiwale communities in society has not considerably impacted notwithstanding their sedentarization. The Mariaaiwale community's methods of local adaptation for generating a livelihood put them into the bottom of the social ladder of the caste system. The caste system's challenges were something the Mariaaiwale encountered after they had not overcome their problems as nomads. The Mariaaiwale have been through two crucial processes: a change in their mode of subsistence and a change in their spatial pattern. The study determines the process of Mariaaiwale sedentarization and its socio-economic ties using an ethnographic methodology in Mangalvedhe tehsil of Solapur district.

**Keywords:** Mariaaiwale, Nomadic tribe, Sedentarisation, Nomadism

## Introduction

Human populations all over the world lived nomadic lifestyles prior to the discovery of permanent agriculture. In South Asia, the process of sedentarization accelerated during the Chalcolithic era. But it had begun in the late Mesolithic, when domesticating plants and animals became popular. The history of Homo sapiens underwent a profound shift as a result of the agricultural revolution. People began to settle, and they systematically tended to their plants and animals. Most human tribes made the transition from nomadic to stable lives as a result of agricultural improvement.

Some nomadic people began to settle down gradually, circa 10000 BC, with the discovery of the plough and settled agriculture, while others persisted with their long-cherished ways of life (Renke Commission Report, 2008, p. 13). Settlement began as a result of the discovery of established agriculture. In several regions of South Asia, a mixed herding-farming style of life had evolved. In some nomadic tribes, a transhumant pattern of nomadism has begun to emerge (Rao & Casimir, 2003).

Humans practised shifting cultivation during the early stages of the agricultural revolution. They began to live near the river banks because they recognised the value of water in agriculture. The majority of historic civilizations are situated along riverbanks (Rao & Casimir, 2003). Communities that were both sedentary and nomadic have coexisted and been in close proximity. They exchanged goods and services. Agro-pastoral and Nomadic Pastoralism were the two main types of settlement throughout the Harappan period (2500–1700 BC). The Harappan era is when sedentary tendencies first emerged (Rao & Casimir, 2003).

Some communities became nomadic owing to historical events, while others that had previously been settled became nomadic because they had never settled down (Bokil, 2002). Nomadic tribes like the "Gadi Lohars," "Banjaras," and "Shikalgars" served various monarchs on the Indian subcontinent. However, as the empire fell, many communities lost their economic assistance and were moved from their original locations (Bokil, 2002).

The government should settle the NTs and DNTs, according to the First Backward Classes Commission, also known as the Kaka Kalelkar Commission, which made its recommendation in 1953. They ought to offer alternative sources of income. This committee contends that if people lead sedentary lives, particularly the Denotified Tribes (who were flagged by the British as criminal tribes), the stigma they bear will diminish (Renake commission report, 2008, p. 3). According to the Renake Commission (2008), after the nomadic communities have settled, their economic situation would improve and they will be respectfully accepted into society.

The settlement, however, also has certain unforeseen and undesirable effects. According to Bokil (2002), although nomadic populations started to settle down, they had historically been denied access to welfare services and citizenship rights because they lacked land or home titles. The lives of nomadic people have

long been impacted by the adoption of new customs, culture, livelihood, habitat modification, and urbanization.

Researchers have long focused on sedentarization and nomads, but the crucial relationship between them is not well addressed. This study examines and critically evaluates the Mariaaiwale's transition from a nomadic to a sedentary way of life. The Mariaaiwale is a nomadic section of society. The arts or religious activities are essential to a nomadic society. The peripatetic community have lost their traditional source of income due to new entertainment advancements and the shifting trend of mainstream communities toward traditional religious performances. Government laws and other factors had an impact on the peripatetic community's way of life. The nature of nomadism has altered over time, and sedentarization has both beneficial and harmful effects.

### **Mariaaiwale community**

Marimata, also known as Mariaai<sup>1</sup>, is the guardian deity of the community. They are her intimate people. Her name (Mariaai- mother Mari, wale-carriers, Carriers of mother Mari) and the name of the community are derived from her. In some regions, such as the Konkan and other areas of Paschim Maharashtra, they are also referred as as Kadak Laxmiwale and Margammawale. Another name for the goddess Mari is Laxmi. In the past, people found alms in her name to support themselves. Mariaaiwale still work in their original occupations today, but recently many of them have also started working in newer vocations.

The Mariaai-gada is transported from village to village by Mariaaiwale. In October and November, they start coming. Peasants gather their harvests at this time. Alms used to be mostly given in the form of grains and other agricultural items, which the Mariaaiwale would collect. They receive extra money and other necessities like clothes, cereals, and oil.

Mariaai-gada is a little, transportable, rectangular, wooden Marimata temple. Its typical dimensions are 2 to 2 ½ feet in height and 1 to 1 ½ feet in breadth. It is decorated with green, white, or red specks and is painted in saffron and yellow. Numerous paintings have been painted on the door and doorframe.

They doodle leaves and flowers on the door frame, and Potraj, a whip, Potraj with a whip, a scorpion, a calf, a rooster, etc. are embossed on the gada door, among other things. A peacock feather, a little oil can, and other items are stored inside the Mariaai-gada where the idol of the Marimata deity is also kept. Two or more family members trudge along with the gada while they are seeking alms. A little drum (Dholki)

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<sup>1</sup> Mari is the name, mata and aai mean mother, wale-carriers: Mariaaiwale means carriers of mother Mari.

with a string hangs around the woman's neck, and the Mariaai gada is perched on her head. Men transport the bell and wrap.

There are various variances between "Potraj," one tradition or clothing, and the Mari-aaiwale and Matang community (one of the castes in the SC category). Mari-aaiwale Potraj wanders with his wife or mother, not alone himself, and dons a specific outfit called a "Aabran." Matang Potraj holds a "Daphade (one instrument)" and wears a particular "Brazen Chal." A person known as "Potraj" was presented by the Matang community to the Marimata, and Mari-aaiwale Potraj possesses Potraj by birth or its descend from Potraj through generations. For them, this is a traditional source of income (Chavan, 2006).

When they are begging, they put up the Mariaaigada in the centre of the village or, if the community is large, in the middle of a community. It is thought that the Mariaaiwale can predict weather as well as any approaching tragedies, such as epidemics and natural calamities. The Mariaaiwale identify a remedy once the people present their issues. People contribute liberally because of their strong religious conviction in the forecasting abilities of the Mariaai-gada bearers.

The locations where they can go for "Bhiksha" for the Mariaai-gada are governed by unwritten laws in the society. With the Mariaai gada, a Mariaaiwale family is not free to travel. The region to which the Mariaaiwale travel for Bhiksha has been apportioned among the Mariaaiwale families by the caste council. For instance, the family of Parshuram Kale, the household head in the village of Khupsangi, is allotted four distinct villages in a particular tehsil. This family expands and divides into two over time. Each split family is given two villages out of the four total villages. Families who travel to communities that are not assigned to them risk punishment.

### Methodology and study area

This research was carried out in two villages in the Maharashtra state's Mangalvedhe block of the Solapur district. The Mariaaiwale have quite big settlements there. Additionally, the researcher collected some data from the villages of Mayni and Venegao in the Sangli and Satara districts, respectively. As part of their yearly routine, Mariaaiwale from Khupsangi village visited these two villages. Not merely in comparison to Khadaki (68) and many other villages in the Solapur district, Khupsangi village (447) has a substantial Mariaaiwale population.

Table 1: Village wise population distribution of Mariaaiwale community by sex

	Khupsangi	Khadaki	Total
<b>Male</b>	243	33	276
<b>Female</b>	204	35	239
<b>Total</b>	447	68	515

*Source:* data collected from the field (2018).

## The transition towards a settled way

The origins of the Mariaaiwale are unknown to them. Some of the more senior people can only recall the nomadic route. Mariaaiwale from the villages of Khadaki and Khupsangi are from Vijapur (Karnataka), and Guddapur (Tal. - Jath, Dist. - Sangli, Maharashtra). Then they travelled to Paschim Maharashtra, namely the Solapur area, where they dispersed over several communities. With time, they have begun to settle, although the process is still ongoing. They were completely nomadic 60 to 70 years ago.

30 to 40 years prior, the community started living as seasonal nomads. Seasonal nomadism permeated the entire community. The majority of families today move around seasonally. They have settled in part. As their "home village," they had begun referring to Khadaki and Khupsangi. Gav (village) is the name used for the home village and Varlikad (village) for the wandering villages to the west of the home villages. Varlikad means "upside/on the higher side." They spend three to four months a year in their home villages.

Comparing the lifestyles of different age groups in the community (seasonal nomadism, seasonal migration, and sedentarism) reveals a trend (see Table no. 2). 42 percent of the Mariaaiwale have sedentary lives, 32 percent migrate seasonally, and 26 percent practise seasonal nomadism. When they first began to settle, often 30 to 40 years ago, they relied only on traditional means of subsistence such Mariaai gada, patitale dev, and Potraj.

**Table 2:** Nature of nomadism in the last 365 days from the date of data collection (in %)

Sr. No.	Age Group	Seasonal Nomadism	Seasonal Migration	Sedentary
1.	Children (0-06)	23	34	43
2.	Children (07-12)	13	15	72
3.	Adolescence (13-18)	17	38	45
4.	Young adults (19-25)	25	53	22
5.	Adult (26-40)	37	43	20
6.	Middle age person (41-59)	38	23	39
7.	Old age (60+)	65	08	27
	Total	26	32	42

*Source:* data collected from the field (2018).

The Mariaaiwale practice seasonal nomadism, especially the middle-aged and elderly. Young people and adults migrate more frequently throughout the winter. Additionally, the majority of the kids reside in their original village. Even though the majority of community members rely on seasonal nomadism for their livelihood, the nature of nomadism is undoubtedly changing.

For the past 50 to 60 years, this group has lived in the Khadaki village. It was customary for them to only remain a few months when they arrived at the Khadaki village. Only one or two families visit Mariaai-gada for alms, while the rest of the family remain in the hamlet. During seasonal migration, some community members cut sugarcane.

We can see from a first glance at the Mariaaiwale community that they are heading in the direction of a settled life. The key factor driving the community toward sedentarization is a shift in the group's principal source of income since the traditional means of subsistence cannot meet all of the demands of the families. The society provides religious services, such as making prognostications about diseases, monsoons, and droughts in exchange for cash or other forms of payment. The rural non-nomadic people of Maharashtra are what sustain the Mariaaiwale. The alteration in the mainstream community's inclination has an impact on the community's conventional means of subsistence.

The deterioration of a nomadic tribe's livelihood or traditional employment can be attributed to a variety of factors. The Latin word "traditio," which means to "hand down" or "hand over," is the source of the English term "tradition." Customs, values, and cultural knowledge are transmitted from one generation to the next verbally and through enculturation. In contrast, enculturation and practical instruction are used to transmit livelihoods and other behaviours. The policies of colonial and independent India, as well as globalisation, modernization, urbanisation, technological advancement, changes in agricultural practises, market interference, and commercialization, are to responsible for the changes in livelihood (Renke commission report, 2008; p.-68).

Since Independence, Milind Bokil (2002) has documented how several nomadic tribes or groups' traditional livelihoods have been altered. For example, pastoralists are turning to small agriculture and wage labour since they have lost their usual grasslands and the few remaining areas have been damaged. The peripatetic nomads experience the same phenomenon. The traditional ways of life of nomadic groups have changed as a result of privatisation, mechanisation, industrialization, the expansion of contemporary entertainment media, legislation prohibiting performance with animals, changes in belief systems, and the loss of traditional locations. The majority of them are thus forced out of their conventional means of subsistence. They turn to small trade, wage labour, beggars, or even prostitution since they have no other options for a living.

According to Hayden R. (Ed.) (2003), many traditional service nomad occupations have become outdated due to social change or the effects of modernization. Certain peripatetics could be able to take on new peripatetic traits. However, some people still aren't, therefore they choose for settlement as an option (p. 466). The Mariaaiwale has managed to navigate this change and found a home. The community's peripatetic traits have changed, nevertheless, as they go through their shift. The community embraces other means of support that subsequently develop into its traditional means of support, such as the selling of imitation jewellery, scrap collecting, and hair collection. The group accepts additional means of subsistence from the larger society, but from lower castes, including paid labor for sugarcane harvesting.

Home village and destination village are two different ways of living that the community is experiencing. The housing community benefitted from government welfare programmes and integrated with the local community in the home village. The issue is how they are viewed by the general public, how they are housed, and to what extent this population has benefitted from government welfare initiatives. The community's history should not be used to gauge its present level of growth. The community's social standing, economic situation, level of education, and access to high-quality medical facilities are all still quite low.

### **Social Exclusion**

The Mariaaiwale community has a negative reputation as a community of beggars. Pork is a common meal in the community. Pork intake is taboo in the general public, particularly in the so-called higher caste population. People find it extremely repulsive since the pigs consume human excreta. The majority of society shunned them 15–20 years ago. The untouchable communities stay away from them at that time as well. As a result, they located outside the village since they felt more vulnerable there. The pig and donkey were essential to the society, therefore racial animosity toward them led to conflicts with the majority of the population.

### **Disputes with Mainstream community**

The first couples to arrive in the Khadaki village were Gangubai and Durgappa Koli. Approximately 50–60 years ago, Banda and Durgappa Mariaaiwale, brothers, visited the village of Khupsangi and introduced their descendants as members of the Mariaaiwale family. They recall their journey from the Vijapur district of Karnataka. Then in pursuit of livelihood with Mariaai gada, they came to Guddapur hamlet in Jath tehsil in Sangli district of Maharashtra state. The community's waggon arrives in the Mangalvedha tehsil's "Akole" hamlet, where the residents subsequently become known as "Bhikar Akole." The locals refer to the Mariaaiwale community as "bhikar." Bhikar denotes a panhandler.

This community began implementing new methods of generating income, like gathering trash and human hair and selling fake jewellery. In the same village, they were unable to maintain their way of life (Bhikar Akole). As a result, a few households began to move to the next hamlet, Pathakal, Andhalgao, and Ganeshwadi, which are close to Bhikar Akole. The community's mobility caravan was also split up and dispersed at the same time. Fewer households visited the Khadaki village than the Pathakal village.

From the Patkhal, a community close to the Khadaki village, Durgappa Koli wed Gangubai Koli. At this time, certain communities were involved in criminal activity, and the villages did not permit the wandering community to stay in their villages for an extended period of time because of their cattle. Since there were few transportation options in this area, donkeys were a valuable resource. Donkeys were crucial for transportation between locations. "Ath divasapeksha jast yeka gavamdhe ami thambat nvavto," remarked

Chanappa Koli, 75 years old. The community relied on the donkeys to transport their belongings because we didn't remain in any one hamlet for longer than eight days.

Nevertheless, conflicts with the rest of the population were sparked by donkeys. Due to the decreasing common grazing fields, Mariaaiwale found it increasingly challenging to feed the donkeys. Sometimes the donkeys wandered onto the locals' farmland, causing arguments. At the hamlet of Pathakal, the event with the Mariaaiwale took place. The Mariaaiwale family of Khupsangi village originally resided in Pathakal village, 3 kilometres distant in the Mangalvedha tehsil of Solapur district. The Pathakal village only had one Mariaaiwale family.

Once a dispute occurred between the Mariaaiwale family and a farmer in the village because the Mariaaiwale family's donkey entered his farm. The villagers beat up the Mariaaiwale family. Because of the Pathakal mainstream community's dispute, Mariaaiwale families scattered to nearby villages of Pathakal, for instance, Khupsangi, Hajapur, and Khadaki.

Recently, the dispute of Mariaaiwale with the mainstream community has been noticed. The Mariaaiwale community rears pigs because pig rearing is another source of their income, and they consume pork as their staple food. The pigs are roaming in the villages and entering the yard of other community houses. Therefore, the Khupsangi village villagers filed a complaint against the Mariaaiwale in Grampanchayat and had a Grampanchayat meeting. The Khupsangi has restricted the Mariaaiwale community for pig rearing, or if they are found with pig rearing, they will boycott. Therefore the Mariaaiwale from the Khupsangi village has shifted their pigs to the Khadaki and Maravade village.

However, this is not only about the Mariaaiwale in Khupsangi village. The disputes with the Mainstream community because of the pig is expected in the Khadaki and Maravade village. The Mariaaiwale community avoids disagreement with the mainstream community. Therefore they settled outside the village.

### **Settlement on the edge of the village**

As discussed earlier, this community settled in villages like Bhikar Akole, Khupsangi and Khadaki. They settled in villages whose social characteristics are tantamount to each other; for instance, Khadaki and Khupsangi- Khadaki village is less populated, and most of the marginalised communities are inhabited in Khadaki villages. The communities like Mahar, Matang, Kaikadis, Chambhar, Phanse Paradhi, Vharul, Pardeshi, Mang Garudi, and Darveshi reside in Khadaki village. All communities mentioned above are marginalized communities. Moreover, the social composition of Khupsangi village is similar to Khadaki. The communities like Mahar, Matang, Chambhar, and Muslim are located in the midst of villages. All other communities like Maratha, Teli (oil-miller), Vani, Rajput, Beldar and Dhangar have a large number of farms living on their farm.

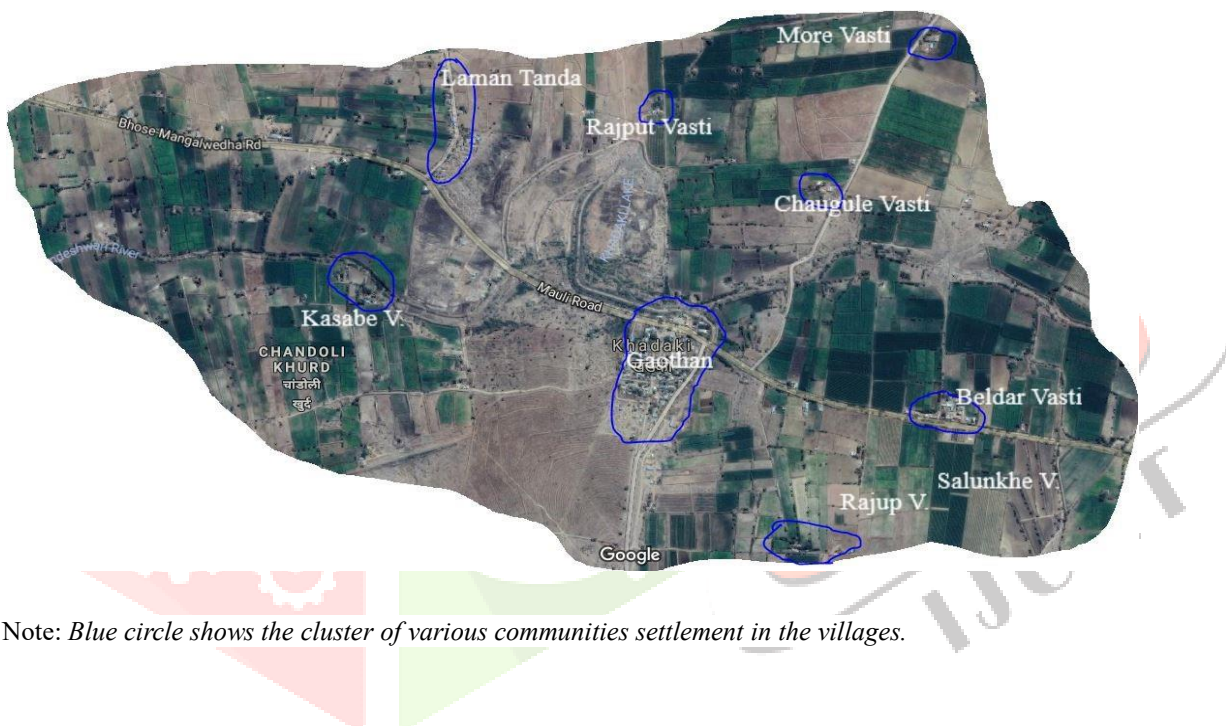


The villages are dominated by particular communities with many farms, like Pathakal and Nandeshwar villages—Pathakal is dominated by the Maratha community and Nandeshwar by Dhangar. Dhangar comes from a nomadic tribe, but this community-owned a large number of farmland and the politics of Nandeshwar moves around the Dhangar community. Therefore, settling in such villages was very difficult for communities like Mariaaiwale. Mariaaiwale settled in such villages where they had not dominated.

This community's hamlet is located outside the village and beside the marginalised communities. One notable thing is that this community's hamlet settled at the villagers' place for open defecation.

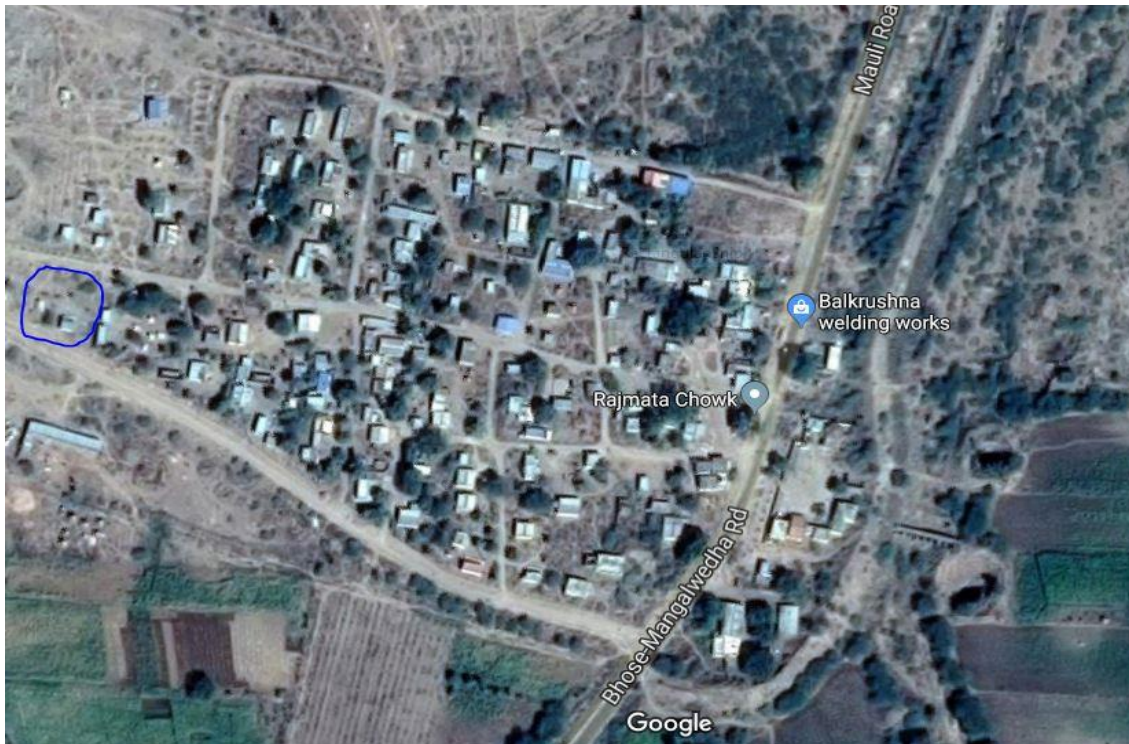
**Location of community settlement in the Village population**

**Map 1:** Khadaki village

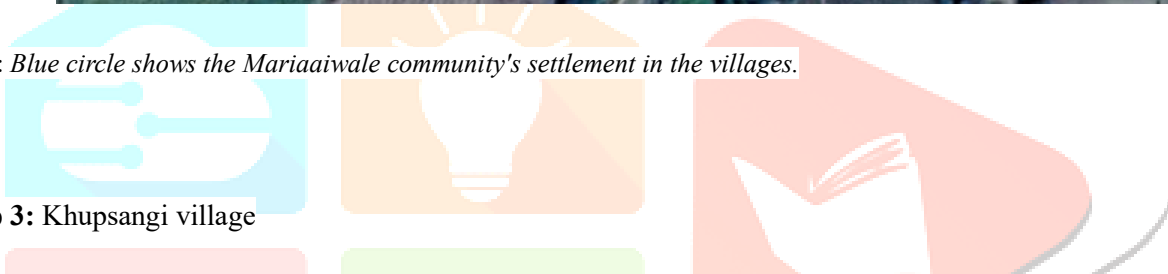


Note: Blue circle shows the cluster of various communities settlement in the villages.

Map 2: Khadaki village communities settlement map (Gaothan)



Note: Blue circle shows the Mariaaiwale community's settlement in the villages.



Map 3: Khupsangi village



Note: Blue circle shows the cluster of various communities settlement in the villages.

**Map 4:** Khupsangi village communities settlement map (Gaothan)

Note: Blue circle shows the Mariaaiwale community's settlement in the villages.

Maps 1 and 3 show both villages' village boundaries considering the dispersed settlement. The blue circle on the map represents the location of the various communities in the villages. Maps 2 and 4 show the Mariaaiwale community's settlement location in the villages through the blue circle.

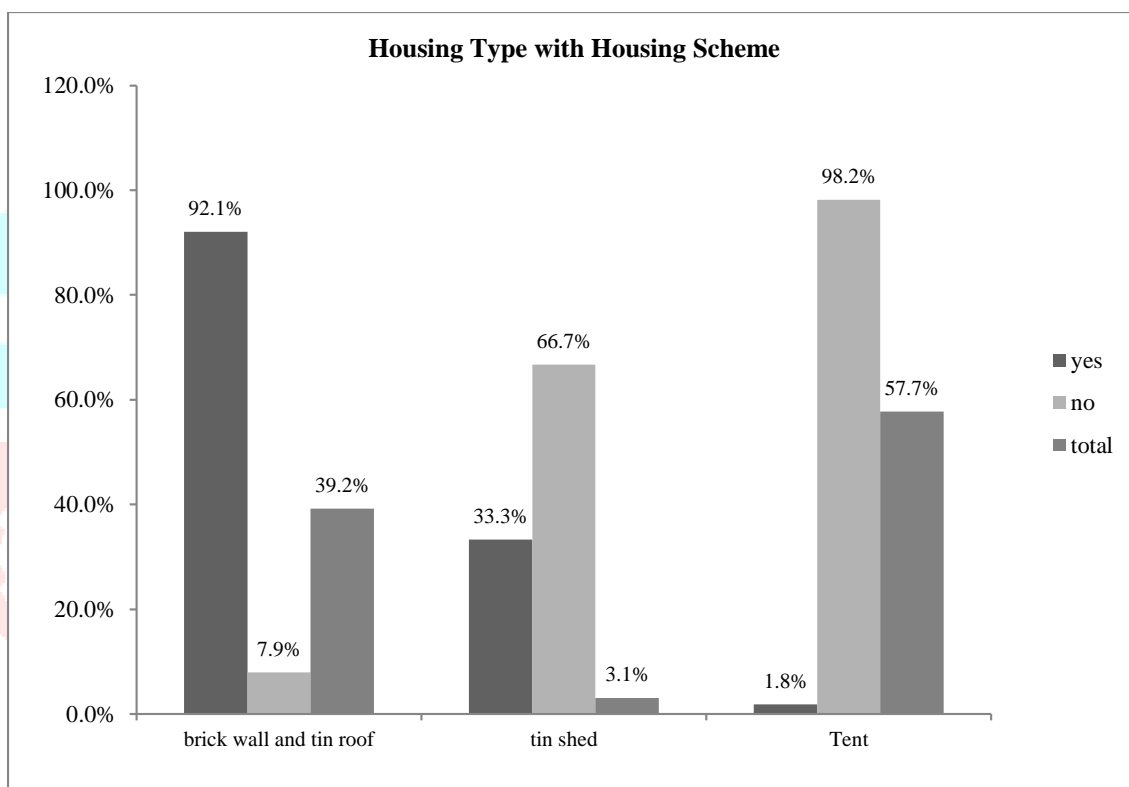
**'Gaothan'** is the non-agricultural land used for residential purposes in a village. In Khupsangi and Khadaki villages, Gaothan is occupied by Mariaaiwale and other low caste communities. Khadaki Gaothan, Mahar, Mang, Chambhar, Vharul, Muslim, Darveshi, Pardhis, Kaikadis, Dhangar, etc., are inhabited. In Khupsangi village, Mahar, Mang, Chambhar, Muslim, etc., are settled in Gaothan. In both villages [Khadaki and Khupsangi], the Mariaaiwale community is inhabited outskirts of the villages and beside the Mahar, Mang, Darveshi or Paradhi community.

The dominant communities in both villages are mainly settled a little far away from the **'Gaothan'**, and all the marginalised communities live in the Gaothan. The reason behind it is that the dominating community has extensive farmland. Upper caste peoples in both the villages are dispersed and have their houses built near their agricultural land. In both villages, Maratha, Hatakar, Rajput, Beldar, Vani, etc., are inhabited a little far away from the Gaothan.

## Housing Condition at Settlement villages

Chart 1 shows the housing pattern of the Mariaaiwale community (Khadaki and Khupsangi villages) and what proportion of houses were constructed under the government housing schemes for the poor. There are 57.7% of families living in a tent in both villages. Around 39% of families live in semi pakka houses (brick walls and tin roofs). In that, 7.9 % of homes were built on their expenses. However, the remaining 92.1% semi pakka houses were constructed under various government housing schemes, for instance, Indira Awas Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, etc. 3.1% of Mariaaiwale community families are living in the tin shed, and within these families, 33.3% families are beneficiaries of government housing schemes, but their houses are under construction.

**Chart 1:** Housing type with a housing scheme



*Source:* data collected from the field (2018).

Many Mariaaiwale families can be seen constructing houses in the home village even though 61 per cent of families live in tent and tin shed houses. The Mariaaiwale families benefit less from welfare schemes and programs because of the lack of citizenry documents and caste certificates. The 94 per cent of community members are deprived of the caste certificate and

## The entry of Mariaaiwale into the hierarchy of mainstream society

This community is being sedentarised but in the caste structure of the mainstream culture. They have been entered into the lower strata of the caste hierarchy. This community's lifestyle is changing from nomadic to seasonal nomadism. At present, they have adopted the livelihood of mainstream communities.

**Table no. 4:** People currently engaged in occupation (In %)

Sr. No.	Livelihood options	Currently Engaged (In %)	Total Sample
1	Mariaai gada	11	57
2	Patitaladev	11	57
3	Potraj	1	4
4	Beggary	7	37
5	Scrap	2	8
6	Ornaments	26	136
7	Hair trade	1	3
8	Labour work	22	114
9	Sugarcane cutting work	25	126
10	Commercial work	1	7
11	Farming	0.2	1

*Source:* data collected from the field (2018).

As mentioned earlier, Mariaai-gada, Patitale dev (Goddess in the basket), Potraj and Beggary are the community's traditional livelihoods- 30 per cent of community members engaged with it. Table number 4 describes the occupation distribution in the Mariaaiwale community. With time and changes in the community's needs, this community has taken up scrap work, hair collection and selling artificial jewellery. As compared to all other sources of livelihood, more individuals in the home village are engaged in sugarcane cutting, daily wage labour and the sale of artificial jewellery. The mainstream communities, especially the lower caste, face a lack of availability of work. Nevertheless, Mariaaiwale gets work because they are recognized as honest, hardworking, and lower wages.

Sugarcane cutting, agricultural labour, construction work, daily wage labour, and farm labour are not traditional earning methods. Carrying Mariaai gada and collecting the things needed for their lives was the only livelihood. Because of some reasons like; the unable to collect enough money or grains, division in the Mariaai gada region, the apathy of the mainstream community about alms, changing tendency of a new generation of the Mariaaiwale community member is toward the traditional way of earning; this community has started to adopt livelihood of the mainstream community. However, they exercise such livelihood by low strata in the caste hierarchy. In this way, this community is becoming the sedentarise or entering the sedentarisation process but at the mainstream society's low strata.

## Conclusion

The researcher has focused on the process of the sedentarisation of the Mariaaiwale and its impact on the community's social, economic, and political aspects. Change in livelihood has forced this community toward a settled life. Traditional livelihoods are not only the means of livelihood, but it is also a part of community members' lives because of every tradition, belief, and custom related to the traditional livelihood of the Mariaaiwale community. Therefore, at present, this community is also doing conventional livelihood activities. Because they believe that if they discontinue the practices related to Mariaaigada, the goddess will curse the community members.

Due to the shrinking of territories assigned to each household of Mariaai gada, decreasing alms through the Potraj and Patitale dev is forcing the community to adopt alternatives. They had chosen supplementary livelihoods that they might exercise with traditional ones, such as ornament sale, hair collection, scrap collection, etc. They had come close to the sedentary community with the changing livelihood pattern. They are imitating the sedentary community.

The Mariaaiwale community has adopted livelihood sources exercised by the sedentary community. This community has started working on farms, construction sites and sugarcane fields. One can see primarily three clusters of livelihoods that the Mariaaiwale community has adopted in chronological order; initially, they were dependent on the traditional source of livelihood. Then they adopted such livelihoods (selling imitation jewellery, a collection of hair, rag picking), which they could easily carry out alongside the traditional livelihood. Moreover, because of the increased contact with the mainstream community and settled life, they have adopted their livelihood (agriculture, sugarcane cutting, agricultural labour, construction work).

The change in livelihood occurs in the Mariaaiwale community, but their entry point to the caste Hindu mainstream society is through the lower strata of the caste system. The low caste communities exercise the occupations adopted by the Mariaaiwale community. They work on wages lower than what the low caste communities demand.

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