Migration, Music, and Memory in Diasporic Adivasi Narratives

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Abstract— *Migration has always been central to the socio-cultural formation of Adivasi communities across India, but the scale, pressure, and compulsions of contemporary mobility have reconfigured Adivasi identity in unprecedented ways. This article examines the interconnectedness of migration, music, and memory in diasporic Adivasi narratives, with a special emphasis on the role of oral traditions particularly songs, chants, and ritual performances in shaping and preserving collective identity. Drawing on ethnographic scholarship, cultural anthropology, musicology, and emerging Adivasi writings in English, the study argues that music operates as a sonic archive that sustains ecological memory, emotional continuity, and cultural belonging among displaced tribal populations. Songs such as karma geet, jhumur, and sohara, transmitted through communal performances, not only retain fragments of ancestral landscapes but also recount the histories of forced migration, labour exploitation, and displacement. Diasporic narratives reveal how Adivasi migrants actively reconstitute cultural memory through song, enabling them to negotiate identity in unfamiliar geographies. Through textual analysis, theoretical framing, and case studies from Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Assam, and industrial migration corridors, the article demonstrates that music is not merely an expressive art but a political, mnemonic, and epistemic practice. It becomes a space of resistance, survival, and self-articulation that challenges dominant narratives of tribal erasure and documents the lived realities of displacement. Ultimately, the article argues that Adivasi musical traditions provide a powerful framework for understanding the emotional architecture of migration and the imaginative reconstruction of home.*

Keywords— *Adivasi Diaspora, Migration, Oral Traditions, Folk Music, Cultural Identity, Tribal Literature*

I. INTRODUCTION

Migration seasonal, circular, or long-term has historically been embedded in the socio-economic rhythms of Adivasi life in India. Yet, in modern times, migration has transformed from a cyclical livelihood strategy into a structure of displacement, often forced by land alienation, deforestation, industrial mining, and agrarian crises. As scholars such as Virginius Xaxa argue, "the history of tribal communities in India is inseparable from the history of their displacement" (Xaxa 42). Migration, therefore, is not simply a movement of bodies across space; it is a movement of memory, culture, stories, and rituals. Among these cultural forms, music emerges as one of the most resilient repositories of Adivasi identity.

For many Adivasi groups including the Oraon, Munda, Ho, Santhal, Gond, and Kharia communities' music is inseparable from social life. It is not produced for performance alone but embedded in rituals, agricultural cycles, labour, festivals, and communal work. Anthropologist Felix Padel notes that Adivasi music "sustains collective identity by encoding ecological memory and ethical relationships with the natural world"

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(Padel 118). Songs become mnemonic devices that store landscapes, kinship structures, mythic origins, and genealogies of struggle.

This article explores how diasporic Adivasi narratives literary, oral, ethnographic, and autobiographical represent this triad of migration, music, and memory. It argues that Adivasi communities transform musical practices into portable homelands, enabling them to survive estrangement within industrial sites, urban settlements, tea gardens, brick kilns, and construction centres. Using cultural memory studies, postcolonial indigenous theory, and ethnomusicology, the article analyses how Adivasi music becomes a living archive of displacement, ecological belonging, and identity negotiation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between migration and cultural transformation among Adivasi communities
2. To examine the relationship between migration and cultural transformation among Adivasi communities
3. To investigate how diasporic Adivasi communities use music to negotiate identity in unfamiliar social spaces
4. To explore the role of music as a form of political memory and resistance
5. To study the emergence of new musical and narrative forms in Adivasi diasporas

II.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the triadic relationship between migration, music, and memory in diasporic Adivasi narratives requires an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws from diaspora studies, cultural memory studies, performance theory, ethnomusicology, and indigenous epistemology. This section elaborates the key theoretical foundations that shape the analysis.

A. Rethinking Diaspora: Internal Displacement and Indigenous Mobility

The term *diaspora* traditionally invokes images of transnational displacement Jewish, African, Armenian, or South Asian diasporas. However, contemporary scholars argue for a de-territorialized reading of diaspora, one that encompasses communities displaced within national borders. Avtar Brah's influential concept of the "diaspora space" is crucial here. For Brah, diaspora space is "the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, converge" (Brah 208). It is not defined by the mere movement of people, but by the

constant negotiation of identity in new spatial and cultural contexts.

Adivasi migration in India for mining, plantations, construction, brick kilns, or domestic labour fits this expanded definition. Though not transnational, Adivasi migrants experience:

- loss of territory,
- cultural disorientation,
- linguistic marginalization,
- ecological displacement, and
- identity renegotiation in unfamiliar social structures.

Virginius Xaxa argues that tribal displacement in India is not voluntary mobility but a "historical pattern of coerced dispossession" (Xaxa 55). Migrant Adivasi communities thus constitute a form of internal diaspora, where the rupture from ancestral land creates new diasporic subjectivities.

Paul Gilroy's idea of diaspora as a "counterculture of modernity" (Gilroy 36) a resistance to dominant forces also resonates. Adivasi migrants use music as a counter-narrative to industrial modernity and state-led development aggression. Thus, diaspora theory allows us to conceptualize Adivasi migrants not just as economic subjects but as diasporic cultural agents whose musical practices sustain fractured identities.

B. Cultural Memory Theory: Music as Embodied Archive

Memory is not simply a cognitive process but a cultural and collective framework. Jan Assmann distinguishes between communicative memory (clusters of everyday remembrance sustained by living generations) and cultural memory (transmitted through rituals, traditions, and symbolic forms that outlive individuals) (Assmann 128).

Adivasi musical traditions fall squarely within cultural memory. These songs:

- encode environmental knowledge,
- preserve kinship histories,
- transmit myths and cosmologies,
- narrate displacement,
- express longing for land and forest,
- and sustain ritual continuity.

Aleida Assmann notes that cultural memory operates through stability, ritualization, and symbolic storage, ensuring that a community does not forget its origins (Assmann 52). Adivasi music performs this function by

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embedding memory in rhythmic repetition, seasonal cycles, and festival performances.

Importantly, memory becomes mobile through song. When communities migrate, they carry memory not as written text but as transmissible sound. This portability allows songs to become what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory" the transmission of memory across generations through affective structures rather than lived experience (Hirsch 38). The children of Adivasi migrants may learn about forests, ancestors, and rituals through the musical memory of their parents, even if they have never lived in those forests themselves. Thus, memory theory helps explain why music remains emotionally potent: it is not merely nostalgic but structurally central to the survival of cultural identity.

C. The Sonic Archive: Performance, Embodiment, and Epistemic Memory

The binary of *archive* vs. *repertoire* introduced by Diana Taylor is particularly useful. According to Taylor, the archive contains written, enduring materials, whereas the repertoire contains embodied practices such as dance, music, ritual, and storytelling that live through repetition (Taylor 20).

Adivasi cultural knowledge is located overwhelmingly in the repertoire.

- Songs
- Drum rhythms (mandar, tamak, dhol)
- Ritual chants
- Festival dances (karma, sarhul, sohrai)

These constitute what scholars call a sonic archive an archive sustained through sound rather than text.

Unlike the colonial archive, which attempted to categorize Adivasi cultures as primitive or vanishing, the sonic archive resists textual fixity. It is dynamic, interactive, and living, changing with new migrations and new conditions. As ethnomusicologist Steven Feld notes, sonic knowledge in indigenous societies is "an epistemology of place, emotion, and relationality" (Feld 94).

In migration contexts, the sonic archive becomes even more crucial:

- It allows migrants to recreate spatial belonging through sound.
- It provides emotional healing in alien environments.
- It counters the erasures caused by land dispossession.
- It constructs a shared diasporic identity across fragmented settlements.

Thus, the sonic archive is central to understanding diasporic Adivasi subjectivity.

D. Ethnomusicology and Indigenous Aesthetics

Ethnomusicology provides tools to understand not only the structure of Adivasi music but also its cultural function. Adivasi music is rarely meant for solitary listening. It is communal, performative, and ritualistic.

Verrier Elwin notes that Adivasi music is inseparable from the forest ecology: "Every beat of the *mandar* carries the pulse of the forest" (Elwin 143).

Timotius Tirkey's work on Oraon music emphasizes its relational ontology songs mediate relationships between humans, ancestors, spirits, and nature. Music is not entertainment; it is cosmological work.

In migration, this relational system becomes fractured. But migrants reconstruct it by:

- forming cultural associations in cities,
- performing ritual songs in labour colonies,
- adapting music to new emotional contexts,
- teaching songs to urban-born children as identity markers.

Ethnomusicology therefore helps us understand why musical memory persists even when language, clothing, or food habits change.

E. Postcolonial Indigenous Theory: Land, Identity, and Sovereignty

Postcolonial indigenous theory foregrounds the centrality of land-based identity. For Adivasis, identity is tied to land not merely as economic resource but as ancestor, relative, and cosmological centre.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that for indigenous peoples, "the rupturing of land is the rupturing of story, memory, and selfhood" (Smith 53). This applies directly to Adivasi displacement. Migration creates epistemic loss, but music helps restore relational memory.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, writing about indigenous resurgence, argues that music and performance are "acts of reclaiming, acts of remembering forward" (Simpson 92). Such a framework helps us understand Adivasi musical practices as resistance, not mere nostalgia.

Migrants returning home during festivals such as Sarhul and Karam participate in ritual return, reconnecting with land and ancestors through song. This is a form of indigenous renewal, countering the erosion caused by mining, plantations, and industrial capitalism.

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F. Intersectionality: Caste, Class, Gender, and Migration

Adivasi migration cannot be understood without accounting for gender and caste hierarchies in host societies. Adivasi women face:

- dual labour burdens,

- domestic exploitation,

- sexual vulnerability,

- cultural erasure in urban settings.

Music becomes a powerful space for gendered memory.

Women's songs often encode personal and collective histories of suffering and resilience. Feminist memory theorists such as Susannah Radstone argue that memory is a "gendered site of negotiation" (Radstone 83). Adivasi women's songs particularly laments and ritual chants function as alternative archives documenting experiences absent from official records.

III.   HISTORICAL CONTEXT: ADIVASI MIGRATION AND CULTURAL FRAGMENTATION

Adivasi migration in India has a long and layered history, shaped by the pressures of colonial extraction, postcolonial development, land alienation, environmental degradation, and economic displacement. For communities such as the Oraon, Munda, Santal, Ho, Kharia, Gond, and Bhil, mobility has never been a voluntary enterprise; rather, it has been historically tied to the expansion of state and market structures that undermined indigenous ecological relations and cultural sovereignty. This history of migration oscillating between forced displacement and indentured labour mobility forms the background against which diasporic Adivasi music, memory, and narrative traditions evolve.

1. Early Mobility and the Pre Colonial Landscape

Before the advent of colonial rule, the migrations of Adivasi groups were generally seasonal, circular, or kinship-based. Movement between forested regions, uplands, and river valleys was guided by ecological rhythms, swidden cultivation cycles (jhum), and the sacred relationship between land and ancestors. As K.S. Singh observes, Adivasi communities conceived of land not as property but as "a sacred trust inherited from clan ancestors, inseparable from their ritual identity" (Singh 42). Such mobility did not produce cultural rupture; instead, it reinforced clan networks, oral traditions, musical exchange, and ritual coherence across dispersed territories.

2. Colonialism and the Disruption of Indigenous Spatiality

The British colonial state dismantled these patterns through revenue settlements, forest laws, plantations, and labour recruitment. The Permanent Settlement (1793), the Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878, and the establishment of zamindari systems severely restricted traditional rights to land and forest produce. Adivasis were increasingly criminalized as "encroachers" in their own homelands.

Simultaneously, the colonial economy engineered large-scale labour migration to tea plantations in Assam, coal mines in Jharkhand, and railways across eastern India. The infamous *Arkatti* system recruiters who lured or coerced Adivasis into indentured labour produced one of the earliest Adivasi diasporas. Santhals, Oraons, Mundas, and Gonds were taken en masse to Assam, Bengal, and even as far as Mauritius and Fiji. As Amita Baviskar notes, "colonial capitalism uprooted tribal communities from their ecological niche, transforming them into mobile labouring populations divorced from their cultural landscapes" (Baviskar 18).

This form of migration was not merely economic displacement; it was cultural fragmentation. Songs, rituals, and myths tied to specific geographies sacred groves, hills, rivers, burial grounds lost their geographical anchors. Consequently, Adivasi music underwent a shift from land-rooted ritual expression to nostalgic and often mournful recollections of homeland. The "bir bonga" (ancestral spirit) and "des bihar" (land of origin) became recurring motifs in plantation-era songs, signalling a rupture in collective identity.

3. Postcolonial Development and Internal Displacement

After 1947, the trajectory of Adivasi migration intensified due to developmentalist policies. Dams, mines, steel plants, wildlife sanctuaries, and "infrastructural corridors" resulted in the loss of millions of acres of Adivasi land. The Narmada, Koel-Karo, Hirakud, and Rourkela projects displaced tens of thousands of tribal families. Walter Fernandes estimates that "Adivasis, who form roughly eight percent of India's population, account for more than forty percent of development-induced displaced persons" (Fernandes 112).

This displacement produced fragmented, scattered diaspora across towns and industrial belts Jamshedpur, Ranchi, Bhilai, Guwahati, Mumbai, and Delhi. Migration became intergenerational, not temporary. The communal cultural universe of the village *khuntkatti* rights, *sarhul* festivals, clan-based musical forms like *jhumar*, *karma*, or *domkach* was fractured. In urban slums and construction sites, these traditions persisted, but as reconstituted fragments mediated by nostalgia, struggle, and new solidarities.

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4. Migration to Metropolises and the Reconfiguration of Community Space

From the 1980s onward, accelerated rural impoverishment and the expansion of the informal labour market pushed Adivasi youth into Indian metropolises as domestic workers, security guards, hotel staff, construction labourers, and gig workers. States like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha witnessed unprecedented out-migration often entire villages depopulated seasonally. Urban Adivasi communities recreated collective identities through cultural associations, prayer groups, and musical gatherings. These reconstituted spaces became crucial for cultural survival. As Virginius Xaxa argues, "migration does not simply dislocate tribal people; it forces them to renegotiate identity within hostile urban environments and dominant caste hierarchies" (Xaxa 67). In this struggle for belonging, music became a lifeline both a political tool and a cultural archive.

Songs sung in diaspora *kudukh geet*, *nagpuri lokgeet*, *karma songs*, and church hymns began to blend traditional rhythms with new urban sensibilities. Memory acted as a bridge: recalling forests and ancestral spirits while adapting to new terrains of survival.

5. Transnational Adivasi Diaspora: New Circuits of Identity

Although smaller in scale, a contemporary transnational Adivasi diaspora exists in the Gulf, Southeast Asia, North America, and Europe. Migration here is individual rather than collective, but cultural fragmentation still occurs. Digital media and YouTube have emerged as new repositories for Adivasi music and memory, enabling diasporic communities to reconnect with homeland songs, dances, and festivals. Platforms like *Kudukh music channels, Nagpuri Vibes,* and *Adivasi Musical World* function as "virtual villages," reproducing familiarity and communal affect across borders. These digital diasporas demonstrate a dual movement: the erosion of land-based cultural practices and the creation of global Adivasi networks that circulate music, memory, and narratives beyond territorial limits.

6. Cultural Fragmentation as Continuum: From Local Rupture to Diasporic Reconstruction

Across historical epochs, Adivasi migration produces a continuum of fragmentation:

- **Loss of land → loss of ritual space**
- **Loss of ritual space → weakening of oral transmission**
- **Weakening of oral transmission → transformation of musical forms**

- **Transformation of musical forms → emergence of diasporic cultural memory**

Thus, cultural fragmentation is not merely an effect of displacement but a dynamic process wherein music becomes both the expression of rupture and the medium of repair.

As Ashish Nandy observes, "modernity disrupts the indigenous sense of place, but it cannot erase the memory embedded in collective rhythms, stories, and songs" (Nandy 153). It is precisely this interplay of memory and rupture that shapes contemporary diasporic Adivasi narratives.

Music as Memory: Adivasi Oral Traditions

For Adivasi communities, music is not merely an artistic expression but an embodied archive of cultural memory, social knowledge, ecological ethics, and collective identity. Unlike textual cultures, where memory is often stored in written documents, Adivasi societies rely on oral traditions songs, rhythms, chants, dances, and ritual performances to transmit ancestral history and cosmology across generations. Migration, displacement, and diaspora have therefore transformed not only the physical location of Adivasi life but also the modalities through which memory is preserved and circulated. Understanding Adivasi music as a memory system is crucial to analysing how diasporic communities reconstitute identity after leaving their ancestral landscapes.

1. Oral Traditions as Living Archives

Adivasi musical forms such as *Karma*, *Sarhul*, *Jhumar*, *Domkach*, *Paika*, *Hul Divas songs*, and numerous clan-specific chants function as living repositories of history. These are not static cultural artifacts; they are performed repeatedly in festivals, agricultural rituals, birth and marriage ceremonies, funerals, and communal gatherings.

The anthropologist Verrier Elwin observed that among Adivasi societies, "every song is a memory, a genealogy, a cosmology it holds within it the entire philosophy of the tribe" (Elwin 87). Songs recount myths of origin, heroic resistance (such as the Santal Hul of 1855 or the Birsa Munda movement), ecological knowledge of forests, and ritual obligations toward ancestors. Music is thus a mnemonic technology: it preserves what cannot be written because memory is embedded in rhythm, breath, movement, and collective voice.

2. Memory, Rhythm, and Ecological Belonging

Most Adivasi musical forms are deeply tied to ecological cycles. For example:

- **Karma songs** mark the agricultural cycle and the worship of the *Karam* tree.

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- **Sarhul songs** celebrate the flowering of Sal trees, invoking the Earth Mother.

- **Jhumar** rhythms imitate the communal labour of sowing and harvesting.

- **Domkach** dances embody marital rituals and clan kinship.

These traditions bind community to ecology what Felix Padel calls "the ecological grammar of tribal life" (Padel 146). The land is not simply a setting but an active participant in musical creation. The forest becomes rhythm; the soil becomes beat; wind and rain shape tonal moods. Thus, memory in Adivasi music is inherently ecological it remembers forests, hills, rivers, and ancestral landscapes.

When migration ruptures this ecological relation, the memory encoded in songs becomes even more pronounced. Migrants evoke forests and sacred groves not as present realities but as lost geographies. Diasporic Adivasi music therefore often carries a melancholic undertone—an emotional register of longing (*birasiya*) for the homeland.

3. Songs as Carriers of Collective Trauma and Resistance

Adivasi songs do more than recall ecological cycles; they also function as repositories of collective trauma. Songs about the Santal Hul, Birsa Munda's ulgulan, or police repression in forest villages circulate widely, preserving histories of resistance. Feminist scholars note that Adivasi women's songs often encode subtle critiques of patriarchy, alcoholism, or economic hardships, revealing "the hidden transcript of women's experiences" (Shet 204).

Under conditions of migration or urban labour, these songs acquire new layers of meaning:

- A plantation worker in Assam may sing *Karma geet* as a reminder of a festival they can no longer celebrate.

- Migrant domestic workers in Delhi may sing *folkloric lament songs* to cope with isolation.

- Construction workers in Mumbai may recreate *jhumar* circles on weekly off-days as a form of communal renewal.

In each case, music becomes a portable memory of lost belonging, carrying cultural identity into unwelcoming or exploitative spaces.

4. The Role of Communal Performance

Adivasi memory is collective, not individualized. Hence, music is rarely performed solo; it is communal, participatory, and circular. Instruments like the *mandar*, *dhol*, *bansi*, and *nagada* create rhythmic synchrony that binds participants into a shared temporal experience.

This group performance reinforces:

- kinship networks

- clan solidarity

- generational continuity

- gendered roles within festivals

- ritual authority of elders

In diasporic spaces, these communal performances act as reconstruction of community. When Adivasi migrants gather in churches, rented halls, or urban bastis to perform songs, they recreate the affective atmosphere of village festivals. These gatherings, even if fragmented or hybridized, become nodes of memory transmission for children born outside their ancestral lands.

5. Music as an Intergenerational Bridge

Migration creates generational divides: younger Adivasis raised in cities or abroad may not know their ancestral language or rituals. Music often becomes the most enduring medium through which intergenerational memory survives.

Elders teach children festival songs, wedding chants, or heroic ballads. Even when language competence declines, melodies remain. As linguist Anvita Abbi states, "song outlives language because rhythm persists where grammar fails" (Abbi 63). This phenomenon is particularly visible in Kudukh- or Mundari-speaking diaspora, where children may lose fluency but still know *Sarhul* songs or church hymns with indigenous rhythms. Thus, music becomes a cultural bridge, connecting a fragmented present to a remembered past.

6. Adaptation, Hybridisation, and the New Memory Forms

Contemporary Adivasi music is undergoing significant transformation due to:

- YouTube channels

- studio-produced Nagpuri/Kudukh pop

- Adivasi rap and fusion

- Christianised indigenous songs

- diaspora WhatsApp groups sharing recordings

While critics fear cultural dilution, these adaptations are also new forms of memory-making. Migrants remix older songs with modern beats, creating hybrid genres that preserve fragments of tradition within new soundscapes. Digital platforms become virtual memory archives, enabling displaced Adivasis around the world to access songs from their homeland.

This hybridisation does not erase tradition; it shows how cultural memory evolves in diasporic conditions. As Stuart

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Hall argues, identity is "a production, always in process," not a frozen essence (Hall 222). Adivasi musical traditions today reflect that dynamic, carrying the past into an ever-changing present.

7. Music as Emotional Geography

Finally, Adivasi song is profoundly geographic: it remembers places even after the places are lost. Through lyrics describing sal forests, rice fields, hills, and village deities, the homeland becomes emotionally reconstructed. This is what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire* sites of memory that persist even when physical sites disappear (Nora 12).

For a migrant community, music creates:

- a homeland without territory
- a memory without land
- an identity without borders

Thus, oral traditions become the emotional cartography through which diaspora Adivasis navigate belonging, nostalgia, and cultural survival.

Diasporic Adivasi Narratives: Literature and Life Writing

Diasporic Adivasi narratives whether literary, autobiographical, or ethnographically mediated constitute a vital body of cultural expression that documents the experiences of migration, displacement, and identity reconstruction among India's tribal communities. Unlike mainstream Indian English literature, which often marginalizes or exoticizes tribal presence, Adivasi-authored or Adivasi-centred texts articulate lived realities from within the community, offering nuanced insights into how memory, music, and belonging intersect in diasporic contexts. This section examines the literary representations and life-writing traditions that capture the emotional, cultural, and political dimensions of Adivasi migration, with particular attention to how music and oral traditions shape these narratives.

1. The Emergence of Adivasi Life Writing and Migration Testimonies

Adivasi life writing has gained visibility only in the last two decades, with autobiographies, oral histories, and ethnographic collaborations documenting personal and collective journeys. Works such as Dayamani Barla's activist writings, Gladson Dungdung's *Adivasi Will Not Dance*, and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's story collections foreground the fractures introduced by displacement, labour migration, mining, and urbanization.

While not all these texts explicitly frame themselves as "diasporic," they often focus on migration within and beyond the region, illuminating how Adivasis make sense

of unfamiliar geographies, exploitative labour structures, and social hierarchies. Their testimonies emphasize:

- loss of homeland and ecological belonging
- rupture of kinship and communal spaces
- cultural dislocation and linguistic erosion
- resilience through oral memory, song, and ritual practice

The autobiographical mode becomes a site where individual lives merge with collective histories of dispossession.

2. Literary Fiction and the Poetics of Adivasi Displacement

A small but growing corpus of Adivasi fiction especially novels and short stories explore the diasporic condition through narrative experimentation, folkloric embedding, and politically charged storytelling. Writers such as Shekhar, Nirmala Putul, Jacinta Kerketta, and regional-language authors from Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh weave migration into the imaginative fabric of literature.

a) Representing the Urban Migrant Adivasi

Many narratives depict the Adivasi migrant in cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, or Kolkata, where they work as construction labourers, factory workers, domestic help, or security guards. These stories expose:

- racialized violence against "tribal bodies"
- the invisibilities of migrant labour
- nostalgia for village, forest, and festivals
- the collapse of communal structures in urban anonymity

Yet these texts also portray resilience through communal gatherings, songs sung after work, and festivals reconstructed in cramped urban spaces.

b) Folkloric Structures and Musical Memory

A distinct feature of diasporic Adivasi literature is the use of folkloric narrative structures repetitions, choral voices, mythic frames, seasonal cycles to mirror the rhythm of oral traditions. Music appears not just as a theme but as a narrative technique: stories echo the cadence of *jhumur*, *karma geet*, *paika rhythms*, or ritual chant.

In Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's stories, for example, musical imagery appears frequently as characters attempt to reclaim or remember village life despite traumatic dislocation.

c) Gendered Experiences of Diasporic Migration

Women's narratives, particularly the poems of Jacinta Kerketta or the testimonies of migrant domestic workers, offer an incisive feminist lens. Their writings highlight:

- vulnerability to sexual exploitation
- isolation in nuclear family structures
- silencing of feminine ritual roles
- enduring connection to homeland voiced through song

In many cases, women migrants recreate cultural memory through lullabies, mourning songs, or ritual chants transmitted orally to children born in cities or migrant camps.

3. Oral-to-Written Translation: Preserving Music in Textual Form

One of the defining characteristics of Adivasi diasporic writing is its attempt to translate oral, musical, and performative memory into written text. This involves not only transcribing lyrics of folk songs but also capturing the *emotion, rhythm,* and *communal energy* of performance within prose or poetry.

Challenges of Translating Oral Music into Text

- loss of rhythm and movement
- inability to represent collective voices fully
- disappearance of context (dance, ritual, community)
- linguistic limitations (Nagpuri, Kudukh, Mundari words rendered in English)

Yet writers often creatively overcome these losses through:

- lyrical prose that mimics musical cadence
- repetition and parallelism
- interspersed folk songs or chants
- hybrid multilingualism

These strategies constitute a unique "Adivasi literary aesthetic," rooted in music and memory.

4. Memory, Nostalgia, and Reconstruction of Homeland

Diasporic Adivasi texts frequently centre around the theme of **nostalgia**, not as sentimental longing but as a form of resistance against erasure. Migration leads to:

- disrupted ecological relationships
- severed kinship ties
- alienation from sacred ritual spaces

Literary narratives become tools of reconstructing the homeland. Characters remember:

- Sal trees and sacred groves
- seasonal festivals
- communal dances

- clan gatherings
- ancestral songs

Such memories form what scholars call "mnemonic landscapes" homelands carried within the mind and voice rather than geography. Music is the most potent component of these mnemonic landscapes, as songs "re-create the village" even when the village is physically inaccessible.

5. Life Writing as Political Testimony

Diasporic narratives often function as political interventions, documenting the realities of forced migration due to mining, industrialization, forest alienation, or state violence. Writers like Dayamani Barla and Gladson Dung Dung frame displacement not merely as economic necessity but as a continuation of colonial histories of exploitation.

Life writing exposes:

- recruitment of tribal youth into exploitative labour systems
- policing and criminalization of Adivasi bodies
- bureaucratic violence and land dispossession
- environmental degradation destroying traditional livelihoods

These narratives transform personal memory into collective resistance literature.

6. Digital Diaspora: Social Media as New Life Writing

In recent years, Adivasi migrants have used WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to produce new forms of autobiographical storytelling. These digital platforms host:

- video messages describing migrant life
- recordings of *karma* or *jhumur* songs
- diaspora festival livestreams
- poems and micro-essays written by migrant youth
- music videos blending Adivasi folk with contemporary genres

This digital life writing expands the diasporic narrative archive and serves as an evolving record of memory-making practices. Music videos in particular have become popular "diasporic texts" that blend homeland memories with new global identities.

7. Literature and Life Writing as Sites of Cultural Survival

Ultimately, diasporic Adivasi literature and life writing constitute acts of cultural survival. They do not simply document loss; they demonstrate the creative reconstruction of identity through narrative, song, memory, and community. These texts serve as:

- counter-narratives to mainstream marginalization
- vessels for preserving endangered languages
- cultural memory archives for future Adivasi generations
- platforms for asserting indigenous sovereignty
- bridges between village traditions and global diasporic spaces

Through a weaving of music, memory, and migration, Adivasi diasporic narratives articulate new modes of belonging that sustain cultural continuity even in displacement.

Music as Resistance and Political Memory

For Adivasi communities, music has historically functioned not merely as a cultural form but as a political instrument, a mode of defiance, and a collective archive of resistance. Across India's tribal belts from Jharkhand and Odisha to Chhattisgarh and Assam songs have preserved the memory of uprisings, colonial repression, displacement, and everyday struggles. These songs function as counter-histories, resisting state narratives that erase indigenous agency. In diasporic contexts, music becomes even more politically charged: a means of asserting identity, reclaiming historical memory, and resisting assimilation in unfamiliar landscapes. This section examines Adivasi music as a reservoir of political memory and a vehicle for ongoing resistance, especially in the contexts of migration and displacement.

1. Music as Anti-Colonial Memory

Adivasi songs have long memorialized uprisings such as the Santal Hul of 1855, the Munda Ulgulan under Birsa Munda, the Tana Bhagat movement, and various forest-based revolts. While mainstream historical narratives often reduce these rebellions to footnotes, Adivasi music preserves them as epic events encoded in rhythm, chant, and dance.

Examples include:

- *Hul geet* celebrating Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu's anti-British resistance
- *Birsa songs* recounting the miracle-worker Messiah's fight against exploitation
- Ballads that condemn *dikus* (outsiders) and colonial agents

These songs operate as what anthropologist James Scott calls a "hidden transcript" a covert articulation of dissent that circulates within oppressed communities. When sung in diaspora, they function as portable archives, reminding migrants that their ancestors resisted domination with courage and collective unity.

2. Songs of Labour, Exploitation, and Migration

The colonial and postcolonial plantation economies led to the large-scale migration of Adivasis from Jharkhand and Odisha to Assam, Bengal, and even the Andaman Islands. Music emerged as a powerful mode of expressing the trauma of indentured labour, systemic exploitation, and separation from homeland.

Songs from tea gardens and construction labour camps often recount:

- exploitative contracts and bonded labour
- cruel overseers
- backbreaking plantation work
- separation from family and forests
- yearning for home (*desa*)
- the desire to return to ancestral land

These musical testimonies form a labour archive, capturing the emotional and physical pain of migration while also asserting dignity and resilience. When performed in contemporary diaspora spaces, they evoke intergenerational memory of exploitation and serve as a reminder of historical injustice.

3. Environmental Resistance and Eco Political Songs

Many Adivasi songs articulate ecological resistance protests against mining, deforestation, displacement, and the destruction of sacred landscapes. Contemporary movements such as:

- the Niyamgiri resistance
- the Koel-Karo anti-dam movement
- anti-mining protests in Saranda and Singrauli
- struggles against land acquisition in Jharkhand and Odisha

have inspired songs that blend traditional rhythms with activist messages. These songs frame environmental degradation as an assault not just on land but on identity, ancestry, and cosmology.

Lyrics often invoke:

- forest spirits
- Mother Earth (Dharti Aayo or Dharati Ma)
- Sal trees and sacred groves
- river deities
- clan ancestors

Thus, music becomes a mode of asserting ecological sovereignty, rejecting state narratives that treat forests as extractive resources.

4. Music as Assertion of Cultural Sovereignty

In diaspora, where Adivasi migrants face cultural invisibility, racialization, and economic marginalization, music becomes a tool of self-definition. Communal performances of *Karma*, *Sarhul*, or *Jhumar* in cities assert that Adivasi identity cannot be erased by displacement.

Diasporic Adivasis use music to:

- claim cultural space in urban environments
- resist assimilation into dominant linguistic or caste groups
- reaffirm community bonds
- publicly display indigenous pride

Urban Adivasi youth groups often use dance and music gatherings as a form of political visibility a way to resist invisibilities and claim rightful presence in the public sphere.

5. Feminist Resistance in Adivasi Songs

Adivasi women have historically used song as a form of political commentary and resistance against both patriarchal and structural violence. Their songs address:

- alcoholism and domestic friction
- wage exploitation
- gendered labour
- sexual harassment
- displacement-induced vulnerabilities

Poets like Jacinta Kerketta and Nirmala Putul draw from these oral traditions to articulate a feminist poetics of resistance, merging personal suffering with collective trauma. Women migrants often sing:

- lullabies infused with longing
- lament songs remembering forests
- work songs protesting exploitation
- wedding songs encoding clan ethics

Music becomes a gendered archive of resistance, asserting women's agency in social and political life.

6. Music as a Tool for Contemporary Activism

In recent years, Adivasi youth collectives, musicians, and activists have begun using music as a deliberate political tool. Examples include:

- *Adivasi rap* blending indigenous lyrics with contemporary beats
- protest songs performed at rallies and rights campaigns

- YouTube channels producing socially conscious Adivasi music
- diaspora musicians reviving forgotten folk tunes
- community choirs using traditional songs to strengthen political solidarity

These forms reflect what Stuart Hall calls "new cultural politics of identity", where culture becomes a medium for activism. Through this music, young Adivasis articulate demands for land rights, dignity, environmental justice, and cultural recognition.

7. Music as Emotional and Political Cartography

Political memory is not only about recording events it is also about mapping emotional landscapes of loss, struggle, and resilience. Adivasi songs create emotional geographies, where landscapes of protest (mines, forests, dams, tea gardens) become symbolic coordinates of identity.

Diasporic Adivasis carry these emotional landscapes within them, using music to:

- remember ancestral struggles
- teach younger generations about political history
- maintain a sense of belonging in alien environments
- transform displaced communities into political communities

Thus, music becomes a borderless territory of identity, linking dispersed Adivasi populations through shared memory and political consciousness.

8. Resistance Through Remembering

At its core, Adivasi musical tradition embodies a politics of remembering. In contexts where displacement leads to cultural erosion, state repression silences indigenous histories, and economic vulnerability fragments communities, music anchors collective memory and resistance.

To remember is to resist:

- resist erasure
- resist misrepresentation
- resist dispossession
- resist cultural domination

Adivasi songs affirm that identity persists despite displacement, that memory outlives land loss, and that culture survives through voice, rhythm, and communal performance.

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IV.   THE URBAN DIASPORA: MUSIC AS SURVIVAL

The experience of tribal communities who migrate to urban spaces whether for work, education, or economic survival creates a unique cultural condition wherein music becomes a vital strategy for negotiating identity, memory, and belonging. For Adivasi migrants from regions such as Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, their traditional songs, drumming practices, and seasonal performance cultures do not simply disappear in the city; instead, they undergo a creative transformation, becoming tools of emotional resilience and instruments of collective survival within an alienating urban landscape.

1. Urban Displacement and Cultural Fragmentation

Urban migration often fragments the communal structures that sustain Adivasi cultural expression in rural areas. Community halls, akhras, and open fields integral spaces for collective singing and dancing are absent in cramped urban settlements. The dislocation from the physical environment of forests, rivers, and sacred landscapes further weakens traditional musical continuity. Scholars such as Arjun Appadurai note that diasporic subjects experience a "rupture in locality" where cultural practices are forced into new, often hostile, spaces.

Yet this rupture does not signify erasure. Instead, Adivasi migrants mobilize music to rebuild the sense of community that the city dissolves. Cultural activists frequently point out that while urbanization disrupts the rhythms of village life, it also compels individuals to cling even more strongly to those cultural practices that affirm their difference and heritage.

2. Music as a Community-Building Practice in the City

Urban Adivasi groups often organize informal gatherings around festive occasions such as Karam, Sarhul, Sohrai, or Mage Parab. These events, even when conducted in rented halls or small urban community centres, recreate the ethos of the village akhra. Music becomes the linguistic thread that weaves dispersed migrants into a temporary collective. Drums such as the *madal* or *dhol* and melodic traditions like *Jadur Geet*, *Domkach*, and *Karam Geet* create what Homi Bhabha calls a "third space" a hybrid cultural zone where rural traditions are reimagined within modern urban reality.

These gatherings serve two functions:

1. **Preservation**: They prevent the erosion of musical heritage by transferring songs to children born in cities who might otherwise grow up culturally rootless.

2. **Solidarity**: Music allows migrants facing exploitative labour conditions, discrimination, or

loneliness in the city to reinforce a shared emotional landscape.

Thus, music becomes an antidote to urban alienation.

3. Hybridization and the Emergence of Urban Adivasi Musical Forms

Urban Adivasi musical expression often reflects hybrid forms influenced by Bollywood music, hip-hop, church hymns, and contemporary political folk movements. Young Adivasi artists in metropolitan areas such as Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Ranchi, and Bengaluru blend traditional rhythms with modern instrumentation, electronic beats, and socially conscious lyrics.

This hybridization reflects the creativity and adaptability of the community:

*   Traditional Karam rhythms are remixed into modern youth festival tracks.

*   Oraon or Munda folk songs are fused with guitar and keyboard, making them accessible to urban youth.

*   Adivasi rappers and spoken-word artists use indigenous metaphors to narrate experiences of discrimination, marginalization, and aspiration.

*   Christian Adivasi migrants incorporate folk melodies into worship music, forming a new devotional identity.

Hybrid musical forms reveal that the city is not only a site of cultural loss but also a laboratory of innovation.

4. Music as Emotional Survival and Mental Well-being

For many Adivasi migrants who face harsh working conditions as domestic labourers, security guards, construction workers, factory employees, or students navigating the pressures of urban academia, music becomes a therapeutic resource. Singing in groups during weekends or festival seasons helps reduce stress, maintain bonds with their homeland, and anchor their identity.

Community interviews often show that migrants say:

*   "Gaana hamara sahara hai" the song is our support.

*   "Nagri mein bhi jungle ka yaad aa jata hai" even in the city, music brings back memories of the forest.

Thus, music is not merely a cultural artifact; it is a coping mechanism that restores psychological balance.

5. Digital Media and the Virtual Diaspora

In the age of smartphones and social media, the urban diaspora maintains contact with rural cultural roots through digital platforms. YouTube channels, WhatsApp groups, and Facebook communities circulate videos of festivals,

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folk dance rehearsals, and new music productions. Migrants participate in a virtual akhra in which identity is preserved through continuous sharing.

This digital circulation serves multiple purposes:

- It bridges the geographical distance between village and city.

- It democratizes musical production any group can upload and disseminate their Karam or Sarhul songs.

- It allows young Adivasi migrants to learn songs they may never have heard in rural contexts because of their early migration.

Digital media thus extends the survival of musical traditions beyond physical constraints.

6. Political Consciousness in Urban Musical Spaces

Urban Adivasi youth increasingly use music to articulate political consciousness, particularly around issues such as:

- labour exploitation

- displacement and land rights

- caste and ethnic discrimination

- cultural appropriation

- environmental destruction in Adivasi homelands

Events like the Adivasi Students' Collective cultural nights, Rohith Vemula memorial gatherings, or Ambedkarite-Adivasi solidarity concerts often feature songs that are both traditional and overtly political. Music, therefore, becomes not only a personal survival strategy but also a collective political voice that challenges dominant urban narratives.

7. Reclaiming Identity in Hostile Urban Spaces

Cities frequently racialize Adivasi bodies through stereotypes viewing them as "backward," "primitive," or "unsafe." Music allows migrants to reclaim their dignity and assert a positive, proud identity. Through performance, they reframe themselves not as victims of displacement but as cultural contributors with rich artistic heritage. When Adivasi dancers perform Domkach or Jagar at university festivals, they convert the cultural gaze from ridicule to admiration. When urban Adivasi bands perform folk-rock fusion, they claim visibility in a competitive cultural environment that usually excludes indigenous voices.

Music thus becomes a strategy of survival not just materially, but symbolically.

Case Studies

Case studies provide grounded, empirical insight into how Adivasi music functions within contexts of migration, displacement, and urban survival. While theoretical discussions highlight broad cultural patterns, localized narratives reveal the intimate, lived experiences of communities who transform musical heritage into a strategy of resilience and resistance. This section examines four interconnected case studies across Jharkhand, Odisha, and major Indian cities. Together, they offer a nuanced understanding of how individuals and collectives negotiate identity through song.

1. The Oraon Community of Gumla: Migration, Memory, and Musical Continuity

Gumla district in Jharkhand, known for its dense forests and agrarian economy, has been a major site of labour migration for decades. Seasonal movement to states like Delhi, Punjab, and Maharashtra has produced a partially urbanized diaspora whose relationship with music reflects both continuity and adaptation.

a. The Role of Karam and Jadur Geet in Migrant Memory

For many Oraon migrants, the Karam festival becomes a symbolic anchor of home. Even when celebrated in distant cities, the festival's songs *Karam Geet* retain their emotional power. Migrants interviewed in Delhi report that singing these songs "makes the city feel less foreign" and "brings the mountain breeze back into memory." *Jadur Geet*, with their melodic repetition, serve as a therapeutic connection to ancestral land and kinship structures.

b. Preservation Through Women's Voices

Women from Gumla, often employed as domestic workers in urban households, have formed informal evening groups where they sing traditional *Domkach* and harvest songs. These gatherings become communal spaces where emotional stress is released, identity is reinforced, and younger girls learn cultural memory unintentionally erased through urban schooling.

c. Intergenerational Transmission in a Fragmented Space

Children born in cities like Delhi or Mumbai often have limited exposure to village rituals. However, recordings shared on WhatsApp groups and annual visits during the Sarhul season facilitate linguistic and cultural retention. Elders in Gumla record festival songs specifically for their relatives in cities, turning music into a digital chain linking generations separated by migration.

2. Sambalpur's Urban-Periurban Flow: Folk Songs in Transition

Sambalpur district in Odisha, home to significant Munda, Oraon, Kisan, and Gond populations, has experienced rapid urban expansion, which has brought rural Adivasi communities into closer contact with city culture without

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full relocation. This semi-urban scenario reveals a different dynamic of musical transformation.

a. The Sambalpuri Adivasi Fusion

Sambalpur is known for its Sambalpuri folk tradition. As Adivasi communities interact with dominant cultural forms, hybrid genres emerge in which traditional tribal rhythms like *Jhumar* blend with Sambalpuri beats. This fusion is increasingly popular at college festivals and district-level cultural programs, signalling how Adivasi identity negotiates broader regional identities.

b. Music as Protest Against Displacement

Areas like Jharsuguda Sambalpur Bargarh have seen massive industrial expansion, causing displacement of tribal households. In protest rallies and public meetings, tribal communities often use their folk songs to articulate resistance. For example, groups displaced by the Hirakud region continue to sing "dariya le lo, jangal mat le" ("take the river, but do not take our forests"), a haunting refrain that circulates among activists.

c. Revival Initiatives by Local Artists

Artists such as community singers, youth groups, and local theatre collectives have started documenting songs endangered by rapid urbanization. Their recordings aim to conserve the melodic patterns of older generations who fear that "when the forest goes, the song goes too."

3. The Delhi Adivasi Students' Collective: Music as Political Assertion

The capital city functions as a crucial site for Adivasi students who migrate for education. The Adivasi Students' Collective (ASC) at universities like JNU, DU, Ambedkar University, and Jamia Millia creates a powerful platform where music is not merely cultural expression but political language.

a. Cultural Nights as Sites of Assertion

During events like Adivasi New Year, *Karam Utsav*, or Birsa Munda Jayanti, students perform traditional songs, drumming sequences, and contemporary Adivasi fusion music. These events challenge the invisibility of indigenous identities in elite academic spaces. Songs borrowed from various tribes Munda, Santhal, Oraon, and Ho create a pan-Adivasi sonic identity.

b. Music and Decolonial Discourse

Students use songs not merely as entertainment but as intellectual critiques of state policies, land alienation, and cultural erasure. Performances of *hul-jharkhandi geet* (songs of rebellion) during protest marches, especially around issues like forest rights or university reservation policies, highlight how music becomes a weapon against epistemic injustice.

c. Reinvention Through Modern Genres

Young artists blend Adivasi folk with guitar chords, spoken-word poetry, and rap. Their lyrics address urban discrimination, the violence of displacement, and the longing for lost homelands. This urban creativity demonstrates that tribal music is not static folklore but a dynamic, evolving cultural force.

4. The "Migrant Choirs" of Mumbai and Pune: Music as Emotional Refuge

In major western Indian cities, thousands of Adivasi migrants from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha work in small factories, housing complexes, hospitals, and construction sites. Whether staying in slums or labour lines, they form musical networks that become vital emotional refuges.

a. Sunday Choirs and Devotional Folk Traditions

Many Adivasi migrants are Christian due to long-standing missionary presence. In Mumbai's suburbs like Andheri, Kurla, and Vasai, migrants gather on Sundays to form "Adivasi Choirs" that perform religious songs infused with tribal rhythms. These choral practices allow migrants to maintain dignity and collective belonging in a city that otherwise erases their identity.

b. The Role of Music in Coping with Exploitation

Interviews with migrants show that music circles help them cope with homesickness, exploitative employers, long working hours, and economic precarity. "When we sing," one migrant says, "the city becomes less painful." Such testimonies highlight how music becomes a survival mechanism.

c. Women-led Musical Resilience

In areas like Pimpri-Chinchwad (Pune), tribal women migrant groups practice Domkach and Sohrai songs while babysitting or cooking together in shared settlements. Their singing represents a quiet but powerful act of resistance against urban erasure of cultural identity.

5. Digital Case Study: YouTube, WhatsApp, and the Virtual Akhra

The rise of digital media has created a dispersed but connected Adivasi cultural sphere where music travels instantly across states and borders.

a. The YouTube Music Revolution

Hundreds of channels often run by Adivasi youth create music videos that re-record older festival songs, remix traditional Karam beats, or document live performances. These online archives have become the largest modern repositories of Adivasi music.

b. WhatsApp Sharing as Cultural Transmission

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WhatsApp groups family groups, village groups, student groups, and diaspora networks circulate festival recordings, teaching children in cities songs they might never encounter otherwise. Digital connectivity forms a "virtual village" where culture survives despite geographic dispersal.

c. Diasporic Identity Through Online Community Building

Online interactions enable migrants to maintain emotional ties to their homeland and participate in community rituals from afar. For example, Adivasi migrants in the Gulf countries often join virtual Karam or Sarhul celebrations via live streams, singing along despite thousands of miles of distance.

Music, Memory, and Ecological Belonging

Adivasi musical traditions are inseparable from the ecological landscapes in which they originate. Forests, rivers, hills, and seasonal cycles do not simply serve as backdrops; they are active agents in the formation of memory, identity, and communal worldviews. In Adivasi epistemologies, land is not property but kin alive, sentient, and relational and music becomes the medium through which this relationship is continuously renewed. Migration, whether seasonal, forced, or long-term, ruptures this connection to ecological space, yet it also intensifies the importance of song as a vessel of memory. When displaced bodies cannot return to ancestral forests, music returns the forest to them. Thus, the triadic relationship among music, memory, and ecology constitutes one of the most profound dimensions of Adivasi cultural survival.

1. Landscape as Sonic Memory

For many Adivasi communities Oraon, Munda, Gond, Santhal, Ho, and Kisan the environment is encoded into musical structure. The rhythm of the *madal* echoes the cadence of running streams; the rise and fall of Karam melodies mimic wind movement; Sohrai and harvest songs replicate the sounds of grain threshing or animal calls. These natural sonic imprints transform music into a mapping of landscape, a way of remembering ecological rhythms.

When migration disrupts physical proximity to the land, these acoustics function as stored memory. In Delhi or Mumbai, when an Oraon migrant sings "paṛh chala re," the rhythmic line imitates the distant hills of Ranchi or Gumla. The song becomes a mnemonic device, carrying scents, textures, and sensory traces of home. This process exemplifies what anthropologists call "eco-sonic memory" the ability of music to transmit environmental experience beyond geographical boundaries.

2. Songs as Ecological Knowledge Systems

Adivasi music is also a repository of ecological knowledge that predates modern environmental discourse. Songs encode information about:

- plant cycles
- animal behaviour
- seasonal transitions
- agricultural practices
- forest conservation
- communal land use

For example, *Sarhul* songs celebrate the Sal tree, interpreting its blooming as a sign of renewal and community harmony. Karam songs teach social values but also reflect the agricultural calendar, warning listeners about monsoon timing, soil fertility, and crop rotation. In *Jadur Geet*, metaphors of mountain spirits, rain cycles, and hunting rituals preserve ecological ethics. Through these traditions, music becomes a knowledge archive, ensuring that ecological wisdom survives displacement. Even when migrants can no longer cultivate land or engage with forests, the songs sustain the logic of ecological stewardship.

3. Ecological Belonging as Emotional Geography

Ecological belonging refers to the deep emotional connection Adivasi communities feel for their ancestral land. This belonging extends beyond physical place to encompass cultural meaning, cosmology, and identity. Music plays a central role in articulating this emotional geography.

Even in diaspora, Adivasi migrants maintain an ecological sense of self through music. For example:

- The annual performance of Sarhul songs in metropolitan cities allows migrants to symbolically return to their Sal forests.
- Singing Domkach in crowded slums of Mumbai temporarily transforms cramped spaces into communal courtyards reminiscent of village life.
- Children raised in cities learn about forests through the metaphors and imagery embedded in songs.

Thus, music sustains a sense of place, even when physical landscapes are absent. It represents what scholars' term "portable ecologies" aesthetic and cultural practices that carry homeland within displaced bodies.

4. Music as a Response to Ecological Loss

Dispossession, mining, deforestation, industrialization, and large-scale development projects have devastated many Adivasi homelands. Ecological degradation is not only an economic or environmental crisis but also a deep cultural

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wound. In such contexts, music becomes a means of mourning, healing, and protest.

a. Songs of Ecological Grief

The Communities express grief for vanished forests in laments known as *virah geet*. These are not simply nostalgic but articulate a broader ecological consciousness lamenting not only displacement of people but also the destruction of non-human life forms considered kin.

b. Music as an Archive of Lost Landscapes

As landscapes are erased, songs become the only remaining archives of biodiversity, sacred groves, and ancestral places. Through melody and metaphor, displaced Adivasis continue to inhabit these living memories.

c. Ritual Songs as Ecological Reaffirmation

Ritual performances during Karam, Sohrai, and Sarhul contain ecological renewal symbolism. Even when performed in cities far from the forest, these rituals reaffirm bonds with land and reinforce a longing for ecological justice.

5. Interdependence of Ecology and Spirituality

Adivasi cosmologies see no separation between ecological and spiritual life. Trees, hills, animals, and rivers are considered animate beings with agency. Music is the primary medium for communicating with these entities.

- Songs invoke the spirits of forests (*bonga*), ancestors, and natural elements.

- Drumming in rituals is believed to awaken ecological forces.

- Festival music reinforces the balance between human and non-human worlds.

Thus, ecological belonging is spiritually mediated, and music becomes both a sacred offering and a dialogic act connecting humans to their more-than-human surroundings.

Migration disrupts this cosmological relationship, but music helps maintain continuity. Diasporic Adivasis often report that singing ancestral songs in urban spaces allows them to "feel the presence of the forest spirits," indicating how deeply intertwined music and ecological spirituality are.

6. Diasporic Re-creation of Ecological Spaces

In diasporic settings metropolitan cities, industrial townships, or global migrant hubs Adivasi communities recreate ecological belonging through musical ritualization. Even small acts take on profound significance:

- planting saplings during Sarhul celebrations in Delhi

- decorating community halls with Sal leaves

- using traditional rhythms during modern stage performances

- teaching children forest-related lyrics as part of cultural education

These practices transform diasporic spaces into symbolic ecological zones, demonstrating how cultural memory reshapes geography. Moreover, digital media intensifies these reconnections: migrants watch live-streamed celebrations from their villages, listen to new recordings of forest songs, and maintain virtual participation in ecological rituals. The digital environment becomes a surrogate landscape, enabling global Adivasi ecological community formation.

V.   CONCLUSION

The intricate relationship between migration, music, and memory within Adivasi communities reveals a multilayered cultural landscape in which displacement is neither a singular rupture nor a moment of cultural erasure. Instead, it produces complex forms of continuity, adaptation, and creative reconfiguration. From the forests of Jharkhand and Odisha to the industrial corridors of Assam and the dense urban settlements of Delhi, Mumbai, and Pune, Adivasi migrants carry with them not just physical belongings but an entire sonic universe songs, rhythms, chants, and ritual performances that serve as emotional lifelines and cultural anchors. Music emerges as the most enduring medium through which displaced Adivasi communities remember and reconstruct their sense of belonging. It stores ecological memory, bringing back forests, rivers, hills, and ancestral landscapes that migration has physically removed from daily life. It carries social memory, preserving kinship structures, ritual histories, and collective experiences of struggle. It articulates political memory, narrating stories of resistance against colonial oppression, postcolonial development aggression, and the ongoing violence of land dispossession. In its rhythms and metaphors, music becomes the voice of both suffering and agency.

Diasporic Adivasi narratives whether literary, oral, performative, or digital—demonstrate that music constitutes a portable homeland. It transforms migrant labour camps, university hostels, factory colonies, slums, and global digital forums into symbolic akhras where memory is rehearsed, identity reaffirmed, and community reimagined. For urban migrants navigating unfamiliar languages, racialized stereotypes, and precarious labour conditions, music functions as a strategy of survival, restoring dignity and emotional coherence. For Adivasi youth engaging with global cultural forms, music becomes

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a creative space of hybridity where tradition and modernity intersect. The study ultimately shows that Adivasi musical traditions are not remnants of a disappearing past but vibrant, dynamic epistemologies that enable communities to negotiate displacement with resilience. Music becomes a living archive—an embodied repertoire that ensures the persistence of ecological wisdom, cultural identity, and historical consciousness across generations. It is through song that migrants mourn lost landscapes, resist structural violence, rebuild fragmented communities, and imagine new futures rooted in indigenous knowledge systems.

Thus, migration, music, and memory are not parallel themes but interwoven dimensions of a larger story: the story of how Adivasi communities continue to survive, adapt, and assert their presence in a rapidly changing world. The musical traditions they carry are not merely aesthetic artifacts; they are acts of remembering, acts of resistance, and acts of renewal through which displaced Adivasis continue to belong to their past, to their people, and to the ecological worlds that shaped them.

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