



The Evolution of an Identity

From the traditional Kolhu to the modern cabinet: Tracing the mythological origins, shifting varnas, and political ascent of the Teli community across the Indian subcontinent.

Tailik (Sanskrit)

The ancient root word meaning 'oil' or 'extracted from seeds' (sesame/mustard). Over millennia, Tailik evolved into the colloquial Teli, defining the traditional occupational group responsible for pressing and trading oil.

Ancient Era

Traditional oil pressers utilizing the ox-driven Kolhu.

Medieval Era

Wealthy temple patrons, philanthropists, and pan-subcontinent merchants.

Modern Era

Highly diversified demographics wielding significant influence in modern Indian democracy.

A Mythological Origin Map

4. The Sacred Invention

To compensate the grieving merchant, Shiva invents the Kolhu (a mortar and pestle mechanism) and teaches him to extract oil from seeds. The merchant becomes the first Teli.



1. The Divine Creation

Parvati, lacking a door guard, creates Ganesha from her body's essence to guard the southern gate.



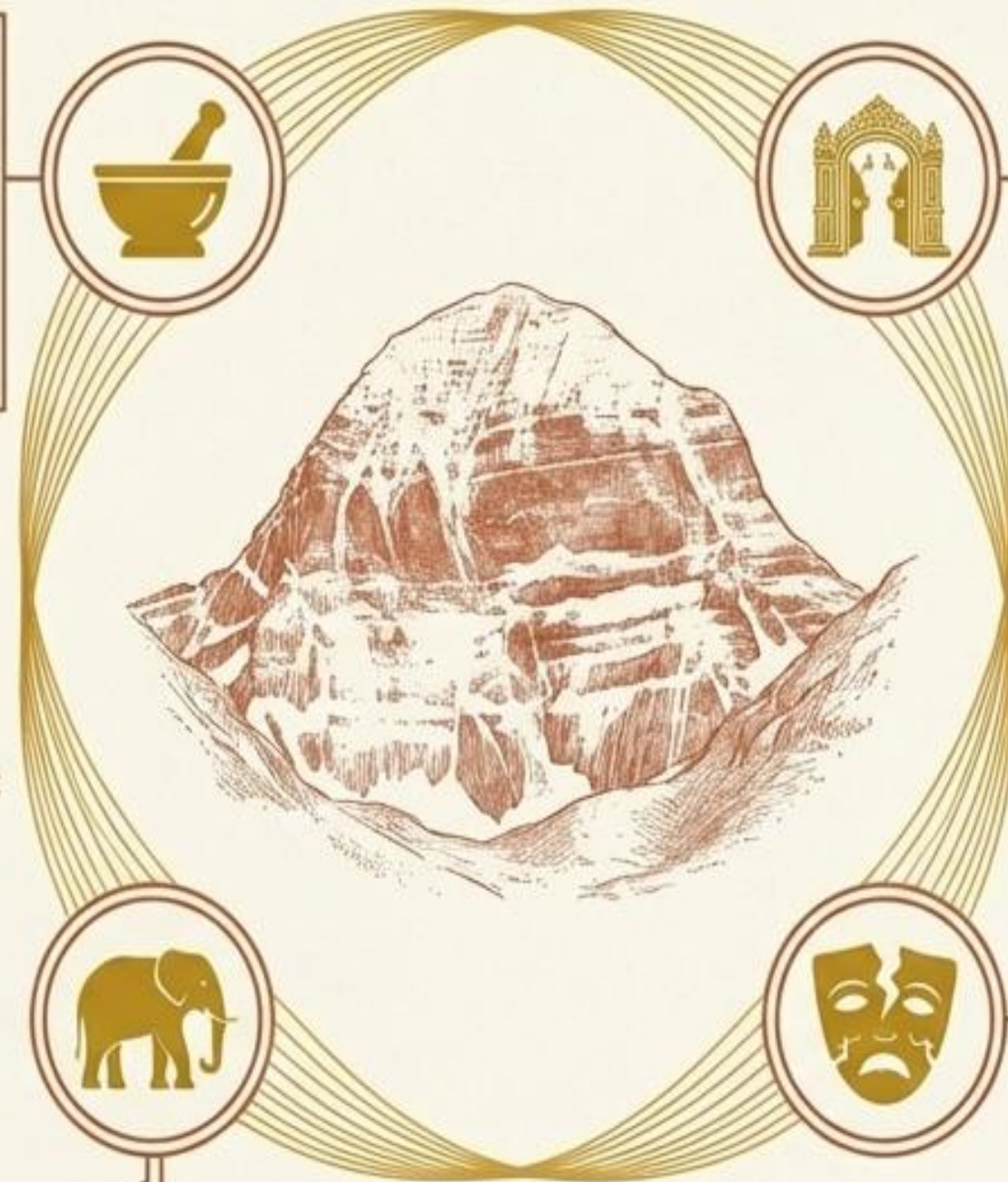
3. The Elephant's Sacrifice

To revive Ganesha, Shiva severs the head of a south-facing elephant belonging to a resting merchant. Ganesha is restored, but the merchant weeps for his lost livelihood.



2. The Tragic Misunderstanding

Shiva returns, is denied entry by Ganesha, and beheads him in a rage, reducing the head to ashes.



The Sacred Geometry of the Kolhu

The Jhapad (The Blindfold)

An eye-covering for the ox. This is not an act of cruelty, but of deep compassion—designed to prevent the animal from suffering dizziness while walking in continuous circles.



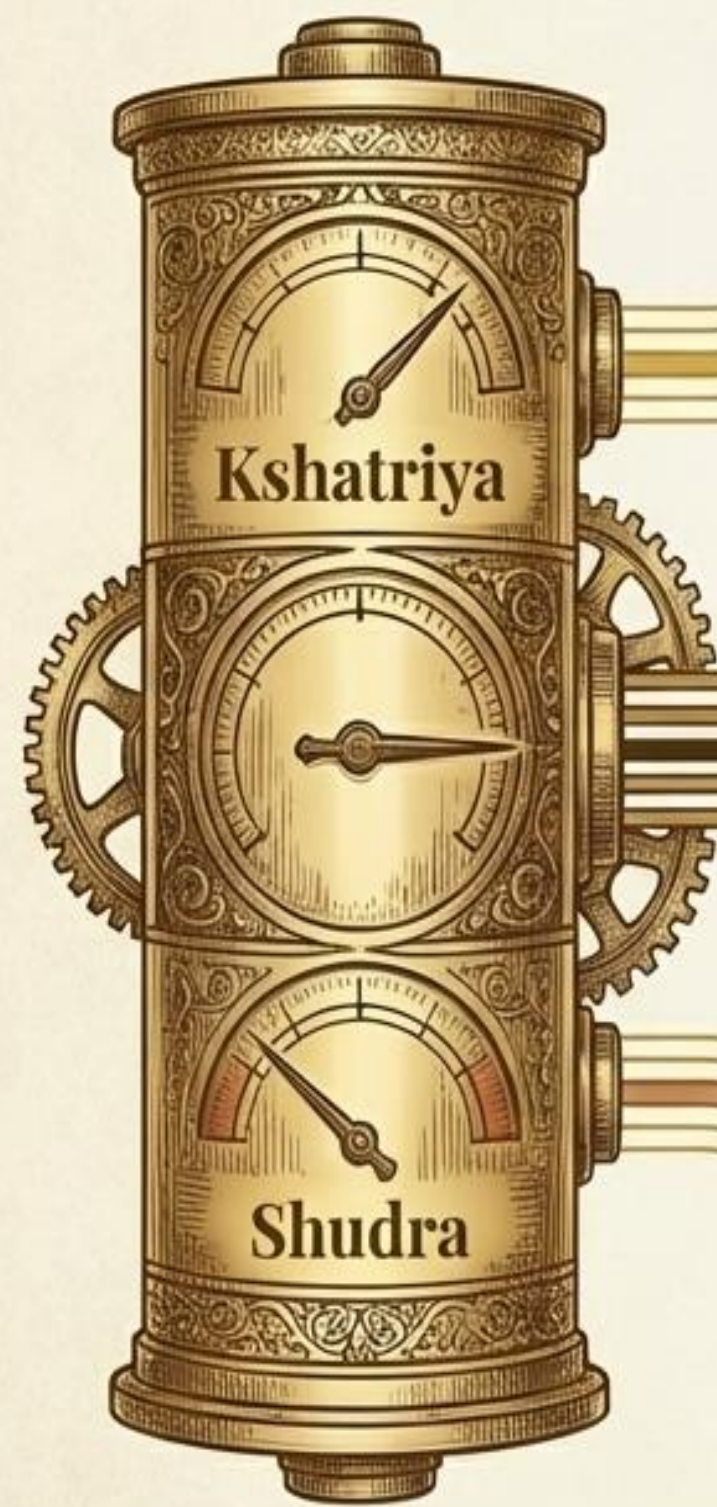
The Living Engine

The ox itself is treated with reverence, historically viewed by the community as a manifestation of the divine, treated like a son rather than a mere beast of burden.

The Monday Closure

A strict community tradition of halting all oil-pressing operations on Mondays as a mark of devotion to Lord Shiva, the mythological inventor of the Kolhu.

The Identity Paradox: A Varna Fluctuation Spectrum



Propelled by historical claims of Rajput descent (e.g., Rathore Rajputs fleeing Mughal persecution and hiding their identity by pressing oil).



Vaishya - Primary Status
Anchored by their immense wealth, trade networks, and temple philanthropy as a core merchant class (Banias/Guptas).

Pushed down temporarily by shifting religious paradigms in regions like Gujarat, where the rise of Jainism and strict Ahimsa (non-violence) led later Smritikars to classify the crushing of live seeds as a violent act.



Tracing Kshatriya Lineage & Societal Mobilization



The Gupta Connection

Historical Anchor: Accounts by the 7th-century Chinese traveler Xuanzang.

The Claim: Xuanzang identified King Baladitya (builder of the Nalanda Stupa) as belonging to the Tailadhak dynasty, connecting the Teli to the imperial Gupta lineage.

Modern Impact: North Indian Teli organizations proudly utilize the Gupta royal insignia (the Garuda) on their community flags today.

The Census Mobilization

Sl. No.	Date	Ledger name.	District of natal.	Amount in Rs.		Status of community of the tenant.	Status of community of the tenant.				Remarks.	
				1.	2.		3.	4.	5.	6.		
1011		Tamari's Rathore	Balwanter	50	100	3						

1911 Census: The community officially adopts the surname Rathore to solidify Rajput claims, styling themselves Rathore Teli.

3/1027		Rathore	Balwanter	5	10	2						
4/1020		Rathore	Balwanter	3		1						

1931 Census: The identity shifts further upward as they mobilize to be classified as Rathore Vaishya, heavily promoted by Arya Samaj leaders through publications like *Telivarna Prakash*.

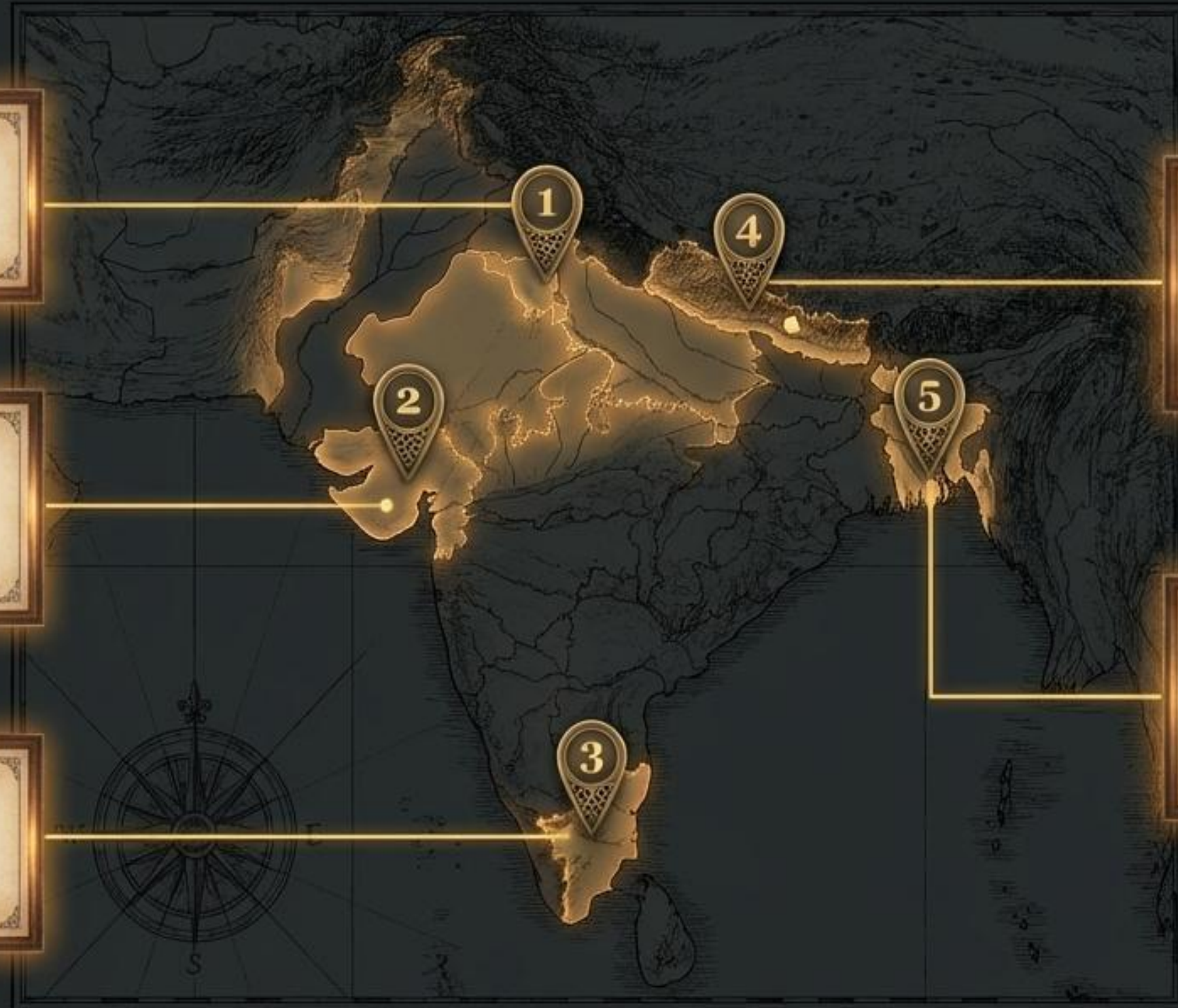
60/1110		Rathore	Balwanter	3		1						
60/1131		Tamari's	Balwanter	210	21	1						

Identity Map of the Subcontinent

North & Central India:
Known heavily as Sahu,
Rathore, and Gupta.

Gujarat: Known as
Ghanchi (associated with
the Modh Bania merchant
community).

South India: Known as
Chettiar, Ganiga, and
Vanniyar.



Nepal: Constituting 1.4% of
the national population,
highly concentrated in the
Madhesh Province (over 5%).

Pakistan & Bangladesh:
Present as significant Muslim
Teli communities maintaining
traditional trade networks.



The Pan-Asian Nomenclature Matrix

Region	Primary Surnames	Religious Affiliation	Historical Note
North/Central (UP, MP, Bihar)	Sahu, Gupta, Rathore	Hindu	High concentration of merchant/temple builders.
West (Gujarat, Rajasthan)	Ghanchi, Modi, Gandhi	Hindu / Jain	Deeply tied to the Modh Bania merchant traditions.
South (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka)	Chettiar, Ganiga	Hindu	Historically integrated into temple economies.
Islamic Assimilation (Pakistan, North India)	Malik, Roshandaar, Sheikh Mansoori	Sunni Muslim	Descendants of converts who maintained the oil trade.
Judaic Assimilation (Maharashtra)	Shanivar Teli (Bene Israel)	Jewish	Known for strictly abstaining from oil pressing on the Sabbath (Saturday).

The Temple Economy Loop



Monuments in Stone: The Legacy of Philanthropy

Teli Samaj



The Teli Ka Mandir (Gwalior Fort)

A towering 9th-century masterpiece of the Gurjara-Pratihara era. Financed and constructed by a powerful syndicate of Teli oil merchants, standing as an enduring symbol of their immense medieval wealth and political clout.



Baba Nayak Dham (Uttarakhand)

A prominent regional pilgrimage site. Revered as the primary Kuldevta (ancestral deity) site for the community, anchoring their spiritual history and devotional roots in the northern mountains.

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Historical Giants: Four Pillars of Impact



Maa Karma (Spirituality)

A legendary devotee of Lord Jagannath. Legend states the deity Himself visited her home to eat her Khichdi, a tradition honored to this day at the Puri Jagannath Temple.



Bhamashah (War Finance)

The ultimate patriot. He donated his vast, accumulated merchant wealth to Maharana Pratap, allowing the Rajput king to rebuild his army and fight the Mughal Empire.



Santaji Jagnade (Literature/Bhakti)

A vital figure in Maharashtra's Bhakti movement. He meticulously recorded and preserved the divine Abhangs (poetry) of the great Sant Tukaram.



Hemu Vikramaditya (Administration)

A medieval general and administrator of modest origins who successfully captured the throne of Delhi, becoming one of the last Hindu kings to rule the capital.



The Modern Kingmakers: Political Ascension



Historical Firsts

The political legacy also extends to R.K. Shanmukham Chetty Cetty (Independent India's first Finance Minister) and descendants of Mahatma Gandhi (who trace lineage to the Modh Bania/Ghanchi tradition).

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The Reservation Landscape Matrix

National Status

Classified under the Central Other Backward Class (OBC) list, forming a massive, highly organized voting bloc represented by groups like the Akhil Bharatiya Teli Sahu Mahasabha.

Bihar (The EBC Shift)

In 2015, CM Nitish Kumar shifted the Teli (constituting 2.81% of the state population) into the Extremely Backward Class (EBC) category, a major political maneuver altering local power dynamics against upper castes.

Maharashtra

A dominant demographic force and highly courted voting bloc across the entire Vidarbha region.




Jharkhand

Currently classified as OBC, but positioned at the absolute center of a massive, ongoing state-wide conflict demanding Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Jharkhand: The Friction of Demographics



Demographic Belts

-  **Eastern Belt** (Singhbhum to Deoghar): Kurmi dominant.
-  **Western Belt** (Lohardaga to Palamu): Teli / Vaishya dominant.
-  **Central/Southern Belt:** Adivasi (Tribal) dominant.

Friction Point (The ST Demand)

The Teli (claiming 18-22% of the population) demand Scheduled Tribe (**ST**) status to secure representation in reserved constituencies. In 2018, the government's attempt to include them sparked the 'Adivasi Akrosh Maharally', a massive protest by existing tribal groups pushing back against Teli and Kurmi inclusion.

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The Blueprint of Resilience





The wheel never stopped turning.

From the **mythological sacrifice** of the **Kolhu** to the halls of **modern parliaments**, the **Teli identity is a masterclass in adaptation**. They are not defined by a single trade, but by their unbroken ability to press raw history into the oil of **prosperity, power, and enduring legacy**.