

STUDY ON CONCEPTS, DISTRIBUTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF TRIBALS IN INDIA

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Abstract: The tribal's are an integral part of the Indian population. Their isolated ecology, economy, society, religious belief and centuries long association with the Indian society. The study of tribal's, has been one of the oldest of anthropological concerns. In fact, the genesis of anthropology can be traced to the attempts, made by European colonists, travellers, explorers, and missionaries to understand and describe the ways of life of the native people they found in India. Tribal community have been facing socio-economic problems since ages. Even after the government schemes introduced for the upliftment of tribal educational and economy values, we don't see much improvement in many parts of the country, There are special provisions made in the constitution for the STs, reservation of seats in all sectors, special provisions for the North East tribes, Today many tribe have converted their religion to live peaceful in the urban society. Tribes have been victim of racial and ethnical discrimination, they are becoming landless day by day due to rapid forest been cut down for mining purpose followed by their primitive agriculture practice , they are victims of a number of health issues, the government must introduce schools for tribes in their region , followed by provide them basic forest rights and forest management authority , they help in the Ayurveda development in the country, there knowledge on medical plant is very impressive because of their dependent on traditional products and herbs for health care and living.

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Introduction:

Tribal across the world has remained isolated from the mainstream society. There have their own culture, language and religion, they don't prefer the interference of other community or government. They live in the forest or near small islands, they have long hairs and have painted their bodies with some kind of symbol, there are uncountable tribes in the world, and this each tribe have a different language. Africa is home to maximum number of tribal communities in the world where people speak more than 4000 languages, 4000 tribal communities, they depend on nature for their living, still practice hunting and gathering as a means to feed themselves, there is no school among the tribes, they believe in magic and consider it to be their religion, Tribes are exogamy and endogamy, they marry among their groups or outside their groups. The have clans and made tribal people have the same ancestors. Every tribal have their own dance form and festivals they depend on herbal and tradition forms of medicine to cure themselves and create their own medicine which is even effective , the knowledge on medical plant and other herbs are well known to the tribal community than any other society . They live in an isolated atmosphere and don't prefer to change their way of living and come and be a part of the modern society If anyone tries to come they start killing them or many island and forest have been declared dangerous and people are prohibited to enter those regions , as certain tribes live their which are highly dangerous . There have different kind of weapons

and long hairs. No clue about the outside world. During this COVID-19 time, they are tribe who are unaware of the virus and hardly can people enter those regions. The tribal people are among the people who are most vulnerable to proper health care services, even if a service try to reach out to them, they don't prefer and reject it. With deforestation taking place many tribal have been losing their home and there is loss of bio diversity , there are tribes that worship the sun, earth , moon , animals , fire and rain, all the tribes have different believe, some consider the death of a member as a positive sign , where other perform thousand rituals , they believe in ghost, spirit. Many tribes communities today have come out of their homes and are shifting to urban areas, many live in the rural areas also The government across different countries are trying to bring tribes into the mainstream society and provide them with maximum benefits, sociologist have been working on the tribal society, understanding their behavior and culture, As the language we speak, they don't understand and vice versa, interacting with them becomes difficult.

Concept of Tribe

In contemporary India, the word 'tribe' has thus little cultural or social implications. It has become the watchword of the political consciousness of a particular group of a people in the country. Like caste consciousness or regional consciousness, tribal consciousness is fast developing to be a political tool which has become symbolic of privileged treatment,

separatist tendencies and in places a barrier to national integration.

The tribal as man is simple, humble and possesses a great amount of feeling for his co-villagers and kings man in particular and community members in general. They grow in the intimacy of the social atmosphere of his community. His close association with nature inspires him to lead a carefree life. They feel pleasure in roaming about hills, forests and fields. Nature makes him intimate with the environment. He often meets friends and visits his own relations on different festive occasions and in periodical new relations and association with people.

A series of concept have been offered by the earlier Anthropologists like Morgan, Tylor, Perry, Rivers, and Lowie to cover a social group known as tribe. These definitions are, by no means complete and these professional Anthropologists have not been able to develop a set of precise indices to classify groups as 'tribal' or 'non tribal'. The term generally refers to territorial communities living in the relative isolation in foot-hills and forests.

Many attempts have been made in anthropology to define and characterise on 'tribe', but there is no consensus on defining characteristics. Territorially race, economy animism, political autonomy etc have been variously used. In fact it appears that the dozens of definition and characteristics of 'tribe' floating around in anthropological literature are as diverse as the field situation encountered by those proposing the definitions.

Purely for sake of classification and enumeration, the British Government in India introduced the category of 'tribe' (with occasional qualifying prefixes like 'hill and jungle', 'aboriginal', 'indigenous') to designate these people. The word tribe had been hitherto used by European historians to refer to such distinctive groups of people as the Gauls or the Anglo-Saxons in Europe and such autonomous political groups as Lichchivi, Mulla, Yaudheya and Khasa in ancient India, or such wide descent groups as the tribes of Israel or the Arab tribes in Western Asia. Social Anthropologists like Rivers were using the word in reference to the people of Melanesia where each hill top or valley sheltered groups of people who were politically autonomous and, as if to show that, were constantly at war with each other. It is significant to note that unaffected by its usage in India, British Social Anthropologists like Radcliffe-Brown, Evans Pritchard, Fortes and Nadel have used the word tribe to refer an autonomous political unit which lives on its own territory and possesses its own distinctive way of life.

In the Indian context, efforts have been made to find common denominators if not a common definition of the word tribe. The Commissioner for scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes in his report

for the year 1952 has listed eight such common features. These are:

- They live away from the civilized world in the inaccessible part lying in the forests and hills,
 - They belong to either one of the three stocks- Negritos, Australoids or Mongoloids.
 - They speak the same tribal dialect,
- Profess primitive soul known as "Animism" in which the worship of ghosts and spirits is the most important element,
- Follow primitive occupations such as gleanings, hunting, and gathering of forest product,
 - They are largely carnivorous or flesh and meat eaters,
 - They live either naked or semi-naked using tree-barks and leaves for clothing, and
 - They have nomadic habits and love for drink and dance.

Let us start with the orthodox definition of tribe as revealed in the 'Dictionary of Anthropology' which states: "Tribe is a social group, usually with a definite are, dialect, cultural homogeneity, and unifying social organization". It may include several subs – groups, such as sibs or villages. It may and may have common ancestor as well as presiding deities. The families or small communities making up a tribe, are linked through economic, social, religious, or blood ties i.e. kingship bondage.

A tribe is a group of people, usually staying in jungle areas, in a small locality, absolutely illiterate poor, hardly clad in clothes, usually dark and frail, fully living within their own community whose marriage always takes place among themselves, engaged in hunting and searching for roots, shoots and fruits as their veg food and roasted animals as non-veg food, completely oblivious of the country's political and economic condition, resisting all efforts of development and have a strong dislike for strangers and educated modern community.

- Dr Rivers added the criteria of 'having single government and acting together for such common purposes as warfare'
- Prof. Perry thinks that 'a common dialect and a common territory 'should be treated as the criteria for labelling a group as tribe.
- Prof S.C. Dube has remarked that "Partly because of the isolation and partly because of their limited world view, characterized by lack of historical depth and an overall tradition – orientation, they are integrated themes and special cultural focus give them a separate cultural identity and they often possess latent and manifest value attitude, and motivational system which are

remarkably different from those of the other people”.

- The Tata Institute of Social Science has made following comment on this issue. “A tribe could be a collection of families without the existence of community in the scientific sense of the word. A tribe as a social organization is able to decide upon its own function or the need or otherwise of independence between its different components, units or groups. Economic backwardness is very relative.
- Prof. S.C. Sinha has tried to define the category ‘tribe’ as essentially pre literate groups living in relative isolation in hills and forests or in the plains skirting the forests who are apparently outside the threshold of ‘Brahmanic hierarchic civilisation’.

On the basis of certain universal characteristics contained in various definitions, Majumdar (1958) proposed a definition of tribe claiming that some of it would define a tribe anywhere.

“A tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialization of function ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect, recognising social distance with other tribes, caste, without any social obloquy attaching to them as it does in the caste structure following tribal traditions, belief and customs illiberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration.”

In Indian context, too, the term is a British legacy. They classified as tribe such people who were beyond the pale of Hindu Varna system occupied inaccessible hills and forests and were of dark complexion. Neither Hindu nor any other Indian language has a corresponding term with exact connotation as ‘tribe’. This in itself is a proof enough that Indian language have never conceptually set these people apart from the rest.

It was perhaps a well-meaning act on the part of our Constitution framers in 1947-50 to incorporate statutory guarantees of privileges to our backward castes and tribes. The principle no doubts were good. But the way it has been administered by the government and exploited by vested interests – both foreign and Indian – has led to the present situation of unrest in our tribal areas. On the one hand, we have failed to give to our ‘tribal’ brother’s education, health education, health and the basic necessities of comfortable existence. On the other, we have made them dependent upon doles which they have now come to regard as their birth right by virtue of their belongings to a community rather than because of their techno-economic backwardness.

Tribes distribution in India

India is home to one of the largest number of tribes in the world. Although there are 537 tribal communities in India, only 258 communities have been notified as tribes. STs as a category of India’s population, constituting 8 percent of her’ total population (Census, 2001), is “varied in terms of socio – economic and political development (Sharma, 2007). Tribes in India are not a homogeneous group as their culture and values are distinct from each other. The states of Maharashtra and Orissa share the largest number of tribes in India. There is high variation in the spatial distribution of tribes in India. Almost 82 percent of the tribes live in western and central states where only 11 percent of them are located in southern states. Regarding the growth rate of tribal population, it is obvious that the number of tribe has been growing over the years although the rate of growth of tribe population has been less than that of the general population.

Identification of Tribes

Added to this is the administrative problem of the identification of tribes for purpose of scheduling and consequent grant of privileges guaranteed to the Scheduled tribes under the Constitution. Well-meaning, the constitution framers guaranteed certain privileges to the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes in matters of representation, services, education, and so on. Before Independence the general tendency was for ‘lowly’ castes and tribes to make effort to elevate their social position and try to get recognition (formally from the Government at the time of the decennial censuses) as ‘upper castes.

Definite Common Topography/ Geographical isolation or semi-isolation

Tribal people live within a definite topography and it is a common place for all the members of a particular tribe occupying that region. In the absence of a common but definite living place, the tribal’s will lose other characteristics of a tribal life, like common language, way of living and community sentiment etc.

Ethnic distinctiveness from the national society

Taking a lead from Guha Racial classification on Indian tribal

A) The Negrito group: The characteristics physical features of this group are very short, pigmy stature, dark black skin colour, woolly and frizzly hair, broad nose, dolichocephalic head. The Andamanese, Onge, (of the Andaman’s), the Kadar, Urails of South India belong to this physical type.

B) The Proto – Australoid group: This group is characterised by medium stature dark brown skin colour, wavy and curly hair, thick lip, broad nose, and doilcho-mesocephalic head. The Gond of Bastar, the Bhil of Rajasthan, the Oraon, Munda, Santal of Chotanagpur, Chenchu of Andhra Pradesh, Juang of Orissa, Kharia, Bhumij, Ho of Singhbhum district of

Bihar possesses the characteristics of the proto – Australoid.

C) The Mongoloid group: This group is characterised by medium stature, yellowish brown skin colour, flat face, oblique eye – slit with epicanthic fold, scanty beard and moustache.

Their hair has the tendency to be straight. The tribal's of north eastern zone belonging to this racial type. The Naga, Khasi, Garo, Lepcha, Bhutia, Dafia, Abor, Mismi, and some other neighbouring tribes are having Mongoloid features.

D) The Nordic group: The Toda of Nilgiri hills of south India are regarded as the solitary example of this racial type so far India is concerned. They are characterised by tall stature, rosy – white skin colour, wavy hair, prominent fine nose, thin lip, and with plenty of facial and body hair.

Sense of Unity

Unless and until, a group living in a particular area and using that area as a common residence, does not possess the sense of unity, it cannot be called a tribe. Sense of unity is an invariable necessity for a true tribal life. The very existence of a tribe depends upon the tribal's sense of unity during the times of peace and war. They have strong sense of unity and any stranger is attacked with bows and arrows.

Economic base tightly dependent on their, specific environment

In many cases, tribes have highly advanced hunting and fishing economics and more adjusted to their physical environment than other developed economics. The evolution of the economy from non – feudal to feudal and then to commercial conditions can take place during any stage of Tribal evolution. Little value on surplus accumulation on the use of capital and on market trading; largely or entirely independent of the national economic system; the sources of subsistence and livelihood are varied so far the Indian tribal's are concerned; starting from the pure and simple parasitic habit of the nomadic hunters and food gatherers who depend mostly on nature for the sources of subsistence to the settled agriculturists.

Communitarian basis of land holding

Each tribal group is often identified with a particular territory; therefore, some scholars also suggest that “a tribe is a territorial group”. Bearing a few exceptions of some nomadic tribes, the entire tribal group are found to have emotional attachment with their land and habitat. Because of their sentimental attachment with their land to the tribal's have always resisted any outside interference. Tribal resistance against interference in their habitat and land system is reflected in various tribal revolts in the past, as well as failures of several tribal resettlement schemes in different parts of the country.

Poor Literacy and Education among Tribal's

Although most of the tribal people of India are agriculturists yet their economy basically remains at

the subsistence level. As a result the tribal's at own, exert little effort to afford proper education. Whatever education the tribal's have received so far has been because of the efforts of the missionaries and the central and the respective state government. Among several tribes socio – cultural factors have been mainly responsible for low literacy rate, particularly among the girls. There are other socio-cultural factors as well, such as early marriage which prevents particularly a tribal girl child to receive proper education and stake her claim in the job.

Endogamous Group Tribal people generally do not marry outside their tribe and marriage within the tribe is highly appreciated and much applauded. But the pressing effects of changes following the forces of mobility have also changed the attitude of tribal's and now, inter-tribe marriages are becoming more and more common. A tribe is an endogamous group, as distinct from a clan who is exogamous, have common name and is engaged in worshipping strange objects, hunting of small animals, and resists entry of any outsiders inside their territory. All tribe members are related by blood, have their own political organization which has a chief who exercises authority over all the members, even recommending marriage of young boys with girls whom they have found suitable for marriage.

Common Dialect Members of a tribe exchange their views in a common dialect. This element further strengthens their sense of unity.

Ties of Blood-relationship Blood-relation is the greatest bond and most powerful force inculcating sense of unity among the tribal's.

Protection Awareness Tribal people always need protection from intrusion and infiltration and for this a single political authority is established and all the powers are vested in this authority. The safety of the tribal is left to the skill and mental power of the person enjoying political authority. The tribal chief is aided by a tribal committee, in the events of contingencies. Tribe is divided into a number of small groups and each group is headed by its own leader. The chief of a group works according to the directives received by him from the tribal chief.

Distinct Political Organization The political life of the tribal's of India reflects a paradoxical situation in which democracy and monarchy co-exist. Every head of the community at different levels like clan, village and territory is generally honoured, obeyed and accepted as the head of the group. Every tribe has its own distinct political organisation which looks after the interests of tribal people. The whole political authority lies in the hands of a tribal chief. In some tribes, tribal committees exist to help the tribal chief in discharging his functions in the interests of the tribe. Absence of strong, complex, formal organization possessing leadership but no more national representation, and few, if any political rights.

Common Culture Common culture of a tribe springs out from the sense of unity, common language, common religion, and common political organisation. Common culture produces a life of homogeneity among the tribal's; unacculturated or partially acculturated into national society Folk-art is part of the culture but not the whole of it. It includes folklore, i.e., myths, legends, tales, proverbs, riddles, ballads, and other songs, folk-dance, folk-music, folk- carvings etc.

Importance of Kinship Kinship forms the basis of tribal social organization. Most tribes are divided into exogamous clans and lineages. The marriage among tribals is based on the rule of tribal endogamy. Marriage is viewed as a contract and there are no prohibition on divorce and remarriage; kinship as an instrument of social bonds.

Egalitarian Values The tribal social organization is based on the egalitarian principle. Thus there are no institutionalized inequalities like the caste system or sex based inequalities. Thus men and women enjoyed equal status and freedom. However some degrees of social inequality may be found in case of tribal chiefs or tribal kings who enjoy a higher social status, exercise political power and posse's wealth. A lack of hierarchy among men and groups found among them.

Rudimentary type of Religion/ Common religion and Common culture Belief in the existence of superhuman or supernatural power is almost universal. Experiences of certain day to day sudden happenings, of disease, death and unexplainable, have led to the tribal people in to believing in other then material visible world, i.e. in the invisible spirit – world or the supernatural. They have established a kind of close relationship between themselves and this power. Tribes believe in certain myths and a rudimentary type of religion. Further, they believe in totems signifying objects having mystic relationship with members of the tribe. Each tribe is guided by their own religion which is based on totemism, magic and fetishism i.e. believing in god being embedded in a special piece of stone, a special tree or a peculiar strange animal; lack of distinction between form and substance of religion.

Conclusion

The tribal have characteristics of their own. They differ from the common Indian population both in character and composition. On an all – India basis Indian non tribal population vary widely from place to place according to natural surroundings, economy, tradition and local history. On the other hand the tribal population of India has, more or less, similar natural environments of hill and forest, poor economy, and specific tradition which are ideal for the tribal to come up. The most obvious way to grasp a tribal village in India is to consider its geographical settings, settlement pattern and size on the one hand and the social settings including ethnic composition,

on the other. In general, however, the tribes in different parts of India passing through an accelerated phase of transformation and equilibrium in the traditional society has definitely been greatly disturbed; a phase of transformation marketing the meeting of the two worlds, traditional and modern, is in the process, it seems the different tribes or sections of a tribe will continue to respond the change differently, and thus the identity and variety of the tribal culture, of course in changed form, will be maintained.

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