



**TRIBES AND PEASANTS IN INDIA**

**School of Social Sciences  
Indira Gandhi National Open University**

## EXPERT COMMITTEE

Professor K. K. Misra  
Former Professor and Head  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Hyderabad  
Former Director  
Anthropological Survey of India.  
Former Vice Chancellor, Utkal University of  
Culture

Professor R. Siva Prasad  
Former Professor and Head, Department of  
Anthropology,  
University of Hyderabad

Professor Subhadra Mitra Channa  
Former Professor, Department of  
Anthropology  
University of Delhi

Professor Vinay Kumar Srivastava  
Former Professor and Head, Department of  
Anthropology,  
University of Delhi, Former Director,  
Anthropological Survey of India

Professor P. Venkata Rao  
Former Professor and Head, Department of  
Anthropology,

Former Dean School of Social Science,  
University of Hyderabad

Professor Vineetha Menon  
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Kannur University, Kerala

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University, Chandigarh

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SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

Prof. Rashmi Sinha, SOSS, Discipline of  
Anthropology, IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. K. Anil Kumar, Assistant Professor,  
Discipline of Anthropology, SOSS, IGNOU,  
New Delhi

Dr. Rukshana Zaman, Assistant Professor,  
Discipline of Anthropology, SOSS, IGNOU,  
New Delhi

Dr. P. Venkatramana, Assistant Professor,  
Discipline of Anthropology, SOSS, IGNOU

## COURSE PREPARATION TEAM

<b>BLOCK 1 TRIBES IN INDIA</b>		
Unit 1	Concept of Tribe	Dr. K. Anil Kumar, Assistant Professor, Discipline of Anthropology, SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi
Unit 2	Geographical Distribution and Ecological Relations	Dr. D.V. Prasad. Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak
Unit 3	Tribal Organization	Dr. Nilakantha Panigrahi. Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology and Tribal Development, Guru Ghasidas Central University, Bilaspur, Chattishgarh
<b>BLOCK 2 TRIBAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION.</b>		
Unit 4	The History of Tribal Administration	Dr. D.V. Prasad. Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak
Unit 5	Tribal Problems	Dr. K. Koteswara Rao, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology, Rourkela
Unit 6	Tribal Welfare: Constitutional Provisions and Development Measures	Dr. Kasi Eswarappa. Assistant Professor, Department of Tribal Studies, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak
<b>BLOCK 3 PEASANTS AND PEASANTRY</b>		
Unit 7	The Concept of Peasantry	Prof. R. Siva Prasad, Former Professor and Head, Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad
Unit 8	Characteristics of Indian Village	Prof. N. Sudhakar Rao, Former Professor and Head, Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad
Unit 9	Approaches to the Study of Peasants	Prof. Nihar Ranjan Mishra, Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology, Rourkela

<b>BLOCK 4</b>	<b>CONTEMPORARY ISSUES</b>	
Unit 10	Market Economy, Agrarian Crises and Migration	Dr. Hari Charan Behera, Assistant Professor, Indian Statistical Institute Giridih, Jharkhand
Unit 11	Development: Impact, Response and Consequences	Dr. K. Koteswara Rao, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology, Rourkela
Unit 12	Protest, Resistance and Ethno-political Movements	Dr. Khirod Maharana, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Allahabad, Allahabad
	<b>Practical Manual</b>	Dr. K. Anil Kumar, Assistant Professor, Discipline of Anthropology, SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi  Practical Manual Edited by: Prof. P. Venkata Rao, Former Professor and Head, Department of Anthropology, Former Dean School of Social Science, University of Hyderabad.

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## **COURSE COORDINATOR**

---

Dr. K. Anil Kumar  
Assistant Professor  
Discipline of Anthropology  
SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

---

## **GENERAL EDITOR**

---

Dr. K. Anil Kumar  
Assistant Professor  
Discipline of Anthropology  
SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

---

## **COURSE INTRODUCTION AND CONTENT EDITOR**

---

Prof. P. Venkata Rao, Former Professor and Head, Department of Anthropology, Former Dean School of Social Science, University of Hyderabad

**Language Editor:** Mr. Bhupinder Singh, Freelance editor and document reviewer, 302 Tower 7, The Close North, Nirvana Country, South City II, Gurgaon, Haryana-122018

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## **PRINT PRODUCTION**

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**Mr. Rajiv Girdhar**  
Assistant Registrar (Publication)  
MPDD, IGNOU, New Delhi

**Mr. Hemant Parida**  
Section Officer (Publication)  
MPDD, IGNOU, New Delhi

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# **BANC 105 TRIBES AND PEASANTS IN INDIA**

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## **Course Introduction**

The discipline of Anthropology involves understanding the people and their institutionalized behavior in varied settings and contexts. Tribe and Peasant are the anthropological terms denoting categories of people. Together, these categories constitute largest proportion of Indian population. There are issues in conceptualizing these categories. There are problems related to definitions, typical characteristics because of overlapping features. Anthropologists documented processes 'Tribe-Peasant continuum' and pointed to the shift from their traditional means of subsistence resulting in peasantization of tribals.

Tribes represent simple societies that exhibit distinct socio-cultural characters. There are policy issues about their position vis-s vis others such as isolation, assimilation and integration of these populations. In this course, we get to understand the issues related to definition, and classifications proposed on the basis of racial, linguistic, cultural, geographical, and economic features. The study of tribal organization in its various dimensions like gender relations, economy, social control, political organization, and religion are discussed. The tribal populations inhabit resource rich regions that attract several external forces. As a result they encounter issues related to land alienation, debt-bondage, environmental degradation, displacement, poverty and destitution. In view of the problems faced by these people in the course of their contact with more advanced populations, Governments implemented various protective measures from British period onwards. After India became independent, the tribal groups have been designated as Scheduled Tribes for administrative purposes and several special provisions were made for them through constitution. Economic development, education, and health received special attention through specially designed programs implemented by number of development agencies.

Unlike the tribal populations who inhabited inaccessible regions like hilly and forest areas, Peasants have been a part of the larger civilizations. They have many attributes which identify them as traditional, conservative, rustic, rural folk and so on. Western scholars highlighted the continuity of peasantry and focused on the persistence of their organization under different dynasties. There are varied depictions and characteristics which make it difficult to define or conceptualize peasant society. Their social organization and economy are of special interest for anthropologists who approached them from economic, political and cultural perspectives. For centuries, the ruling classes have exploited the peasants and appropriated their production through various means. Peasants have been oppressed by the feudal land lords known by different names such as Zamindars, Jagirdars etc. As a result there were various instances of protest, resistance which culminated in the form of Ethno-political Movements.

Arrival of green revolution and commercial crops altered the nature of peasant production and economy. In the recent decades, the processes of liberalization and globalization resulted in severe agrarian crisis in the rural areas. The push factors from rural areas led to marginalization of the small farmers and landless who migrated to urban areas in search of wage labor. Apart from these, various measures taken by government for the betterment of rural people and the implementation of rural development programs resulted in improvement of village

communities. The impact and response to rural development programmes is varied. All the above aspects have been covered in different units is also covered in this course.

### **Learning Outcomes**

To study the tribes and peasants population of India from socio-cultural point of view;

To understand the issues related to definition, concept, classifications and distribution proposed on the basis of racial, linguistic, cultural, geographical, and economic features;

To study the tribal and peasant organization, movements and their relationship with nature;

To understand the tribal problems, welfare and development issues;

To study the peasantry and their characteristics in Indian village; and

To understand the contemporary issues of tribes and peasants in India.

### **Course Presentation**

The course has been divided into four blocks and a practical manual. Each block has been thematically arranged by twelve units. Now let us discuss about each block in detail.

**Block 1:** The first block will acquaint the learners with the basic understanding of the definition of the tribe, concept, classifications and distribution proposed on the basis of racial, linguistic, cultural, geographical, and economic features. The learners would also gain insight about tribal organization, and their relationship with nature;

**Block 2:** The second block deals with the study of issues of tribal administration, tribal problems, tribal welfare and tribal development. The block presents several special provisions were made for the development of tribe through constitution.

**Block 3:** In the block third the learner would be introduced about peasants of India. Peasants have been a part of the larger civilizations. They have many attributes which identify them as traditional, conservative, rustic, rural folk and so on. The block also discussed the peasantry and their characteristics in Indian village.

**Block 4:** The fourth block presents various instances of protest, resistance which culminated in the form of Ethno-political Movements. The study of tribal organization in its various dimensions like gender relations, economy, social control, political organization, and religion are discussed in this block.

**Practical Manual:** For the anthropology learners it is very important to pursue research on human subjects. More specifically to conduct social research they should know the specialized procedures and methodology of research. This Practical manual would assist the learner how to prepare project synopsis, how to conduct fieldwork, data collection techniques, data analysis and report writing. The manual would guide the learners how to prepare whole project work.

Hope the course material act as a guide for you to achieve your goals. All the Best.





**BLOCK 1**  
**TRIBES IN INDIA**

Pignou  
THE PEOPLE'S  
UNIVERSITY



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# UNIT 1 CONCEPT OF TRIBE\*

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## Contents

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Etymology of the term Tribe
- 1.3 Demography and Distribution of Tribes in India
- 1.4 Defining and Conceptualising Tribes
- 1.5 Problems of Nomenclature
- 1.6 Summary
- 1.7 References
- 1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

## Learning Objectives

At the end of this unit, the learner will know about:

- demographic and geographical profile of Indian tribes;
- defining and conceptualizing of the term ‘tribe’ and the problems of nomenclature;
- characteristics of tribal society;
- Categories such as scheduled tribes, denotified communities and Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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On the basis of geographical surroundings and socio-cultural characteristics, the Indian society is divided into tribal, rural and urban societies. Tribal communities are an integral segment of Indian society. Tribal population is found in almost all parts of the world. India has the second largest tribal population in the world, the first being Africa. India, with a variety of ecosystems, presents a varied tribal population depicting a complex cultural mosaic. The tribal population lives in relative isolation in hilly forests or well demarcated areas marked with distinct culture, language, religion and strong ethnic identity.

Tribals are known to be autochthonous people of land who were the earliest settlers in the Indian Peninsula. In India tribals are often referred as *adivasis* (original inhabitants). In the contemporary world, they are considered to be socio-economically backward.

Defining and conceptualizing tribes is difficult because they are found in a variety of socio-economic milieu and because of their continuous assimilation and acculturation with the wider social structure. However scholars agree on some common features of tribes on the basis of which they are defined and conceptualized. This unit provides a broad understanding on defining the concept of tribe.

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\* Contributed by Dr. K. Anil Kumar, Assistant Professor, Discipline of Anthropology, School of Social Sciences, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi

## 1.2 ETYMOLOGY OF THE TERM TRIBE

The term “tribe” originated around the time of the Greek city-states and the early formation of the Roman Empire. Though the word ‘tribe’ was derived from the Latin term “*tribus*”, it has since been transformed to mean “a group of persons forming a community and claiming descent from a common ancestor” (Oxford English Dictionary, IX, 1933, p. 339, as cited in Fried, 1975, p. 7). The word “tribe” is generally used for a “socially cohesive unit, associated with a territory, the members of which regard themselves as politically autonomous” (Mitchell, 1979: 232). With the upsurge of nationalism in Europe, the term ‘tribe’ was used to denote a particular stage in the socio-political fruition of a community of people speaking a certain language within a specified territory. Clan, tribe and nation came to denote in European phraseology successive stages in the liberal march towards nationhood (Ray, Nihar Ranjan: 1972).

The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1911, defines a tribe as a “collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous though originally it might have been so”. For Romans, the tribe was a political division. The Dictionary of Anthropology mentions *tribe* as a social group, usually with a definite area, dialect, cultural homogeneity and unifying social organization. The tribes in India differ from one another depending upon the region, language, customs, culture, religion, racial traits and so on. Often a tribe possesses a distinct dialect and distinct cultural traits. In the West, as also in India, the word tribe initially had a totally different connotation than what is prevalent now (Verma, R.C:1990).

### Box 1

In India, tribal people are known by many names, such as ‘*adivasi*’ (original settlers), ‘scheduled tribes’ (*anusuchit janajati*), ‘tribes’, ‘janajati’ (folk communities), ‘*girijan*’ (hill dwellers), ‘*vanvasi*’ (forest dwellers), ‘*vanyajati*’ (forest caste), *adimjati* (primitive caste) ‘hill tribe’ (mountain dwellers) and indigenous people. The tribal people of India are called ‘Scheduled Tribes’ in the Indian constitution. The indigenous people of India prefer calling themselves *Adivasi* (original inhabitants). The word *Adi* means “first”, “original” or “from the earliest time”, and the word *Vasi* means “dweller”, “inhabitant”, and “resident of”. This self-identification as *Adivasi* corresponds to the modern concept of indigenous peoples.

## 1.3 DEMOGRAPHY AND DISTRIBUTION OF TRIBES IN INDIA

Tribes are found in all parts of India, except the states of Punjab and Haryana and the Union Territory of Chandigarh, Delhi and Puducherry. The Anthropological Survey of India under the ‘People of India Project’ identified 4,635 communities in India, of which 461 communities were of the scheduled tribes.

The Government of India, in its Draft of the National Tribal Policy for Scheduled Tribes, which came for the first time in February 2004, identified 698 tribal

communities in India. The second version of the Draft was circulated in July 2006 which noted that there were more than 700 tribes in India.

The Census of India held in 2011 counted the number of scheduled tribes (both 'major tribes' and their 'sub-tribes') to be 705. As can be noted from the increasing number of tribal communities, with the passage of time more and more communities are being added to the list of the scheduled tribes.

According to the Census of 2011 the population of scheduled tribes in India was 10,42,81,034 persons, constituting 8.6 per cent of the population of the country. From 2001 to 2011, as per census of the respective years, their population has increased from 8.2 per cent to 8.6 per cent of India's population (Srivastava V. K: 2015). The decadal population growth of the tribals from Census 2001 to 2011 has been 23.66 per cent against the 17.69 per cent population growth of the entire population. The sex ratio for the overall population is 940 females per 1,000 males and that of scheduled tribes is 990 females per 1,000 males. The population of scheduled tribes has seen an increasing trend since Census 1961. In the 1961 census the number of scheduled tribe communities increased to 427, twice the number from the previous census. This increased to 432 by the 1971 census.

In India, the geographical distribution of tribal population is not uniform. Everywhere they have adapted to the local ways of living, thus cultural differences are quite visible within the same community. Bhils form the largest tribal group in India, followed by Gonds, Santhals, and Meenas. The largest concentrations of scheduled tribe population are found in the eastern, central and western belt covering the following nine states:

- Madhya Pradesh (14.69%),
- Maharashtra (10.08%),
- Orissa (9.2%),
- Rajasthan (8.86%),
- Gujarat (8.55%)
- Jharkhand (8.29%),
- Chhattisgarh (7.5%)
- Andhra Pradesh (5.7%) and
- West Bengal.

About 12% inhabit the Northeastern region, 5% the Southern region and 3% the Northern states. The state with the highest proportion of scheduled tribes is Mizoram (94.5 per cent) and the union territory with the highest proportion of scheduled tribes is Lakshadweep (94.8 per cent). Except the states of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi, and the union territories of Chandigarh and Puducherry, tribals inhabit all parts of the county. In India their number and other demographic features vary from one state to another. The largest number of tribal communities (62) is in the state of Orissa (Census 2011). Some of the major tribes of different states are given below:

**Tribes in India**

<b>States</b>	<b>Tribes</b>
Andhra Pradesh	Andh, Sadhu Andh, Bhagata, Bhil, Chenchus (Chenchawar), Gadabas, Gond, Goudu, Jatapus, Kammara, Kattunayakan, Kolawar, Kolam, Konda, Manna Dhora, Pardhan, Rona, Savaras, Dabba Yerukula, Nakkala, Dhulia, Thoti, Sugalis.
Arunachal Pradesh:	Apatanis, Abor, Dafla, Galong, Momba, Sherdukpen, Singpho.
Assam	Chakma, Chutiya, Dimasa, Hajong, Garos, Khasis, Gangte.
Bihar	Asur, Baiga, Birhor, Birjia, Chero, Gond, Parhaiya, Santhals, Savar.
Chhattisgarh	Agariya, Bhaina, Bhattra, Biar, Khond, Mawasi, Nagasia.
Goa	Dhodia, Dubia, Naikda, Siddi, Varli.
Gujarat	Barda, Bamcha, Bhil, Charan, Dhodia, Gamta, Paradhi, Patelia.
Himachal Pradesh	Gaddis, Gujjars, Khas, Lamba, Lahaulas, Pangwala, Swangla.
Jammu and Kashmir	Bakarwal, Balti, Beda, Gaddi, Garra, Mon, Purigpa, Sippi.
Jharkhand	Birhors, Bhumij, Gonds, Kharia, Mundas, Santhals, Savar.
Karnataka	Adiyan, Barda, Gond, Bhil, Iruliga, Koraga, Patelia, Yerava.
Kerala	Adiyan, Arandan, Eravallan, Kurumbas, Malai arayan, Moplahs, Uralis.
Madhya Pradesh	Baigas, Bhils, Bharia, Birhors, Gonds, Katkari, Kharia, Khond, Kol, Murias.
Maharashtra	Bhaina, Bhunjia, Dhodia, Katkari, Khond, Rathawa, Warlis.
Manipur	Aimol, Angami, Chiru, Kuki, Maram, Monsang, Paite, Purum, Thadou.
Meghalaya	Chakma, Garos, Hajong, Jaintias Khasis, Lakher, Pawai, Raba.
Mizoram	Chakma, Dimasa, Khasi, Kuki, Lakher, Pawai, Raba, Synteng.
Nagaland	Angami, Garo, Kachari, Kuki, Mikir, Nagas, Sema, Lotha.
Odisha	Gadaba, Ghara, Kharia, Khond, Matya, Oraons, Rajuar, Santhals.

Rajasthan	Bhils, Damaria, Dhanka, Meenas (Minas), Patelia, Sahariya.
Sikkim	Bhutia, Khas, Lepchas.
Tamil Nadu	Adiyan, Aranadan, Eravallan, Irular, Kadar, Kanikar, Kotas, Todas.
Telangana	Gond, Pardhan, Kolam, Koya, Chenchus.
Tripura	Bhil, Bhutia, Chaimal, Chakma, Halam, Khasia, Lushai, Mizel, Namte.
Uttarakhand	Bhotias, Buksa, Jannsari, Khas, Raji, Tharu.
Uttar Pradesh	Bhotia, Buksa, Jaunsari, Kol, Raji, Tharu.
West Bengal	Asur, Khond, Hajong, Ho, Parhaiya, Rabha, Santhals, Savar.
Andaman and Nicobar	Oraons, Onges, Sentinelese, Shompens.
Little Andaman:	Jarawa.

Source <http://tribal.gov.in/writereaddata/mainlinkFile/File722.pdf>

Anthropologists and Sociologists study Indian tribes considering their distinctive demographic, ecological, economic, political, historical and socio-cultural milieu. Most indigenous tribes in India are found in geographically isolated locations in forests, plateaus or hills and very few of them live in plains. Most of them still live by hunting, gathering, fishing, performing shifting cultivation or settled cultivation, and are pastoralists, artisans and labourers etc. They speak mostly Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan and Mongoloid languages and marry within their restricted local groups. They are guided by their tribal leaders or chieftains. They have socio-cultural institutions and try their best to retain their own beliefs and customs. Belief in supernatural power, magic, sorcery and witchcraft are an integral part of tribal socio-cultural life (Ramesh Thapar: 1996).

**Check Your Progress**

1) In which states and union territories tribals are not found?

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**1.4 DEFINING AND CONCEPTUALISING TRIBES**

Anthropologists such as L.H. Morgan, Meyer Fortes, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Bronislaw Malinowski, and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown conducted intensive micro-level studies on tribes in Africa, Australia, Asia, Melanesia and other parts of

world. They tried to understand family, kinship, marriage, religion, magic, economy, political institution, law and social relation of primitive tribes from ethnographic account per se (Lucy Mair: 1972).

The definition of tribe framed by anthropologists and sociologists is rooted in evolutionary framework. Studies of primitive society by evolutionist Lewis H. Morgan and functionalist Emile Durkheim exemplify that society is not static but gradually evolves with time-space equation. To them, the term tribe not only connotes a type of society but a stage of evolution and development. While Morgan viewed that every stage of social evolution is characterised by a specific mode of social organisation, Durkheim used the term “poly-segmental society” instead of the term “tribe”. In his book “The Division of Labour in Society (1839) Durkheim highlights two types of solidarity in society: mechanical and organic. Social organisation of primitive tribes is characterised as mechanical solidarity (Emile Durkheim: 1997 Reprint).

Lewis H. Morgan in his book “Ancient Society” (1877) defines tribe as a completely organised society where all forms of social relation are dominated by kinship. For Morgan, tribal society is organised in such a way that their form of social organisation is capable of reproducing itself. A tribe, according to him, is a collection of a number of clans who have distinct nomenclature, separate language, distinct political organisation and a territory under their own possession (Lewis H. Morgan: 1877).

E.E. Evans-Pritchard in his work “African Political Systems” (1940) writes on Nuers of Southern Sudan. Nuers have a common name, common language, common culture and they are divided into distinct political units. To him Nuers have their specific political system which makes them different from other tribes. Evans-Pritchard is against using the idea of segmentary system to define tribes because the term “tribe” cannot be interchanged with segmentary system (E.E. Evans Pritchard and Meyer Fortes: 1940).

According to Marshall Sahlins, a tribe is a segmental organisation which is composed of equivalent and unspecialized multi-family group, clan or band. A collection of bands has a chiefdom to coordinate its economic, social and religious activities. He makes distinction between state and non-state society. Non-state societies are divided into band, tribe and chiefdom (Marshall D. Sahlins: 1968).

Maurice Godelier rejects Sahlins threefold scheme of band, tribe and chiefdom. For him, there is a basic difference between a tribe and a chiefdom because of appearance of class inequality during evolution of tribe towards chiefdom. Godelier emphasises on mode of production to define and conceptualise tribe. The mode of production of tribe determines its social organisation since the tribal mode of production in every stage of evolution is different from other modes of production (Maurice Godelier: 1977).

Ralph Linton says, “In its simplest form the tribe is a group of people occupying a contiguous territory or territories and having a feeling of unity deriving from numerous similarities in culture, frequent contacts and a certain community of interests”. To Lucy Mair, “a tribe is an independent political division of a population with a common culture” (1972).

Anthropologists have tried to provide universal criteria to define and conceptualise tribe. Because of distinctive ecological, economic, historical and socio-cultural characteristics, each tribe differs from the other but despite diversity and



difference, a degree of commonality exists among tribes. According to anthropologists, a tribe is a group of people living in isolated forests and hills. Their language is different from the language spoken by the mainstream people. They live on hunting, fishing and food gathering. Socio-cultural institutions are highly influenced by their consanguine relation. They have faith in animism, naturism and totemism. Their religions and rituals are influenced by magical practices. Tribes in India may not be similar compared with tribes of Africa, Australia or tribes of other parts of world. Even though a great degree of commonality exists among them in terms of socio-economic life, their world view cannot be defined and conceptualised with universal criteria (Doshi S.L. and P.C. Jain. 2001).

In India tribes constitute a significant proportion of its population. Ancient Indian literature like *Veda*, *Purana*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* highlight nature and features of tribal social formation in India. According to such mythological texts, in ancient India tribes were given names such as *Nishada*, *Kirata*, *Dasyu* and *Dasa*. *Ramayana* mentions that non-Aryans or aboriginal tribes were mainly inhabitants of Deccan region of India. They are called *Rakshasa*, *Yaksa*, *Vanara*, *Nishada* and *Grdhraj* (Prakash Chandra Mehta. 2006).

In ancient India during the rule of Hindu kings, tribes were isolated from the mainland. They were not in contact with the mainstream society. Rulers hardly felt the necessity to contact tribes living in forests and hills. However some tribes accepted Hinduism. In medieval India during the rule of Mughals and Pathans, there was little done to understand and accommodate tribes. There was little contact between tribes and non-tribes during the medieval period, let alone evolve a policy towards them. But that period witnessed growth of Gonds and Rajputs in central India who flourished as martial races and occupied position of warriors in caste hierarchy. The Mughal and other Muslim rulers used to patronize warrior castes and employed their chieftains in high positions in civil and military administration (K.N. Dash: 2004).

In India the concept of tribe is complex. Every tribe upholds its distinct culture, dialect and economic pursuits in their own ecological setting. A few tribes still remain unknown, isolated and alienated, while some others have undergone mobility and change. Tribes in various parts of India, including tribes in Northeast, until recently remained isolated from the mainland (Sukant K. Chaudhury and Saumendra Mohan Patnaik: 2008).

During the British period, Indian tribes became an object of study of the colonial administrator, missionary and anthropologist. Hutton, Risley, Elwin, and others studied tribes to understand social structure and culture of Indian society in general and of tribes in particular. F.G Bailey and W.H.R. Rivers too became interested to study tribes in India (Andre Beteille: 2008). From 1930 to 1950 British scholars and administrators undertook studies in order to know the tribal people of India whom they wanted to bring under their control.

After independence, from 1950 to early 1970 many Indian academicians contributed to the field of tribal study in India. Tribes such as Gond, Bhil, Munda, Oraon, Ho, Naga, Khasi, Mizo and Andaman Islanders became well known subjects of tribal study. A colourful mosaic of tribal culture with exotic custom and ritual, magic and religion, apparel and adornment, song and dance continuously attracts scholars of various disciplines (Vidyarthi, L.P. and B.K.

Rai: 1976). In this context we can put the names of several eminent Indian scholars like S.C. Roy, Nirmanl Kumar Bose, D.N. Majumdar, Surajit Sinha, T.C. Das, P.K. Chattopadhyay, B.K. Roy-Burman, P.N. Mishra, L.K.A. Iyer, G.S. Ghurye, S.C. Dube, L. P. Vidyarthi, Aiyappan, M.N. Srinivas, A.R. Desai and Andre Beteille, who studied Indian tribes with immense interest (Vidyarthi, L.P: 1978).

Because of distinctive ecological, geographical, socio-historical and cultural features of tribes, anthropologists and sociologists have faced tremendous hurdle to conceptualise and provide a universal definition of tribe. In India too, describing tribes has remained controversial among scholars, reformers and administrators. Risely, Lancey, Elwin and Grigson describe tribes as aborigines or aboriginals. Hutton calls them primitive tribes. G.S. Ghurye describes them as backward Hindus. Das S.T designates them 'submerged humanity'. Some scholars and reformers describe them as *adivasis*. After 1947, the Government of India assigned them to the Scheduled Tribes category (Desai, A.R: 1978).

D. N. Majumdar conducted a comprehensive study among Khasa and brought out characteristics of tribal-Hindu continuum. He says the tribe looks upon Hindu rituals as foreign and extra-religious even though indulging in them and worshipping gods and goddesses where as among caste individuals these are necessary part of religion. Caste individuals generally pursue their own specific occupation because socio-economic functions are divided and assigned to various castes under the caste system. According to Majumdar, a tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialization of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect, recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes without attaching any social obloquy to them (unlike in the caste structure), following tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, illiberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration (Majumdar, D. N :1937).

While studying 'Kondh' and 'Oriya' political system, F.G Bailey saw tribe and caste as continuum. He seeks to make distinction not in terms of totality of behaviour but in a more limited way in relation to political economic system. He suggested, "We view caste and tribe as the opposite ends of a single line. At different points along the line particular societies may be located according to their proximity to either the organic caste model or segmentary tribal model."

Bailey labeled the Oriya caste society as organic and the tribal Kondh society as segmentary. He argued that their kinship values and religious beliefs are not far detached from one another. But in contemporary India both caste and tribe are being merged into a different system which is neither one nor the other. Tribes in India are influenced by the community around them. The major neighbouring community is of Hindus. As a result, from very early period there have been several points of contact between Hindus and tribal communities. The nature and extent of contact, mutual participation and characteristics of revitalisation movement vary in different parts of India (Bailey, F.G: 1957).

L.P. Vidyarthi and Binay Kumar Rai published a major book on tribes and tribal life in India. In their book they discussed economic, social, political and religious organisations of Indian tribals. According to Vidyarthi and Rai, tribes of India live in forests, hills and isolated regions. They have been in continuous contact with neighbouring communities and live by farming and working in industries.

Till today they retain their tradition and custom. They form socially distinct communities in contrast to their neighbours. According to them it is these communities which have been designated tribes. Indian constitution listed the tribes in a schedule for special treatment (Vidyarthi L.P and Binay Kumar Rai: 1985).

For Andre Beteille, defining tribe should be based on empirical characteristics of a particular mode of human grouping found in different parts of world, irrespective of condition of time and place. Conceptually a tribe can be defined as an ideal state, a self-contained unit which constitutes a society in itself. A tribe is a society that has a common government and shares a common territory. However, this definition becomes incomplete if one considers empirical evidence of tribes having segmental political organisation, as among Nuer and Dinka. Therefore, ecological and political criteria are not sufficient to define tribe as a society.

Beteille says anthropologists usually define tribe on the basis of linguistic, cultural, economic, political, religion, and kinship criteria. According to him, the above criteria are not sufficient to define Indian tribes. Defining tribes in India is more complicated because now hardly any tribe exists as a separate society. They have all been absorbed, in varying degrees, into the wider society. Due to this many tribes in India have lost their political and linguistic boundary. Hence Indian tribes are in transition and one can't have a ready-made definition to use in empirical research (Andre Beteille: 1986).

According to K.S Singh, during the colonial period, tribals outside North-East closely integrated with the prevailing colonial system of economy and administration. Interaction of peasants and tribes led to the development of settled agriculture as the primary mode of subsistence in pre-colonial period. This process accentuated in the colonial period and helped tribal peasants (Singh, K.S: 1994).

Nirmal Kumar Bose analyzed the society, economy and culture of different tribes in India. He studied different means of livelihood of tribes, their social organization, religion, art, music and dance. Tribes in India form socially distinct communities in contrast to their neighbours. Bose points out that economic life between tribals and their neighbouring peasants is almost similar. The difference is only their isolation and economic backwardness due to which they have been placed under the category of Schedule Tribes. Though tribes could have changed their occupation following social contact with non-tribes, but in subsequent times, particularly during the British period, tribes became victims of exploitation by money lenders and traders of mainland. (Nirmal Kumar Bose: 1971).

According to Virginius Xaxa, the term "tribe" was used by British in more than one sense. In one sense the word denotes a group of people having a common ancestor. In another sense it refers to a group of people living in primitive conditions. To him, different criteria used by anthropologists to define tribe were not clear. To justify his argument he further says earlier tribes were distinguished from non-tribes on the basis of their religion, but religion could not become a satisfactory criterion to define a tribe when census officials found it difficult to separate animism from religion of lower strata of Hindu society. Consequently identity of tribes was changed from animists to backward Hindus. There is then something clumsy about the use of the term tribe in describing Indian social reality (Virginius Xaxa: 2008).

Virginius Xaxa defines tribes as indigenous people. According to him, there are three aspects, which are central to the conceptualisation of the indigenous people.

- 1) The indigenous people are those people who lived in the country to which they belong, before colonisation or conquest by people from outside the country or geographical region.
- 2) They have become marginalised as an aftermath of conquest and colonisation by the people from outside the region.
- 3) Indigenous people govern their life more in terms of their own social, economic and the cultural institutions than the laws applicable to the society or the country at large. (Xaxa: 1999).

Niharranjan Ray says tribals are not a separate category as conceived by anthropologists and sociologists. Hence to him the so-called tribals are to be referred to as *janas* and the whole concept of scheduled tribe must be seriously viewed from Indian point of view (Niharranjan Roy: 1972).

Anthropologists have carried out extensive and in-depth study of tribal life in India. Ethnography of tribes became a major part of investigation by scholars during the early period of study. Indian tribes are always at the centre of intense discussions, especially by anthropologists and sociologists. The study of tribals in India started during late British period, particularly after 1930s. At that time studies were mainly restricted to macro level, covering socio-cultural, political and economic life of tribes. Later studies were intensive, formal, holistic and substantivist

In the post-colonial period, anthropologists have tended to view the 'tribe' as a colonial construct, rendering fixed and rigid those identities which were earlier relatively fluid and contextual. Anthropological accounts of tribal communities have largely provided working definitions of tribe which have often been specific to their site of study, given that tribes differ considerably in terms of their population size, mode of livelihood and level of integration within the capitalist economy.

Anthropologists and sociologists defined the concept of tribe adopting certain parameters for academic convenience. These parameters were religion and magic, family and kinship, economy, political institution, law and other social institutions. Later scholars from allied or divergent disciplines working on cross-cultural or trans-national perspective of tribes exemplified heterogeneity among Indian tribes. Hence any attempt to define tribe in the Indian context carries with it a multiplicity of problems vis-à-vis methodological convenience. Still scholars agree on some common features of tribes on the basis of which they are defined and conceptualized.

In Europe, the term tribe came to denote a race of people within a given territory. Western writers on India, generally called orientalist, followed by anthropologists and sociologists in India, now use the term tribe in that connotation. The tribes in India broadly belong to four categories:

- the Negritos,
- the Mongoloids,
- the Mediterranean.

- the Proto-Australoid

The Negritos are believed to be the earliest inhabitants of the Indian Peninsula. Negrito tribes are found in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, known as Onges, Great Andamanese, Sentinelese and Jarwas, and in Kerala, known as Kadars, Irulars and the Paniyans.

Mongoloid tribes are divided into two categories, namely the Palaeo Mongoloids and the Tibeto Mongoloids. The tribes living in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur are known Palaeo Mongoloids. Tribes living in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh are known as Tibeto Mongoloid tribes.

The Mediterranean people form the bulk of tribal population and are generally known as the Dravidians. The tribes believed to be belonging to the Dravidian race are found in the Chhotanagpur Plateau, the Rajmahal hills region, the Aravali ranges, the central Vindhya, the Deccan Plateau region and the Nilgiri Hills (Verma, R.C:1910).

The earliest stratum of Indian populations was a long-headed, dark skinned, broad nosed people. Their physical features are closely akin to modern aborigines of Chota Nagpur, Central India and the primitive tribes of South India. It is thus seen that the tribals from Central zone generally speak the Austro-Asiatic speech family except tribes like the Oroan, the Khond and the Gond, who speak Dravidian language. They are mainly Proto-Australoid in their racial classification.

Tribe is a contentious term. It is rather difficult to develop, define and conceptualise tribe in totality. Most social anthropologists and sociologists studying tribes have struggled to adequately define the term tribe. Definition of tribe becomes difficult not only because of the variety of socio-economic milieu but also because of their continuous assimilation and acculturation with the wider social structure. Debate on the concept of tribe still continues unabated among scholars across disciplines (David L. Sills: 1976).

**Check Your Progress**

- 2) State Ralph Linton’s definition of tribe.

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**1.5 PROBLEMS OF NOMENCLATURE**

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***Scheduled Tribe***

The Government of India Act 1935 used the term ‘backward tribe’. Later, the Indian Constitution retained the terminology with slight modification using ‘Scheduled Tribe’ in place of ‘backward’. However, the Constitution does not have a precise definition for the term ‘tribe’.

At the time of first census of independent India in 1951, there were 212 recognised scheduled tribes in the country. Article 366 (25) of the Indian Constitution refers Scheduled Tribe to those who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342. Article 342 says that the Indian President, after consulting with the concerned Governors of State or Union territory, can specify the tribes or tribal groups through public notification. Still there exists no clarification as to who is to be included under the category of Scheduled Tribe.

In 1959 the Government appointed a commission headed by Shri U.N. Dhebar to look into the welfare of the scheduled tribes. This commission too failed to arrive at a satisfactory definition. The Lokur Committee (1965) identified certain criteria for specification of a community as a scheduled tribe. They are:

- Indication of primitive traits
- Distinctive culture
- Shyness of contact with the community at large
- Geographical isolation; and
- Backwardness

From the above identifying features, the idea of the tribe as ‘primitive’ has clearly continued into the post-colonial period. The first backward classes commission (Kaka Kalelkar Commission) appointed by the President of India under Article 340 argued that the tribes:

*“lead a separate exclusive existence and are not fully assimilated in the main body of the people. Scheduled Tribes may belong to any religion. They are listed as Scheduled Tribes, because of the kind of life led by them”.*

#### ***De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribal Communities***

The tribal population in India, though numerically a small minority, represents an enormous diversity of groups. Each tribal group is different from the other; their culture and values are distinct from each other. Tribes in India are not a homogeneous group in respect of:

- language and linguistic traits,
- ecological settings,
- physical features,
- size of the population,
- the extent of acculturation,
- dominant modes of making a livelihood,
- level of development and
- social stratification.

Some communities known as ‘tribes’ are not necessarily included within the list of Scheduled Tribes. Two other important governmental classifications of tribes which look at specific histories and vulnerabilities of these communities are:

- Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes and
- Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).

The nomadic and de-notified communities form a substantial proportion of the population and prominent aspect of the mosaic of India. These communities are spread over almost all the states of India. It is estimated by the National Commission for the Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (2008), popularly known as Balakrishna Renke Commission, that the nomadic and de-notified communities constitute about 10 percent of the country's population on a conservative estimate, as population figures were not available for more than 100 communities. It was also observed by the Renke Commission that there are about 1,500 nomadic and semi-nomadic communities and about 150-198 de-notified communities in India. The list of these communities is available at:

<http://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/Draft%20List%20of%20Denotified%20Tribes%20for%20Mail.pdf>

The British colonial rulers created the category of de-notified communities after the 1857 war of independence in which many of the nomadic communities participated to overthrow the colonial rulers. The British propagated a theory that some communities were criminals by birth and crime was their caste or community occupation. The British enacted a Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 and later in 1911, notified a number of communities under this Act, that itself was revised periodically. The district collectors were given the authority to notify the communities under their jurisdiction as criminal tribes. This was annulled after 1952 and all these communities were de-notified following Aiyangar Committee recommendations. That is how they are categorised as de-notified tribes (Siva Prasad, R: 2015).

Traditionally these communities practice a range of occupations and are remarkably internally diverse. Scholars have classified them into the following broad categories:

- pastoralists and hunter-gatherers
- metal workers (smiths), stone workers, salt traders, basket makers
- entertainers including dancers, acrobats, musicians, performers, snake charmers, monkey trainers, wrestlers
- herbalists, mendicants, artisans, bards, astrologers etc. (Milind Bokil:2002).

### ***Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)***

There are more than 705 tribal groups, having heterogeneous social, religious and cultural norms. Some of the tribes are characterized as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) (earlier known as Primitive Tribal Groups) on the basis of their greater 'vulnerability' and economical backwardness, within the scheduled tribes. PVTGs currently include 75 tribal groups which reside in 18 states and the union territory of A&N Islands. Among PVTGs some of communities are facing the threat of extinction and these groups are considered endangered population. In 1979 the Ministry of Home affairs initiated four criteria for identifying Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. They are:

- 1) pre-agricultural level of technology and economy,
- 2) very low rate of literacy,
- 3) declining or near stagnant population, and
- 4) a subsistence level of economy.

These communities depend on activities such as hunting, food gathering, fishing, pastoralism, Jhume cultivation for their subsistence.

Among the 75 listed PVTGs the highest number are found in Odisha (13). Other states having PVTGs are:

- Andhra Pradesh (12),
- Bihar including Jharkhand (9)
- Madhya Pradesh including Chhattisgarh (7)
- Tamil Nadu (6)
- Kerala (5) and
- Gujarat (5).

The remaining PVTGs live in West Bengal (3), Maharashtra (3), two each in Karnataka and Uttarakhand and one each in Rajasthan, Tripura and Manipur.

States and UT-wise list of PTVGs is given below:

S.No	State	PVTGs
1	Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana)	1. Bodo Gadaba 2. Bondo Poroja 3. Chenchu 4. Dongria Khond 5. Gutob Gadaba 6. Khond Poroja 7. Kolam 8. Kondareddis 9. Konda Savara 10. Kutia Khond 11. Parengi Poroja 12. Thoti
2	Bihar (including Jharkhand)	13. Asurs 14. Birhor 15. Birjia 16. Hill Kharia 17. Korwas 18. Mal Paharia 19. Parhaiyas 20. Sauria Paharia 21. Savar
3	Gujarat	22. Kathodi 23. Kotwalia 24. Padhar 25. Siddi 26. Kolgha
4	Karnataka	27. JenuKuruba 28. Koraga
5	Kerala	29. Cholanaikayan (a section of Kattunaickans) 30. Kadar 31. Kattunayakan 32. Kurumbas 33. Koraga
6	Madhya Pradesh (including Chhattisgarh)	34. Abhujh Marias 35. Baigas 36. bharias 37. Birhor 38. Hill Korbas 39. Kamars 40. Sahariyas
7	Maharashtra	41. Katkaria (Kathodia) 42. Kolam 43. Maria Gond
8	Manipur	44. Marram Nagas
9	Odisha	45. Birhor 46. Bondo 47. Didayi 48. Dongria Khond 49. Juangs 50. Kharias 51. Kutia Kondh 52. Lanjia Sauras 53. Lodhas 54. Mankidas 55. Paudi Bhuyans 56. Soura 57. Chuktia Bhunjia



10	Rajasthan	58. Seharias
11	Tamil Nadu	59. Irulas 60. Kattunayakans 61. Kotas 62. Kurumbas 63. Paniyans 64. Todas
12	Tripura	65. Reangs
13	Uttar Pradesh (including Uttarakhand)	66. Buxas 67. Rajis
14	West Bengal	68. Birhor 69. Lodhas 70. Totos
15	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	71. Great Andamanese 72. Jarawas 73. Onges 74. Sentinelese 75. Shompens

Source: National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, *Statewise PVTGs List from MTA.pdf*

According to statistical profile of Scheduled Tribes in India (2013) published by Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, the total population of PVTGs comes to 27.68 lakhs and the total number of the communities is 71. Out of these 19 communities have less than 1,000 population. High population can be seen in communities such as Maria Gond of Maharashtra (16,18,090) and Saura of Orissa (5,34,751), while alarmingly low populations are found among Sentinelese (15) and Great Andamanese (44) of Andaman and Nicobar islands.

The majority of the PVTG population lives in the six states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Most well-known PVTGs are the communities labeled as heritage groups such as Jarva, Sentinelese, Shompens and Cholanayakans. They are completely isolated from others and live in distinctive ecological settings. In view of the vulnerability and special needs of PVTGs, separate schemes for economic uplift and imparting education have been envisaged for them (Venkata Rao, P:2015).

Beyond definition of 'tribe' anomalies have been noted in the list of the Scheduled Tribes in India. Classification of communities as Scheduled Tribes is not uniform throughout the country but varies based on often arbitrary administrative boundaries. Several committees have taken note of this anomalous situation, introduced through the Government of India Act, 1935, whereby communities of the same tribe from an ethnological or social point of view are recognized as scheduled tribes in one state or one part of a state and not in others. For example Lambada tribe, who are a scheduled tribe in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, fall in the list of the Other Backward Classes in Maharashtra and Scheduled Caste in Karnataka. This anomaly occurs primarily because the term tribe has not been defined in the Constitution of India. The most important concern has been of identifying communities to be included within the list of the Scheduled Tribes than to deal with the issue of defining tribe. This matter has come up again and again in the reports of the various commissions and committees that were set up by the Central and the State Governments of India, to look into tribal problems. The most recent report submitted to the Government of India by Virginius Xaxa's High-level Committee in 2015 notes that one of the important issues is concerned with identifying the criteria that could be used for defining tribal communities (Srivastava V. K: 2015).

**Check Your Progress**

3) What are the criteria identified for specification of a community as Scheduled Tribe by Lokur Committee 1965?

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**1.6 SUMMARY**

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The word “tribe”, derived from the Latin term “*tribus*” has since been transformed to mean, “A group of persons forming a community and claiming descent from a common ancestor”. Tribes are found in all parts of India, except a few states and union territories. In India, tribal people are known by many names, such as ‘adivasi’ (original settlers), ‘scheduled tribes’ (anusuchit janajati) and ‘tribes’. According to the Census of 2011 the total population of scheduled tribes in India is at 10,42,81,034 persons, constituting 8.6 per cent of the population of the country.

In India geographical distribution of tribal population is not uniform. Everywhere they have adapted to the local ways of living, thus cultural differences are quite visible within the same community. Bhils are the largest tribal group in India, followed by Gonds, Santhals, and Meenas.

Tribe is a contentious term vis-à-vis the issue. It is rather difficult to develop, define and conceptualise tribe in totality. Most social anthropologists and sociologists studying tribes have struggled to adequately define the term tribe. Definition or conceptualisation of tribe becomes difficult not only because of the variety of socio-economic milieu but also because of their continuous assimilation and acculturation with the wider social structure. Debate on the concept of tribe still continues unabated among scholars across disciplines

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## 1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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- 1) Tribes are found in all parts of India, except the states of Punjab and Haryana and the Union Territories of Chandigarh, Delhi and Puducherry.
- 2) In its simplest form the tribe is a group of people occupying a contiguous territory or territories and having a feeling of unity derived from numerous similarities in culture, frequent contacts and a certain community of interests.
- 3) Lokur Committee (1965) identified certain criteria for specification of a community as Scheduled Tribe. They are:
  - a) Indication of primitive traits
  - b) Distinctive culture
  - c) Shyness of contact with the community at large
  - d) Geographical isolation; and
  - e) Backwardness

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## UNIT 2 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND ECOLOGICAL RELATIONS\*

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### Contents

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Himalayan Region
- 2.3 Eastern India
- 2.4 Central India
- 2.5 Western India
- 2.6 Southern India
- 2.7 Island Communities
- 2.8 Summary
- 2.9 References
- 2.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

### Learning Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will:

- Have a pan-India view of tribal communities;
- Understand the logic behind classification based on ecology and cultural similarities;
- Be able to locate tribes based on their geographical affiliation including their ecological relationship.

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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India is a melting pot of diverse cultures as major ethnic groups from different parts of the world immigrated and settled here long ago. More than 3,000 caste communities and 700 tribal communities inhabit different states and union territories. Not confined to a particular territory, they are spread in different ecological, geographical and cultural zones. The tribal communities in India are classified on the basis of:

- racial features,
- economy,
- language and
- geography.

Except for a few cases, there exists a diversity in customs and traditions of tribes, and these are transmitted orally from one generation to another. Forests are the home to tribal people. Their socio-cultural life is mostly woven around nature; they are intimately connected with forest ecology. Forests provide the source and means of survival. These tribals have been living in forests for ages and have an affinity to forests. The tribals know how to live in harmony with

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\* Contributed by Dr. D.V. Prasad, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology & Social Anthropology, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak

nature. Despite the impact of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization, most tribes have retained their separate socio-cultural identity.

Based on physical factors, B.S. Guha (1951) classified the tribes in India into three geographical zones:

- 1) North and north-eastern mountain valleys
- 2) Central region
- 3) Peninsular region

Majumdar and Madan (1956) supported this classification with slight changes to nomenclature, such as northern and north-eastern zone, central or middle zone, and southern zone.

Dube (1960) extending the zones, carved out a middle zone including areas in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra:

- 1) North and North-Eastern Zone,
- 2) Middle Zone,
- 3) West Zone
- 4) South Zone.

Considering historical, ethnic, and socio-cultural relations, Roy Burman (1971) divided them into five territorial groups:

- 1) North-east region: States Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Tripura (seven sister states).
- 2) Sub-Himalayan region: Covers north and north-west India comprising the northern sub-mountain districts of Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh.
- 3) Central and Eastern region: States undivided Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.
- 4) Western region: States Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.
- 5) Southern region: States Tamilnadu, Kerala, and Karnataka

The above distribution took into consideration geographical, ecological, social, economic, administrative, ethnic and racial factors. But it did not take into account tribal communities residing in Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep. Taking these into consideration, the present unit proposes a six-fold geographical classification of tribal communities:

- 1) Himalayan region,
- 2) Eastern India,
- 3) Central India,
- 4) Western India,
- 5) Southern India and
- 6) Island communities.

### Activity

Try to identify the distribution of tribal communities in your locality, district or state and compare them with major tribes mentioned in the present chapter. Try to recognize the nomadic tribal groups who migrated from other regions in search of livelihood and know their traditional occupation.

## 2.2 HIMALAYAN REGION

The region covers the entire Himalayan range of India. It is again sub-divided into three regions:

- North-east Himalayan region
- Central Himalayan region
- North-west Himalayan region.

### North-East Himalayan Region

To the north of river Brahmaputra, lie the regions of northern Buddhist tribal belt of Bhutan and erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), while the tribal belt of Naga and Lushai is located to its south. The north-eastern area consists of Assam, Meghalaya, the mountainous region of West Bengal (Darjeeling), Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. The northern borders of this region coincide with the border of China while the eastern border coincides with the international boundary of Burma. Bhutan and Nepal border the north-west side of the region and in the south-west, the Garo area of Assam borders Bangladesh.

The following are the tribes populating this region and their locations:

- Aka, Dafla, Miri and Gurung reside between Assam and Tibet.
- Apatani inhabit the western part of Subansiri river.
- Gallong, Minyong, Pasi, Padam and Pangi inhabit the Dehong valley.
- Mishmi live in the high ranges between the Dibang and Lohit rivers. Idu-Mishmi, also known as Chulikata, and the Bebejiya inhabit the western part and Digaru-Mishmi, also known as Taraon, and Miju-Mishmi inhabit the eastern part.

Apart from this, there are Khamti, Singhop, and Naga tribes who are again sub-divided based on eco-cultural zones that they inhabit.

- Rangpan and Konyak live in the northern part of the Naga Hills,
- Rengma, Sema, Angami Naga are found in the western part of the Naga Hills,
- Ao Lahota, Phom, Chang, Santam and Yimstsunger inhabit the central part of the Naga Hills,
- Kacha and Kabui are found in the southern part of the Naga Hills,
- Kalyo-Kengu live in the eastern side of the Naga Hills.

Kuki, Lushai, Lakher, Chin, Khasi and Garo inhabit the region south of the Naga Hills, which runs through the states of Manipur, Tripura, and the Chittagong hill tracts.

This vast ecological zone is sparsely populated, with tribes inhabiting the hillocks and villages isolated from each other. The entire region being geographically similar, most tribes resort to terrace farming and shifting cultivation, popular as *Jhum* cultivation. Due to its remoteness from the mainland India, the people are poverty-stricken and economically backward.

**Activity**

Try to identify some Mongoloid tribal groups in your vicinity, for example, those who are engaged in petty-businesses like woolen trade, Gurkhas, students studying in universities. Document the cultural distinction of each group.

**Central Himalayan Region**

This region begins from the river Yamuna in the west to the river Teesta in Sikkim. This zone includes:

- districts of Kumaon and Nainital division of Uttarakhand,
- Champaran in Bihar,
- northern districts of Bengal and Sikkim.

Uttarakhand is divided into Tarai-Bhabar and Siwalik regions. Tarai region is densely forested and is homeland to Tharu, Buksa, and Gujjar tribes. Other important tribes inhabiting this region are Raji, Bhutia, Lepcha, Khasa, and Garhwal. Among the tribes, Bhutia and Lepcha follow Tibetan Buddhism while Raji, Tharu and Khasa follow Hinduism.

The undulated hilly terrains of this region facilitate Gujjar, Bhutia, and Gharwal tribes to resort to pastoral mode of economy for their livelihood. Further, forests play a significant role in enhancing their livelihood with minor forest produces for medicinal, nutritional, socio-economic and religious purposes.

The tribes of Uttarakhand were early settlers of north India but are now confined to remote hilly and forested areas. They depend on agrarian-pastoral way of life. They live off the forests and rely on goats and sheep for transporting goods over the difficult passes of the high Himalayas. Bhutia living on higher reaches practice mountain agriculture, wool-based handicraft, and sheep rearing.

The Sikkim state shares boundaries with three countries and with the Indian state of West Bengal. The Lepcha live inside the deep forests and forage isolated mountains in search of food. Besides hunting and gathering, local inhabitants also undertake slash and burn cultivation. A section of them now undertake cultivation of wet rice, wheat, maize, and vegetables.

**North-West Himalayan Region**

The tribal belt of this region extends from upper Nepal in the east to the Pamir-knot in the north-east. In the north-west corner of Kashmir is Baltistan inhabited by the Muslim Balti tribes. Buddhist Bhot tribe inhabits the Kundan ranges separating Ladakh in the valley of Leh from Sinkiang. Some portions of Himachal Pradesh, the Himalayan belt of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh constitute the north-western part of Himalayan region. The terrain in the entire north-west Himalayan region is highly mountainous and tribal people are interspersed throughout the valley.



Gujjars and Bakhrawals form the majority of tribal population. They depend on livestock herding and migrate from one ecological zone to another on seasonal basis. The declining pastures and grazing lands has led them to adapt to the changing patterns of livelihoods.

### Check Your Progress

- 1) Name the tribes that reside between Assam and Tibet.

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## 2.3 EASTERN INDIA

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This region consists of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Odisha. The states of Bihar and West Bengal are situated in Indo-Gangetic plain whereas Jharkhand lies in Chota Nagpur plateau region. Odisha falls in the Eastern Ghats and Deccan plateau. Ethnically, the tribes belong to proto-Australoid. This zone provides rich natural resources and hence this area is known as the mineral hinterland of India. To exploit the minerals, tribals are displaced from their habitat and resettled in new locations. Of all states, Odisha represents the highest concentration of tribal communities in India with a list of 62 tribes. Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Ho, Bhumij, Bhuiya, Gond, Kandh, Saora, Kora, Lepcha, and Bhutiya are the major tribes of east India.

The majority of people inhabiting the forest-covered tracts of Medinipur in West Bengal, Singhbhum in Jharkhand, and Mayurbhanj in Orissa are tribals. Most of the tribes are agriculturists; earlier economic activities such as hunting, gathering, fishing, cattle-rearing and handicrafts are very rarely found. A large number of tribal people are engaged in mines and tea gardens. Since these areas lack well-developed irrigation systems, people have to depend on rainfall.

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## 2.4 WESTERN INDIA

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This region includes states such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and union territories such as Goa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli. It is surrounded by Thar Desert in the north, Vindhya range in the east and Arabian sea in west. Some portions of Thar Desert form a part of this region. The arid and semi-arid regions of Saurashtra and Kutch also lie in the northern part of this region. Western Ghats lie along the coast of south Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Goa. Some portions of the Deccan plateau also form a part of this region, such as the Deccan plains of Vidarbha and Marathwada in central and eastern Maharashtra.

The major tribes of Rajasthan are Bhil, Meena, Dhanka, Garasia, Kathodi, Koli, Nayak and Sahariya.

The major tribes of Gujarat are Bavacha, Dhodia, Dubla, Katkari, Rabari and Warli.

Geographically, the tribes of Maharashtra are found in three distinct regions. They are:

- **Sahyadri region:** The tribes Warli, Kokna, Thakar, Mahadeo Koli, Malhar Koli, Dhor Kholi and Katkari are dominant in Thane, Raigad, Nasik and Pune districts.
- **Satpura region:** The tribes Bhil, Kokna, Gavit, Dubla, Dhanka and Korku are dominant in Dhule, Jalgoan, Aurangabad and Amaravati districts.
- **Gondwana region:** The tribes Gond, Madia, Korku, Pradhan and Andh are dominant in Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Yavatmal and Nagpur.

The area between the coast and Sahyadri in western Maharashtra is abode of the Kokna tribe. The Warlis, living at the foothills of Sahyadri, depended on hunting and gathering in the forest but now they are forced to alternative livelihoods. The original homeland of Bhils is the hilly country between Abu and Asirgarh. From there, they spread westwards and southwards to the plains of Gujarat and Northern plains. Considerable population of Bhils is also found in the states of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Now they have undertaken a settled way of cultivation. Gonds are engaged in hunting and food gathering, collection of roots, tubers, vegetable leaves, fruits, cultivating on hill slopes and agriculture labour.

Goa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu are geographically very small states and union territories but tribal population is spread far and wide in the region.

- Goa is the smallest state situated between Karnataka and Maharashtra. It is bounded by Terekhol river in the north and Arabian sea in the west. Major tribes of Goa are Dhodia, Dubla, Naikda, Siddi, Warli, Gowdas, Kunbis, Velip and Dhangars.
- Dadra and Nagar Haveli is situated between the foothills of the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea. Dadra is surrounded by the state of Gujarat and Nagar Haveli lies on the borders of Maharashtra and Gujarat. Major tribes here are Dhodia, Kokna, and Varli. Koli, Kathod, Naika and Dublas tribes are scattered over the territory.
- Daman and Diu lie on the seaside and both are enclosed by Gujarat. Daman is located at the mouth of the Gulf of Khambhat (Cambay) south of Surat while Diu is an island joined to the mainland near Junagadh through a creek in the Saurashtra peninsula of Gujarat. The tribes of Goa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli inhabit this region too. The tribes of Goa are engaged in agriculture and related activities.

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## 2.5 CENTRAL OR MIDDLE INDIA

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This zone consists of plateaus and mountains between Narmada and Godavari which divide the North from Peninsular India. This region extends up to Santhal Parganas in the East, Telangana in the South, Rajasthan in the West and Gujarat in the North West.

The major tribes of this region and their locations are the following:

- Savara, Gadaba, Borido, Juang, Kharia, Khond, Bhumij, and Bhuiya inhabit the Eastern Ghats and Odisha hills.

- Munda, Santhal, Oraon, Ho and Birhor inhabit the Chotanagpur plateau.
- Katkari, Kol, and Bhil are found along the Vindhya ranges.
- Bhil also inhabit the Aravalli hills.
- Gond are the largest group that occupy the Gondwana land which is extended southwards into Telangana and the adjoining districts of Bastar and Kanker.
- Korku, Agaria, Pradhan and Baiga are found around Satpura and Maikal hills.
- Dhurwa, Bison Horn Maria, Halba, Bhatra, Gadaba, Dorla, Abujhmaria, and Muria predominantly occupy Bastar in Dandakaranya region.

People of this region, like people of the north-east, traditionally practiced shifting cultivation as a means of livelihood. But as the government has prohibited shifting cultivation to protect the sal forests, they have resorted to sedentary agriculture. The tribes of Bihar confined to the plateau of Chotanagpur and Santhal paraganas, such as the Oraon, Santhal, Munda and Gond, have learnt the art of plough cultivation from neighbouring rural population. The Bastar region is hilly and covered with dense forests and is host to many indigenous tribes. Here people depend on agriculture and forest for livelihood.

This region is an abode of rich mineral resources such as coal, bauxite, and iron. Particularly vulnerable tribes live in the dense forests of isolated peaks interspersed with numerous streams and rivers that make their living difficult. They cultivate coarse cereals such as *mandia*, *kodo*, *kutki*, wheat, corn, *til*, *urad* and vegetables in their fields. They also collect forest items such as fruits, flowers, vegetables, firewood, leaf, bamboo, and mushroom.

**Check Your Progress**

- 2) What are the crops cultivated by particularly vulnerable tribes?

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## 2.6 SOUTHERN INDIA

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This region is located south of the Vindhya ranges. The Narmada and Mahanadi rivers form the northern boundaries. To its west is the Arabian Sea, to its south the Indian Ocean, and to its east, the Bay of Bengal. The states under this region are Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamilnadu, Kerala and Karnataka and the union territory of Pondicherry. The tribes of this region speak Dravidian languages except those from Karnataka who speak Konkani and the Todas of Nilgiri Hills who speak their distinct languages.

In Andhra Pradesh, tribes are located along the coastal and mountain strip of the Bay of Bengal, from Bhadravari agency in Srikakulam district to the Bhadrachalam agency in Khammam and Godavari districts. The Chenchu occupy the areas of

Nallamala hills across the Krishna river. There are 33 tribal groups who inhabit eight districts in Andhra. Some of the tribes are Khond, Kolami, Nayakpod, Koya, Konda Dora, Valmiki, Bhagata, Savara, Jatayu, Gadaba, Yanadi, Sugali and Yerukala.

In Karnataka, tribes inhabit the forests of Coorg, Mysore, Chamarajnar, and Kodagu districts. Some of the prominent tribal communities inhabiting the region are Naikda, Marati, Hakki-pikki, Kattunayakan, Kuruchia, Pandharam, and Urali. The Western Ghats are home to many tribal communities who rely on forests for their survival. The Yeruvu and Todas live in the lower slopes of the Coorg Hills along the Western ghats from the Koraga to South Kanara.

In Kerala, Wayanad has the highest tribal population followed by Idukki and Palakkad. The Irula, Paniyan, Kurumba tribes live along the ranges of Cochin and Travancore whereas Kadar, Kannikar, Malvadan and Malakurvan live in adjacent forest areas. Further, Jenu Kuruba, Betta Kuruba, Kadu Kuruba Kanikkar, Pulaya, Paniyan, Kurichchan, Malaya Pandaram and Urali are other important tribes inhabiting the Kerala region.

Tamilnadu can be broadly divided into two geographical divisions where a large number of tribes are living:

- eastern coastline and
- the mountainous regions in the north and west.

The Western Ghats (Sahyadri hills) run southwards along the whole length of the western border and the Eastern Ghats run across the districts of Thiruvannamalai, Salem and Coimbatore. They finally join to form world famous Nilgiri plateau where Todas, Kurumbas, Kotas and Badagas live.

Except Todas who rely on pastoralism for their livelihoods, other communities of Nilgiri Hills depend upon hunting and gathering, and fishing. Western Ghats are rich in forests that have deep gorges, waterfalls, channels and rivulets. The region has a rich heritage of flora and fauna and most of the tribal communities of this region live in forests and depend on forest produce for their livelihood.

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## 2.7 ISLAND COMMUNITIES

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In addition to the above major geographical regions, some of the tribal communities are distributed in isolated zones in India such as Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshwadeep.

### **Andaman and Nicobar Region**

Andaman Island is an archipelago in the Bay of Bengal located in south-east direction from mainland India. It is 1,190 km east of Chennai and 1,220 km southeast of the coast of West Bengal. The topography is generally hilly and undulating; flat lands are comparatively scarce. The Andaman Islands are home to the Andamanese, an indigenous group of tribes who are remnants of negro stock. The tribes include:

- Great Andamanese,
- Jarawa (Ang),

- Onge,
- Sentinelese.

They have resided in Andaman Islands since ages and have cultural similarities with Semans of Malaya and Aeta of Philippines. Their population is very small and are considered endangered communities.

Most of the Island population is made up of settlers from mainland India.

- In early twenties Mopla or Mappilla were deported to this island from Kerala following the Malabar rebellion.
- Karen were brought to this island from Burma as convicts to work as forest labourers in 1925.
- Bantus from North and Central India migrated in the early 20th century.
- During British regime people from Chota Nagpur Tribal belt were brought to work as forest labourers. These included tribes such as Oraon, Kharia, Munda, Mahli Turi, Ghasi, Cheek and Dom.

Great Andamanese were the original inhabitants of Middle Andaman but were rehabilitated to Strait Island. Jarawas were inhabitants of the western coast of south and middle Andaman. Sentinelese were the sole inhabitants of north Sentinel Island situated south-west of Port Blair. Onge were inhabitants of Dugong Creek and South Bay of Little Andaman. Except Sentinelese, other negrito tribes have been friendly to the settlers but their contact with civilization has resulted in their depopulation.

Conventionally, the Great Andamanese tribes are foragers who practice hunting and food gathering, fishing etc. for sustenance. Their traditional food constitutes items that come mainly from the island's coastal ecology, such as fish, dugong, turtle, turtle eggs, crabs, mollusks, roots and tubers, jackfruit. After they were rehabilitated to colonies in Strait Island, they have started to cultivate coconut, betel nut, vegetables and perform poultry farming.

The Nicobarese and Shompen tribes belong to Mongoloid stock. They inhabit the Nicobar Island which is a conglomeration of 22 islands clustered in three groups:

- Car Nicobar,
- Nancowry,
- Great Nicobar.

Most of the islands are inhabited by the Nicobarese except the Great Nicobar where Shompen live. Car Nicobar has a flat terrain whereas the southern islands are hilly and forested. Though many comparable cultural traits are observed among the Nicobarese, each island tribe has an identity of its own with their distinct language.

The central and southern islands being hilly, are suited for growing coco-palm. Population is sparse in these islands. Traditionally, the Nicobarese of Nicobar Islands are horticulturalists since their area receives highest rainfall. Cultivation of coconut, areca nut and other garden crops is the main economic activity besides fishing and pig herding. Inter-island exchange is a marked feature of the Nicobarese society which facilitates them to obtain scarce resources.

**Check Your Progress**

3) Describe the location and topography of Andaman Island.

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**Lakshadweep Region**

Lakshadweep is a union territory of India with the highest proportion of tribal population. Malayalam is the language spoken in all islands except Minicoy where people speak Mahl (spoken in Maldives also) written in Divehi. The people of the islands are ethnically similar to the people of Kerala coast and are of mixed Indian and Arab descent, except on the southernmost Minicoy where people closely resemble Maldivians.

Lakshadweep group of islands is divided into four sub-groups:

- Minicoy,
- Kavaratti,
- Amini,
- Andrott.

In Lakshadweep, no original settlers are found as the above-mentioned tribal communities have migrated from neighbouring states. Most of the inhabitants of these islands are dependent on fishing, followed by coconut cultivation.

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**2.8 SUMMARY**

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The present unit provides a brief account of geographical distribution of tribes in India. Distributed communities maintain special ecological relations with their natural surroundings. For example, the tribes of Himalayan region are located at high altitudes and hence depend on shifting and terrace cultivation. The tribes of eastern region are based on fertile soils of Gangetic plains and hence developed settled cultivation. The tribes of Central and South India depend heavily on forests for their sustenance. Due to the significance of ecology and natural resources in their daily life, tribes residing in similar climatic conditions developed similar ways of exploiting natural resources.

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## 2.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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- 1) The tribes Aka, Dafla, Miri and Gurung reside between Assam and Tibet.
- 2) Particularly vulnerable tribes cultivate coarse cereals such as *asmandia*, *kodo*, *kutki*, wheat, corn, *til*, *urad* and vegetables in their fields.
- 3) Andaman Island is an archipelago in the Bay of Bengal located in south-east direction from mainland India. It is 1,190 km east of Chennai and 1,220 km southeast to the coast of West Bengal. The topography is generally hilly and undulating. Flat lands are comparatively scarce.

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## UNIT 3 TRIBAL ORGANISATION\*

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- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Tribal Social Organisation
- 3.2 Tribal Economic Organisation
  - 3.2.1 Forms of Tribal Economy
  - 3.2.2 Characteristics of Tribal Economy
- 3.3 Tribal Political Organisation
- 3.4 Law and Social Control in Tribal Society
  - 3.4.1 Features of Primitive Law
- 3.5 Gender Relation in Tribal Society
- 3.6 Tribal Religion and Cosmology
- 3.7 Impact of Social Change on Tribal Social Organisation
- 3.8 Summary
- 3.9 References
- 3.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

### Learning Objectives:

In this unit you will learn about:

- The concept, meaning, and evolution of tribal social organisation, as understood in anthropology;
- Various aspects of tribal social organisation in the areas of economy, political system, law, social control, gender relation and tribal religion.
- The changes in the concept of tribal social organisation due to various exogenous forces.

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### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

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Tribal society is a stage in the social formation of human society. Tribal societies are kin-based, segmentary and personalised societies. They maintain habitational proximity, common languages and are non-stratified homogeneous societies with commune consciousness. They enjoy rights over common property resources on hereditary ownership, express a strong sense of ethnicity and give emphasis to boundary maintenance. They practice family-based production and gender-based division of labour, employing simple technologies. They are guided by a strong sense of supernaturalism-supreme gods and goddesses, presiding deities, ancestral spirits, who are both benevolent and malevolent by nature. Their economy is undifferentiated, having subsistence level economy not oriented to market. Circulation of goods and services in these societies is based on barter and exchange. Most of the tribal communities are not conscious of their ethno-tribal identities rather they call themselves as people. Following annexation of the India by the British, the term tribe got crystalised and formalised under the Scheduled District Act, which incorporated food gatherers and shifting cultivators.

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\* Contributed by Dr. Nilakantha Panigrahi. Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology and Tribal Development, Guru Ghasidas Central University, Bilaspur, Chattishgarh.



### 3.1 TRIBAL SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Social organisation is the pillar of a society. Social organisation is different from social structure. Social organisation refers to an arrangement of activities, while social structure is an arrangement of institutionally controlled and defined relationships.

For example, the structure of Indian society refers to varna and caste system, while organisation refers to the functional aspects of these institutions in various forms such as pollution, purity, food commensality, marriage network, and social hierarchy.

Social organisation refers to the human actions in so far as the actors take into account the actions of others in a behavior pattern, evolved over the time. Therefore, social organisation is a dynamic process because human behavior is ever changing. Social organisation is the functioning of different social institutions in a peaceful manner for larger goal of the society.

R.H. Lowie (1921) defined organisation as ‘articulation of different parts which perform various functions’. It is a group device for the fulfillment of a goal.

Tribal social organization reflects strong close knit based on community feeling. The economic activities like collection of fruits animal hunting, animal husbandry and fishing reflects the community base in tribal society. Tribal societies are divided into certain clan groups or sib which has become very important part of tribal organization. The clan groups based on lineages are exogamous groups having common ancestors and are unilateral by nature.

Radcliff Brown (1931) defined social organisation as a condition in which institutions in a society function according to recognized purpose.

- social control in the form of folkways, mores, laws and institutions and
- consensus, the gene of a social organisation, which arises automatically and without which the physical structure of a society cannot exist.

The major social institutions of any society and also of a tribal society are interrelated with each other and contributory to each other’s existence in a symbolic manner. These include its economy, political organisation, law, social control, gender relations and religion.

#### Check Your Progress

- 1) What is the meaning of social organisation?

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## 3.2 TRIBAL ECONOMIC ORGANISATION

Economic organisation of any society is the sum total of the human behavior to produce, distribute and consume goods for the nourishment of its population. While satisfying biological needs, human beings also address their social needs. Economic organisation involves wants and demands, supply of goods and services and the culture of a society. Similar basic processes are also observed in tribal societies.

Economic historian N.S.B.Gras coined the term economic anthropology and conceived it as the synthesis of anthropological and economic studies.

### 3.2.1 Forms of Tribal economy

Tribal economy is the oldest mode of human economy. It includes both food-gathering, hunting-fishing and pastoral and agriculture economies. By and large all these tribal economies are oriented towards subsistence and nature. The food-gathering economy was in existence since paleolithic era. Later on the hunting and fishing communities adopt a sedentary life. Compared to food gathering, this economy supports a higher population of self-sufficient local groups and have plenty of food and protein-based trading. The food-gathering communities include Mankiridia and Kharias of Odissa, Munda tribe, Birhors of Central-east states like Jharkhand and Odissa, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal. The pastoral economy went hand in hand with hunting and fishing economy. Some of these communities adopted pastoral form of economy. The pastoral communities include Koyas of Odissa, Andhra Pradesh and many communities living in the Himalayan region of India. They are viz: Gujjars of J&K, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, Jath of Kutch region of Gujarat, Kuruba of Karnataka, Kinnauras of Himachal Pradesh. The nomadic pastoralism is practiced by few tribes of different states like Dhangars of Maharashtra, Golla Herders of Karnataka, Raikwars of Rajasthan.

The pastoral form of economy is characterized by:

- semi-nomadism or sedentary lifestyle
- small population
- moderate economic resources with respect to technology, division of labour and land ownership
- surplus of food
- trade and commerce.

The horticulture economy is a comparatively developed economy where tribal women play a distinct role in its various stages which makes the society a comparatively stable one. A few major tribal horticultural communities are: the Madia Gond, the Aangmi Naga and the A bor (Adi) and Dargaria Kandhs and Kaani tribes of Western Ghats.

The horticulture economy is characterized by sedentary lifestyle, low to moderate population, simple to moderate economic resources with respect to technology and division of labour, small to moderate size of food availability and strong social leadership.

Agriculture economy is a permanent type of economy. It incorporates domestication of animals, plantation, use of water and technology and land development .A few major tribal communities who have adopted agriculture as the mode of living are: the Baiga, the Bhil, the Bhuiyan, the Ho, the Lepcha, the Oraon, and the Santhal of India.

Agriculture economy evolved through various stages like Shifting cultivation, Highland cultivation, Plain land cultivation, Irrigation-based cultivation and Intensive cultivation. Agricultural economy is characterized by: sedentary lifestyle, high population density, permanent settlement pattern, developed economic resources with respect to technology, division of labour, other agro-inputs, land ownership.

Development of social organisation in different economies has been different, which in subsequent periods became more specialized, organised, structured and relatively permanent in nature. Malinowski (1926 and 1948) studied the Kula system among the Trobriand Islanders which is a form of ceremonial, utilitarian and gift exchange system of social mechanism.

### 3.2.2 Characteristics of Tribal Economy

Tribal economy is small scale with respect to area coverage, production, cropping pattern and simple technologies. It is characterized by:

- production for self-consumption
- largely based on barter system
- lacks regular marketing and profit motive
- resource ownership is community-specific and not individual-specific
- comparatively backward in many respects.

#### Check Your Progress

2) Name a few tribal communities of India practising food-gathering horticulture, animal husbandry, shifting cultivation and Plain land agriculture?

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## 3.3 TRIBAL POLITICAL ORGANISATION

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The words polity, policy and politics are derived from the Greek word ‘polis’, and refer to a political community.

- The term ‘polity’ involves a territorial space, organisational aspect, leadership, legal or customary aspect and lastly interrelationship.
- The term ‘political organisation’ refers to a public body that formulates public policies which helps to maintain peace and harmony in the society.

Anthropologist R.H. Lowie (1921) is considered the founder of contemporary political anthropology. He used political institutions in the study of social problems. African Political System (1940) edited by E. E. Evans Pritchard explained the political structure of tribal communities. Radcliff-Brown (1931) who studied the Trobriand Islanders observed that politics is concerned primarily with the maintenance of order, legitimate use of violence and the rights of a territory. He saw political organisation as a component of social organisation. He viewed that authority structure of a society is one of the most important features of the political life of a society.

Tribal political organisation includes social structures categorized as:

- centralized political organisation (includes the Chieftdom and the State)
- decentralized political organisation (village, clan, lineage, fraternity, club, Age Grade based, secret societies, Melanesian Big Man system, or tribe). Such political bodies make laws , policies and ensure good governance as per the values in a cultural society.

Political organisations in tribal societies perform various functions. They are viz:

- To decide norms for day-to-day life in the society.
- To use force to bring about and maintain peace and harmony in the village.
- To settle disputes within and outside the village community.
- To decide agriculture activities in the village.
- To give protection to the villagers from outside attack.
- To organise community activities (hunting, religious activities and festivities).

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### **3.4 LAW AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN TRIBAL SOCIETY**

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Primitive societies have an organised body of customs that are supported by sanctions. Malinowski (1926) viewed that the fundamental sanction of law is

- to curb certain natural propensities
- to control human instincts, and
- to impose a non-spontaneous compulsory behavior.

In primitive societies customary rules govern human behavior. A high degree of dependence on each other and mutual obligations force people to abide by uncoded and customary practices of the society. Thus, law is considered a body of principles which controls the activities of human beings in a state. It permits authorities to use force to maintain political and social organisation within a territory. When organized force steps in as a sanction and drive behind a custom, it became a law.

In primitive societies the growth of law is a slow and spontaneous process of usages and customs being given the sanction of time and force. Radcliff-Brown (1931) wrote that law enforces social control through the systematic application of force. He says that fundamentally all the societies go through similar processes to protect physical body, wives, and property from being harmed. The rural prescription in the society came with the state formation.

### 3.4.1 Features of Primitive Law

- Primitive law has kinship force behind it. L.H. Morgan (1877) and Hennery Maine (1871) believed that kinship in tribal society knit people into social groupings.
- Primitive law is backed by ethical and moral notions and public opinion.
- It is believed that breach of primitive law is the breach of supernatural forces and hence the deviants are punished by supernatural forces.
- Ordeals for example, putting hands in boiling water to prove innocence and taking oath in the name of god are the major forms of presenting evidence and ensuring punishment.
- Punishment in primitive society is based on tit-for-tat (an eye for an eye and a limb for a limb) and ostracization of the culprit.

The Kamar tribal community of Madhya Pradesh is fully guided by their customary practices for dispute resolutions by traditional leaders in village panchayats. Punishment varies according to the type and seriousness of the deviations and wrong acts. Many of the offences in the Kamar society are considered sins which can be compensated by giving community feast to the village leaders and to the kith and kin of both the parties.

The Kharia of Odisha and Bihar is a food gathering and primitive agriculture based tribal community. Their village council is popularly known as the village panchayat under the leadership of village leaders and seniors who deal with the violations of socio-cultural incidences. The deviants are normally asked to give feasts to panchayat leaders to relax their punishments.

The Juangs and Bhuiyans of Keojhar district of Odisha traditionally follow the traditional political system popularly known as 'Pirha' (An administrative unit consisting of few contiguous villages) which looks after the socio-cultural and administrative management of people and the resources, dispute resolutions giving punishment and rewards etc.

Due to state interventions and administrative and development packages like Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), customary practices of many tribal communities have been largely weakened; as a result, the control of customary practices on tribal people has been replaced by state formed laws.

#### Check Your Progress

- 3) Discuss the customary law of Kamar tribal community, Juangs and Bhuiyans.

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### 3.5 GENDER RELATION IN TRIBAL SOCIETY

The concept of 'sex' and 'gender' is emerged based on biological and socio-cultural parameters. Social roles and behaviors of males and females have differed in human societies (Marni, 1990). Studies on tribal societies indicate that men are to be the warriors, hunters and processors of hard raw materials used for weaponry tools, whereas, women are to do the cooking and preparation of food (Sanday, 1981). As a result, with regard to gender differentiation and division of labour, men have been in a better position to acquire and control valuable resources of their societies (Friedl, 1975). Matriarchal societies once existed in the history of human evolution. Anthropological evidences have been reported to support these claims (Bamberger, 1974). Anthropologists argue that egalitarian hunting-gathering societies existed prior to colonial contact (Sacks, 1979). Women had a relatively high status in society, because of their role in economic production and distribution (Blumberg, 1984). Anthropologists agree that more complex forms of social organisation brought intensified gender-based stratification (Freidl, Ibid). The Khasis and the Garos of Assam are matrilineal societies in which succession are decided from mothers side.

Anthropological research indicates wide cross-cultural variations in the behaviour of females and males. For example, division of labour by sex is affected by both biological and societal characteristics.

- In foraging societies women tend to provide more than half of the food needed for subsistence.
- In most horticultural societies the labour force is predominantly female (Blumberg Ibid).
- In agrarian societies, women play a major role in production.
- In tribal societies the household is both a production and a consumption unit, which also contributes in minimizing the gaps between the sex groups.

The kinship ties, which are very strong in Indian society, have provided a social security net; as a result, females do not feel insecure even at the time of insecurities.

Anthropologists hold two divergent views on gender relations in tribal societies:

- Gender relations are not based on equality and women suffer a lot.
- Primitive societies generally assign a high status to women.

Malinowski viewed that gender relation can only be understood by taking into account the mutual duties between the sexes and the safeguards provided for the protection of each sex against the other. According to R.H. Lowie, there are four different dimensions to understand gender relations which determine the status of tribal women in a society. They are:

- actual treatment of women,
- legal status of women,
- opportunity for social participation of women
- the extent of work carried out by women.
- Among the Andaman Islanders, man and woman are equal participants in their religio-economic life.

- Among the Kadars there is a well-defined division of labour, giving full opportunity to women.

Therefore, one can say that the type and extent of work distributed among men and women is important to see the gender relations.

- The Khasi society is a matrilineal society where inheritance is based on kinship with the mother or the female line. Property is inherited from mother to daughter. Ceremonial and religious activities are women's rightful areas.
- The Garos are a matrilineal and matrilocal society. Inheritance of property is through the female line which reflects the dominant relation of tribal women over tribal men.

In many tribal societies taboos are meant to prevent adversely impact gender relations. For example, women are considered unfit to perform certain socio-cultural and religious activities because of "impurity" arising out of menstruation and childbirth.

The following is the situation of some tribal women:

- Gond women, according to Grigs on, enjoy higher status in certain aspects like choice of husband and seeking divorce while in other aspects the gender relation is depressed.
- Tharu women, who are experts in sorcery and witchcraft, enjoy special status within the communities.
- Among the Khasis where polyandry is practised women are under constant physical, emotional and social strain.
- Although the Sema Naga women have a better social position in gender relation compared to Angami and Ao Naga women, the latter have a better state of living in possessing property and marital alliance.

Therefore, one can say that in tribal social organisation women comparatively enjoy higher social status. The gender relation of a woman in any society is connected with her child-bearing capacity and child-rearing functions. A mother is respected whereas woman is always looked down upon socially and culturally.

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### **3.6 TRIBAL RELIGION AND COSMOLOGY**

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Sir Edward Burnell Tylor in 1871 defined religion as "the belief in spiritual beings." Tylor argued that foundation of religion is animism or belief in soul or nature worship, normally observed in primitive societies. According to him, polytheism is normally observed in semi-urbanized societies and monotheism in urban and developed societies.

French sociologist Emile Durkheim in 1915 defined religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into single moral community." Clifford Geertz defined religion as a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations. He emphasized the importance of symbols and explained why people find their religion believable.

Emile Durkheim, who worked among the small bands of Australian aborigines, gave the concept of totemism. According to him, religion has its origins in

totemism. Totems are collective symbols that represent both god and society. Totems are representations in the form of an animal, plant or some geographical features which are considered as the ancestors or emblems of a group of people and are worshipped by them.

V. Elwin in his anthropological monograph explained the relationship between tribal religion and Hinduism. According to G.S.Ghurye, tribals are backward Hindus. The Munda, the Ho and other cognate tribes of Chotanagpur region believe in 'Mana', which is considered to be the origin of religion. During the course of time some tribal communities that came into contact with Hindu people adopted some Hindu religious elements. This transformation is popularly known as Hinduization.

Tribal religion consists of faith in Mana which is considered as the supernatural power. Majumdar and Madan viewed that entire religious life of the primitive men is based on beliefs on supernatural power which exist in the universe. The Ho and the Mundas call it as the Bonga which is a unforeseen spirit behind all natural causes like rain, cold, flood, epidemics etc. The tribal people also believe on animism or animatism which believes powerful souls which even survive even after their death. Tribal people worship nature known as naturalism. The Garos of Assam worship sun and moon. The Mundas worship sun god and have faith in the immortality of soul, rebirth, and in magic. Totems represent different objects and animals and are considered as the originators of the tribe having supernatural relations and protect the social groups, in time. The families of one totem maintain strict exogamy.

Thus, religion is universal, endorses beliefs in supernatural powers, provides explanation of life, death and evil, defines moral code and what a population considers as sacred. The constituents of religion include beliefs of several types such as: animistic beliefs, animalistic beliefs, naturalist beliefs, totem beliefs and theistic beliefs.

Taboo, which means to forbid something, is the law of the savage society. Things are forbidden with an aim to limit an individual to the norms of the society. Totemic objects in the form of animal, plants are considered ancestors and are revered. Tribal communities tie taboos to the totems.

Rituals are closely linked to beliefs and are patterned acts which try to contact and control supernatural spirits by prayers, offerings, sacrifices and manipulation of objects. Tribal societies have different names for religious practitioners such as priest and shaman. A priest is a ceremonialist who conducts rituals, sacrifices and serves as the interpreter to God. He persuades the supernatural powers with the help of prayers, offerings and sacrifices. The shaman is a religious practitioner (male or female) who plays the role of an intermediary between the supernatural forces and the individual. The shaman uses divination to identify the cause of an ailment and uses magic to cure the person. He also performs the role of a medicine man to tribal people.

The institution of youth dormitory in tribal societies play a very important role observed in every tribal community. It is known as 'Morung' among the Nagas and the female youth organization is known as 'Yo'. Among Angami Nagas it is known as 'Rangbag'. Among the Mundas and Hos of Madhya Bharat it is known as Gitiora. The Oraon call it as 'Dhumkurya' while the Bhuiyans call it as 'Dhangiribasa'. The Muria Gonds call it as 'Gotul'.



### 3.7 IMPACT OF SOCIAL CHANGE ON TRIBAL SOCIAL ORGANISATION

No society is static by nature. Every society is in perennial state of dynamism. The changes in the nature and structure of groups and institutions, and in their relationships in a continuous manner is called social change. The dynamism of social change depends on the types of interventions and exposures a society goes through. Social change is a process, not a product.

Institution, on the other hand, is a product that endures the process. A social structure cannot be placed in amuseum. Social change is reflected initially as changes in social relationships, followed by structural change.

Culture as a process, goes through continuous change in a definite manner. Social change process may go up and down, forward and backward, towards progression and regression, but it moves in a definite direction. Such cultural or social change processes may be culture sustaining and/or culture transforming, in the form of bringing modifications, deletions or replacements. A few cultural processes that have brought in changes to the tribal social organisation are:

- sanskritization,
- modernization,
- urbanization,
- industrialization and
- globlization.

Eminent American anthropologist Robert Redfield in his book *Peasant Society and Culture*(1956) used the concept of Great Tradition and Little Tradition while studying the Mexican communities. Milton Singer and McKim Marriot applied these concepts in the Indian context to study social change processes. They observed that Chhau dance of the Santhals and the Mundas of Odisha, West Bengal and Jharkhand has been co-opted by higher castes groups with modifications. This has also modernized the traditional Chhau dance pattern of these communities.

M.N.Srinivas in his book *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of south India* (1952)' described changes observed in castes and in tribal societies of India through various cultural change processes like sanskritization, westernization and secularization.

Due to Sanskritization a social change process, the Suddha Saoras of Odisha have given up consumption of liquor and beef and taken to worshipping the Tulsi tree and Goddess Laxmi.

The impact of westernization in Indian society brought in humanitarianism, institutional reforms, establishment of scientific technologies, educational institutions and a new political culture has also affected the tribal societies. Because of these change processes tribal people are more educated, more employable, make use of modern technological tools and claim individual rights. All these have brought in a lot of changes in their belief patterns, institutional arrangements and social functioning.

Similarly, modernization adopted in India brought changes in indigenous cultures. The introduction of means of communication such as television, radio and computers injected scientific world view in these communities to some extent. The use of modern conveniences such as refrigerators and automobiles has become trans-ethnic and universal. The impact of modern values is observed among tribal communities such as Santhal, Munda, Ho, Gond, in and around mining and industrial complexes of Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal and many other tribal communities.

At the macro level the impact of modernization is visible in their: adoption of technologies, economy, political organization, social organisation and legal system.

At the micro level the impact of modernization is visible in their both material and non-material culture. A few of them are viz: dressing, food, ritual, technologies and Disease treatment

Among the tribal people of central India and north-east India to some extent changes are also observed in their: education level, age at marriage, number of births per family, equal remuneration for same work carried out by both tribal male and female belongingness to individual family than maintaining ethnicity at the level of the community, adoption of family planning and adoption of allopathic treatment system.

The Indian constitutional provisions in social, economic and political sectors have also positively impacted tribal life and their social organisation.

Globalisation is a social change process that has had the greatest impact on tribal communities. Since 1991 India has adopted the Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalization (LPG) model of development, following which changes have been observed in state policies, inflow and outflow of capital, adoption of technologies, ideas and cultural elements. Impact of these processes on the tribal social organisation are also visible in many walks of their life (Adishesiah,1992). Impact of such changes is not universal as all tribal communities are not equally receptive to such changes. As a result, one finds comparatively developed tribal communities such as the Meena, the Santhal, the Munda, the Gond, the Oraons, as well as backward tribal communities such as Abuj Maria, the Boda, the Didayi, the Andaman Islanders in India.

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### 3.8 SUMMARY

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The unit provided an anthropological understanding of the tribal organisation. The discussion attempted to describe tribal economy, politics, law, social control, gender relation, religion and rituals, and the impact of social change processes on tribal social organisation. We studied the views and findings of different studies carried out by eminent anthropologists who have explained the meaning, concept, growth and development of various organisations in tribal societies with special reference to Indian situation.

We saw that social organisation of any society is not static but dynamic in nature. The dynamism of a social organisation depends on the type, pattern and complexity of developmental interventions made by outside agencies. No aspect of tribal organization has been free from interventions from outside agencies,

which has led to multiple changes in their content and context. These changes though, are not uniform across all tribal societies, because the socio-cultural and ecological content and context of tribal societies are not same and similar. Therefore, one finds differential impact of these change processes on tribal organisations and their responses.

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### 3.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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- 1) Social organisation refers to human actions in so far as the actors take into account the actions of others in a behaviour pattern, evolved over time. Therefore, social organisation is a dynamic process due to the fact that human behaviour changes. It is the functioning of different social institutions in a peaceful manner for the larger goal of society.
- 2) A few major food-gathering communities the Palyana, the Iruku, the Yanadi, the Kurumbha, the Chenchu, the Onge, the Jarwa, the Sentinali, of India.
- 3) The Kharia of Odisha and Bihar is a food-gathering and primitive agriculture based tribal community. Their village council is popularly known as the village panchayat under the leadership of village leaders and seniors who deal with incidences of socio-cultural violations. The deviants are normally asked to give feasts to panchayat leaders to relax their punishments.



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