



An Evaluation of Tribal Development in Historical Period

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Abstract:

The tribal population of India deserves a special concern of the national heritage in context of their low technological development, general economic backwardness, and complex problems of socio-cultural adjustment to distinctive cultural identity. Development of tribals and tribal areas is a challenging task for the government, as they spread over a wide spectrum of diversities of geographical locations, socio-economic and politico-cultural conditions. This study endeavors to deal with the origin, continuity and socio-cultural bequest of Indian tribal stratification. It also demonstrates how the Republican Indian government endeavored to boost up and amalgamate the tribal segment in the mainstream of social infrastructure.

Keywords: Tribe, Isolation, Pre History, Monarchy, Census

Introduction

Adivasi carries the specific meaning of being the original and autochthonous inhabitants of a given region, and was specifically coined for that purpose in the 1930s. Over a period of time, unlike the terms aborigines or tribes, the word 'adivasi' has also developed a connotation of past autonomy which was disrupted during the colonial rule in India and has not been restored. It should also be noted that in Northeast India, the term Adivasi applies only to the Tea-tribes imported from Central India during colonial times, while all tribal groups refer collectively to themselves by using the English word 'tribes'.

Ethnic origins and linguistic affiliations in India match only inexactly. While the Oraon adivasis are classified as an Australoid group, their language, called Kurukh, is Dravidian. Khasis and Nicobarese are considered to be Mongoloid groups and the Munda and Santals are Australoid groups, but all four speak Austro-Asiatic languages. The Bhils and Gonds are frequently classified as Australoid groups, yet Bhil languages are Indo-European and the Gondi language is Dravidian. In addition, in post-colonial India, tribal languages suffered huge setbacks with the formation of linguistic states after 1956 under the States Reorganisation Act. For example, under state-sponsored educational pressure, Irula children are being taught Tamil and a sense of shame has begun to be associated with speaking the Irula language among some children and educated adults. Similarly, the Santals are "gradually adopting languages of the areas inhabited, like Oriya in Orissa, Hindi in Bihar and Bengali in West Bengal."

Although considered uncivilized and primitive, adivasis were usually not held to be intrinsically impure by surrounding (usually, Caucasoid- Dravidian or Aryan) caste Hindu populations, unlike Dalits, who were. Thus, the adivasi origins of Maharshi (Great Sage of Sanksrit) Valmiki, who composed the Ramayana Hindu religious epic, were acknowledged, as were the origins of adivasi tribes such as the Grasia and Bhilala, which descended from mixed Rajput and Bhil marriages. Unlike the subjugation of the dalits, the adivasis often enjoyed autonomy and, depending on region, evolved mixed hunter-gatherer and farming economies, controlling their lands as a joint patrimony of the tribe. In some areas, securing adivasi approval and support was considered crucial by local rulers, and larger adivasi groups were able to sustain their own kingdoms in central India. The Gond Rajas of Garha-Mandla and Chanda are examples of an adivasi aristocracy that ruled in this region, and were not only the hereditary leaders of their Gond

subjects, but also held sway over substantial communities of non-tribals who recognized them as their feudal lords.

This relative autonomy and collective ownership of adivasi land by adivasis was severely disrupted by the advent of the royal Mughals in the early 16th century. Similarly, the British beginning in the 18th century added to the consolidation of feudalism in India, first under the jagirdari system and then under the zamindari system of land revenue collection. Beginning with the Permanent Settlement imposed by the British in Bengal and Bihar, which later became the template for a deepening of feudalism throughout India, the older social and economic system in the country began to alter radically. Land, both forest areas belonging to adivasis and settled farmland belonging to non-adivasi peasants, was rapidly made the legal property of British-designated zamindars (landlords), who in turn moved to extract the maximum economic benefit possible from their newfound property and subjects without regard to historical tenure or ownership. Adivasi lands sometimes experienced an influx of non-local settlers, often brought from far away by the zamindars to better exploit local land, forest and labour. Deprived of the forests and resources they traditionally depended on and sometimes coerced to pay taxes, many adivasis were forced to borrow at usurious rates from moneylenders, often the zamindars themselves. When they were unable to pay, that forced them to become bonded laborers for the zamindars. Often, far from paying off the principal of their debt, they were unable even to offset the compounding interest, and this was made the justification for their children working for the zamindar after the death of the initial borrower. In the case of the Andamanese adivasis, long isolated from the outside world in autonomous societies, mere contact with outsiders was often sufficient to set off deadly epidemics in tribal populations, and it is alleged that some sections of the British government directly attempted to destroy some tribes.

Land dispossession and subjugation by British and zamindar interests resulted in a number of adivasi revolts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, viz. the Santal hul of 1855-56. Although these were suppressed ruthlessly by the governing British authority (the East India Company prior to 1858, and the British government after 1858), partial restoration of privileges to adivasi elites (e.g. to Mankis, the leaders of Munda tribes) and some leniency in tax burdens resulted in relative calm, despite continuing and widespread dispossession, from the late nineteenth century onwards. The economic deprivation, in some cases, triggered internal adivasi migrations within India that would continue for another century, including as labor for the emerging teaplantations in Assam.

Identification and Classification of Tribes

Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are Indian population groupings that are explicitly recognized by the Constitution of India, previously called the "depressed classes" by the British. SCs/STs together comprise over 24% of India's population, with SC at over 16% and ST over 7.50% as per the 2001 Census. The proportion of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the population of India has steadily risen since independence in 1947.

The Constitution of India, Article 366 (25) defines Scheduled Tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or part of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to the scheduled Tribes (STs) for the purposes of this Constitution". In Article 342, the procedure to be followed for specification of a scheduled tribe is prescribed. However, it does not contain the criterion for the specification of any community as scheduled tribe. An often used criterion is based on attributes such as:

- a) **Geographical isolation:** They live in cloistered, exclusive, remote and inhospitable areas such as hills and forests.
 - b) **Backwardness:** Their livelihood is based on primitive agriculture, a low-value closed economy with a low level of technology that leads to their poverty. They have low levels of literacy and health.
 - c) **Distinctive culture, language and religion:** Communities have developed their own distinctive culture, language and religion.
 - d) **Shyness of contact:** They have a marginal degree of contact with other cultures and people.
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The Scheduled Tribe groups who were identified as more backward communities among the tribal population groups have been categorised as 'Primitive Tribal Groups' (PTGs) by the Government at the Centre in 1975. So far seventy-five tribal communities have been identified as 'primitive tribal groups' in different States of India. These hunting, food-gathering, and some agricultural communities, who have been identified as more backward communities among the tribal population groups need special programmes for their sustainable development. The primitive tribes are awakening and demanding their rights for special reservation quota for them. The tribal population of the country, as per the 2001 census, is 8.43 crore, constituting 8.2% of the total population. The population of tribes had grown at the growth rate of 24.45% during the period 1991-2001. More than half the Scheduled Tribe population is concentrated in the States of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Jharkhand and Gujarat. Tribal communities live in about 15% of the country's areas, in various ecological and geoclimatic conditions ranging from plains and forests to hills and inaccessible areas. Tribal groups are at different stages of social, economic and educational development.

As per the census 2011, the population of Scheduled Castes at 16.6 per cent and Scheduled Tribes at 8.6 per cent, together forming a quarter of the total population. In the period 2001-11, the SCs grew by 20.8 per cent and STs by 23.7 per cent. The data shows the total population has witnessed a decadal increase of 17.7 per cent to touch 1.21 billion. Scheduled Castes are notified in 31 States/UTs of India and Scheduled Tribes in 30 States There are altogether 1,241 individual ethnic groups, etc. notified as Scheduled Castes in different States/UTs Number of individual ethnic groups, etc. notified as Scheduled Tribes is 705.

Population complexities, ethnicity controversies and language in India, sometimes make the official recognition of groups as adivasi political and contentious. However, regardless of their language family affiliations, Australoid and Negrito groups that have survived as distinct forest, mountain or island dwelling tribes in India and are often classified as adivasi. The relatively autonomous Mongoloid tribal groups of Northeastern India (including Khasis, Apatani and Nagas), who are mostly Austro-Asiatic or Tibeto-Burman speakers, are also considered to be adivasi: this area comprises 7.5% of India's land area but 20% of its tribal population. However, not all autonomous northeastern groups are considered tribals; for instance, the Tibeto-Burman-speaking Meitei of Manipur were once tribal but, having been settled for many centuries, are caste Hindus.

It is also difficult, for a given social grouping, to definitively decide whether it is a 'caste' or a 'tribe'. A combination of internal social organization, relationship with other groups, self-classification and perception by other groups has to be taken into account to make a categorization, which is at best inexact and open to doubt. These categorizations have been diffused for thousands of years, and even ancient formulators of caste-discriminatory legal codes were unable to come up with clean distinctions.

An additional difficulty in deciding whether a group meets the criteria to be adivasi or not are the aspirational movements created by the federal and state benefits, including job and educational reservations, enjoyed by groups listed as scheduled tribes (STs). In Manipur, Meitei commentators have pointed to the lack of scheduled tribe status as a key economic disadvantage for Meiteis competing for jobs against groups that are classified as scheduled tribes. In Assam, Rajbongshi representatives have demanded scheduled tribe status as well. In Rajasthan, Haryana and other northern states, the Gujjar community has demanded ST status, even blockading the national capital of Delhi to press their demand. In several cases, these claims to tribalhood are disputed by tribes who are already listed in the schedule and fear economic losses if more powerful groups are recognized as scheduled tribes; for instance, the Rajbongshi demand faces resistance from the Bodo tribe, and the Meena tribe has vigorously opposed Gujjar aspirations to be recognized as a scheduled tribe in Rajasthan.

Unlike castes, which form part of a complex and interrelated local economic exchange system, tribes tend to form self-sufficient economic units. For most tribal people, land-use rights traditionally derive simply from tribal membership. Tribal society tends to the egalitarian, with

its leadership based on ties of kinship and personality rather than on hereditary status. Tribes typically consist of segmentary lineages whose extended families provide the basis for social organization and control. Tribal religion recognizes no authority outside the tribe.

Language does not always give an accurate indicator of tribal or caste status. Especially in regions of mixed population, many tribal groups have lost their mother tongues and simply speak local or regional languages. In parts of Assam - an area historically divided between warring tribes and villages - increased contact among villagers began during the colonial period, and has accelerated since independence in 1947.

Self-identification and group loyalty do not provide unfailing markers of tribal identity either. In the case of stratified tribes, the loyalties of clan, kin, and family may well predominate over those of tribe. In addition, tribes cannot always be viewed as people living apart; the degree of isolation of various tribes has varied tremendously. The Gonds, Santals, and Bhils traditionally have dominated the regions in which they have lived. Moreover, tribal society is not always more egalitarian than the rest of the rural populace; some of the larger tribes, such as the Gonds, are highly stratified.

The apparently wide fluctuation in estimates of South Asia's tribal population through the twentieth century gives a sense of how unclear the distinction between tribal and nontribal can be. India's 1931 census enumerated 22 million tribal people, in 1941 only 10 million were counted, but by 1961 some 30 million and in 1991 nearly 68 million tribal members were included. The differences among the figures reflect changing census criteria and the economic incentives individuals have to maintain or reject classification as a tribal member.

These gyrations of census data serve to underline the complex relationship between caste and tribe. Although, in theory, these terms represent different ways of life and ideal types, in reality they stand for a continuum of social groups. In areas of substantial contact between tribes and castes, social and cultural pressures have often tended to move tribes in the direction of becoming castes over a period of years. Tribal peoples with ambitions for social advancement in Indian society at large have tried to gain the classification of caste for their tribes. On occasion, an entire tribe or part of a tribe joined a Hindu sect and thus entered the caste system en masse. If a specific tribe engaged in practices that Hindus deemed polluting, the tribe's status when it was assimilated into the caste hierarchy would be affected.

According to 1951 census, the scheduled tribes population in India was 19,147,054 which constituted 5.3% of the total population of the country. After the scheduled tribes lists modification order, 1956 tribal population rose to 22,511,845 or 6.23%. This increase of 34 lakhs in population of tribals was due to inclusion of certain groups. According to 1961 census, the tribal population was 29,879,249 i.e. 6.86% of the total population of the country. As per 1971 census, the schedule tribe population was 3.64 millions, while the total population was 54.8 million. The above census figures indicate the regular progressive increase in tribal population. The scheduled tribes list was again amended in 1976 vide GOI order No. 108 of 18th, Sept. 1976.

According to 1981 census, 51,528,638 persons were enumerated in the country excluding Assam where the census was not held due to unavoidable conditions. Out of the total population scheduled tribes constitute 26,038,535 males and 25,590,103 females. The scheduled tribe population constitutes only 7.76% of the total population of the country.

According to 1991 census, the tribal population of India constitute 67,758,380 persons (62,751,026 rural and 50,007,354) i.e. 8.08 per cent of the total population which reveals that the tribals were enumerated throughout the country excepts in the state of Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Chandigarh, Delhi and Pondicherry where the tribals are not scheduled, the North eastern region is highly concentrated with tribals.

The tribal population of the country, as per the 2001 census, is 8.43 crore, constituting 8.2% of the total population. The population of tribes had grown at the growth rate of 24.45% during the period 1991-2001. More than half the Scheduled Tribe population is concentrated in the States of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Jharkhand and Gujarat. Tribal communities live in about 15% of the country's areas, in various ecological and geoclimatic conditions ranging from plains and forests to hills and inaccessible areas. Tribal groups are at different stages of

social, economic and educational development. While some tribal communities have adopted a mainstream way of life, at the other end of the spectrum, there are 75 groups, in number known as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs).

Although, the Census of 2011 enumerates the total population of Scheduled Tribes at 10,42,81,034 persons, constituting 8.6 per cent of the population of the country, the tribal communities in India are enormously diverse and heterogeneous. There are wide ranging diversities among them in respect of languages spoken, size of population and mode of livelihood. The number of communities that find their place in the list of the Schedule of the Indian constitution is reflective of this diversity. The Government of India, in its Draft National Tribal Policy, 2006 records 698 Scheduled Tribes in India. As per the Census of India 2011, the number of individual groups notified as Scheduled Tribes is 705 (Table: 1).

Sr.	Census Years	Total Population	Population of ST	ST (%)
1.	1951	361.1	19.1	5.29
2.	1961	439.2	30.1	6.85
3.	1971	548.2	38.0	6.93
4.	1981	685.2	51.6	7.53
5.	1991	846.3	67.8	8.10
6.	2001	1028.6	84.3	8.19
7.	2011	1210.1	84.32	8.2

Tribals can be seen throughout the globe. In each part they are, called by different names viz. Jippsy, Aborigines, Adivasi and other synonymous names. The tribals have their own identity, cultural traits even than every tribal have their own identity. In this way each tribal group can be distinguished their own existence or identity. The isolation problem has deprived them by the developed part of the nations. The isolation problem is not in India, but it can be seen throughout the world. The highest concentration of tribals can be seen in Africa and second stands in India. In India on 1/5 part (19 per cent) of the country and having more than 500 different groups. They speak over 150 languages and about 225 subsidiary languages.

Conclusion

India is the home to large number of indigenous people, who are still untouched by the lifestyle of the modern world. With more than 84.4 million, India has the largest population of the tribal people in the world. The tribal people are the poorest social stratification in the country and are still dependent on hunting and archaic agricultural patterns. All these tribal people have their own culture, tradition, language and lifestyle. India has the largest concentration of tribal people anywhere in the world except perhaps in Africa. The tribals are children of nature and their lifestyle is conditioned by the Eco-system. India, with a variety of ecosystems, presents a varied tribal population throughout its length and breadth.

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