
ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF TRIBES

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Abstract: The origin of India's scheduled tribes has been traced to such races as the Proto-Australoids who one time practically covered the whole India and secondly, the Mongolians who are still located mostly in Assam, and finally to a limited extent, also to the Negritos Strain as indicated by frizzy hair, among the Andamanes and the Kadars of the South-West India.. It has now become an established fact that the aboriginal tribes in India are, in most cases, survivals from the later pre-historic groups. The feudal period (400 – 100 A.D.) saw a greater opening of tribal areas and Hindustan of tribal chiefs. The Muslim rule (12th to 18th century) witnessed a new phenomenon. The Turko-Afghan and Mughal rulers mostly secured a mere formal allegiance of tribal chiefs or of Hindu rulers in tribal areas of Central India and Bihar. The tribals were isolated and their places of habitation were declared as prohibited areas. Main objective of the present article is to examine the origin and historical perspective of Tribes in India.

Introduction: India has the second largest concentration of tribal population in the world next to Africa. In India, there are about 350 Scheduled Tribes (sub tribes are many more) and they speak more than 100 languages. Tribals have distinct characteristics, which are different from others. They are simple people with exotic customs, traditions and practices. For centuries they lived a life of geographical isolation. In India primitive tribes have lived for thousands of years in forests and hills without any type of contacts with centers of civilization. There is a need for integrating them into the main stream of the society as rightful members, failing which, the ethnic division would persist and deepen, which is dangerous for the very existence of human sanity. Indian population consists of 8 per cent of tribal population in the country. The percentage of tribal population to the total population in the country has increased by 1 per cent during last century. The country is not able to maintain the culture, traditions and customs of the Scheduled Tribes. As per D. N. Majundara 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 any social obloquy attaching to them, as it does 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. They are not politically empowered. Laws that are to improve tribal people enacted are grossly inadequate. There is a special need to empower tribals economically, socially, and politically. Their active participation in the developmental activities will go a long way in nation building.

Objective: Main objective of the present article is to examine the origin and historical perspective of Tribes in India.

Source: the present article is based on the secondary data.

Origin and Historical Perspective of Tribes: The origin of India's scheduled tribes has been traced to such races as the Proto-Australoids who one time practically covered the whole India and secondly, the Mongolians who are still located mostly in Assam, and finally to a limited extent, also to the Negritos Strain as indicated by frizzy hair, among the Andamanes and the Kadars of the South-West India. It has now become an established fact that the aboriginal tribes in India are, in most cases, survivals from the later pre-historic groups. They do not form a uniform race. They belong to different races. However, our knowledge is vague about the origin and subsequent history of the numerous aboriginal tribes of India. The Indus valley civilization and advent of Aryans is most probably a genuine gradual growth on Indian soil.

“Since the chronology has been revised and the end of the civilization fixed at about 1750 B.C., the old hypothesis has been revived that the Aryan invaders, the early forerunners of the Rig Vedic Aryans – might have destroyed the centers of Harappan civilization and killed or dispersed its population. The discovery of unburied skeletons on the steps of a building in Mohenjodaro seems to support such an assumption” The Rig Vedic period (2000 to 1000 B.C.) witnessed wild Aryan tribes pouring into the North-Western parts of the country, fighting not only among themselves but waging a war unto death against non-Aryan tribes.

The process of fusion of Aryan and non-Aryan tribes continued. The later Vedic period (1000 to 600 B.C.) is marked by further working of the twin processes of emerging Hinduism, Aryanisations of the tribal and the tribalization of the Aryans. The two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, refer to tribals such as the Sundras, Abhiras, Dravidas, Pulindas and Sabaras or Saoras'. The tribes were not leading an

isolated and alienated existence. The impact of epic heroes like Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Ravana, Bhima etc. on some of the tribes in central India is evident from their treasures of myths and legends. Gonds call themselves children of Ravana. Manu is another Puranic figure that has deeply exercised the tribes, and Mundas call themselves Manu's children after him.

The feudal period (400 – 100 A.D.) saw a greater opening of tribal areas and Hindustan of tribal chiefs. The Muslim rule (12th to 18th century) witnessed a new phenomenon. The Turko-Afghan and Mughal rulers mostly secured a mere formal allegiance of tribal chiefs or of Hindu rulers in tribal areas of Central India and Bihar. In 1585 and 1616 A.D., Muslim armies marched into Chotanagpur and subjugated the Raja of Khukra. Similarly another Muslim general also subjugated the tribal areas of Assam.

The advent of British rule meant opening up of tribal areas along the seacoast and in Bihar and Bengal. The construction of Grand Trunk Road through tribal pockets accelerated the influx of aliens such as merchants, moneylenders and land grabbers from outside. Furthermore, the pressure of growing population and the ruthless exploitation and oppression by Zamindars facilitated migration of peasants and artisans to inaccessible tribal areas. The Christian missions also got their pound of flesh. The colonial agrarian policy did not consider the economic disadvantage of the hill areas and forest oriented tribal economy, and treated them on par with the plains, mainly to extract the maximum land revenue. Colonial agrarian policy of 19th century to the end of the colonial rule contributed to the deterioration of the tribal economy in Madras presidency due to resulting restrictions on rights and access over land and forest.

There is a general impression among scholars abroad and even among educated Indians that our heritage is primarily geo-philosophical. There is hardly anything worthwhile to mention about our ethnic and technological past. The reason for such an impression is well known. With the departure of British colonialists and rise of independent India, the tribal citizens of the country were promised a fair deal – in some cases privileged – to become partners in progress. Upliftment of the tribal was an article of faith for our constitution makers.

The British administrators of pre-independence India were probably the first people who tried to grapple seriously with the problem of administering the tribal areas and they had a vested interest in cultivating, and perpetuating the myths about the tribal people of India. The tribals were isolated and their places of habitation were declared as prohibited areas. The British Government finally decided on a policy of segregating the tribes into special areas where their

lives and interests could, supposedly, be adequately protected. Accordingly, an Act was passed in 1874 to specify tribal areas into 'Scheduled Districts'. These areas were reconstituted under section 52A of the Government of India Act of 1919. This Act provided for the appointment of officers to administer civil and criminal justice, to superintend the settlement and collection of public revenues and all matters relating to rent, and otherwise to conduct the administration within the Scheduled Districts.

Up to 1947 numerous Acts and Regulations were promulgated and various reforms introduced. Thus in 1935 converting them into "Totally and Partially Excluded Areas" more stringent provisions were incorporated for a special treatment of the tribal areas. With the dawn of independence, the nation witnessed a considerable awakening about the welfare of the tribal people. It visualized a policy of progressive assimilation of the tribal people into the national mainstream. The constitution provided special safeguards for the tribal communities for a period of ten years. This period continues to be extended till now.

A tribal welfare department was instituted in 1951 for the protection and advancement of the scheduled tribes with the help of various provisions of the constitution. Article 244 of the constitution provides for the administration of "Scheduled Areas" in accordance with the Fifth Schedule and "Tribal Areas" under sixth schedule. The Scheduled Areas have been constituted with two clear objectives. One is to assist the tribals in enjoying their existing rights and the Second is to develop the scheduled areas and promote the economic, educational and social progress of scheduled tribes.

The fifth schedule visualizes a division of responsibility between the State Governments and the Union Government in the matter of administration of the scheduled areas. The State Government is directed to screen legislation unsuitable for extension to the tribal areas and to frame regulations for peace and good governance. It is also the responsibility of the state government to implement special schemes of tribal welfare and general development of the scheduled tribes inhabiting within its boundaries. The Union Government also enjoys power to give directions to the state governments regarding the implementation of particular schemes, laying down priorities in their implementation and with regard to the general administration of the tribal areas. In the constitution, ample provisions exist to protect the land rights of tribals, to protect them against exploitation by moneylenders and to preserve their social and cultural life.

The statutory panchayats have adopted almost all the

functions of the traditional tribal councils with the added responsibility of implementing developmental work. The functions of the statutory panchayats are, broadly speaking, administrative, economic and social. Amongst the administrative functions are included watch and ward, control and regulation of fairs, markets, grazing grounds and village farmlands and functions pertaining to sanitation and health. Amongst the economic functions are included functions relating to development of animal husbandry. Social functions included education and recreation, maternity and child welfare, etc. Commenting on the expansion of panchyati raj, the Report of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, 1961, rightly remarks that the foundations of tribal life should not be destroyed. In the Constitution of India various Articles have been incorporated with the object of promoting and safeguarding the interests of the Scheduled Tribes. Tribal Areas have been declared in State of Assam and Meghalaya and the Union Territory of Mizoram. These areas are administered according to the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Some of the important specialties of the Sixth Schedule are as follows:

1. There shall be District Council for each Autonomous District consisting of not more than twenty-four members of whom not less than three-fourths shall be elected on the basis of adult suffrage.
2. There shall be separate Regional Council for each area constituted as Autonomous Region under sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 1 of this schedule.
3. The Regional Council for an autonomous region in respect of all areas within such region and the District Council for an autonomous district in respect of all areas within the district except those which are under the authority of Regional Councils, if any, within the district shall have power to make laws with respect to
 - The management of any forest not being a reserved forest;
 - The use of any canal or watercourse for the purpose of agriculture.
 - The regulation of the practice, of Jhum or other forms of shifting cultivation.
 - Marriage
 - Social Customs
4. The District Council of an autonomous district may make regulations for the regulation and control of money-lending or trading within the district by persons other than Scheduled Tribes resident in the district.

The colonial government dealt with the tribals keeping their own vested interests in mind. Their

mode of tribal administration was basically law and order oriented, primarily meant to keep the tribals isolated from the mainstream of national life. Since the British were also very eager to exploit vast forest wealth and utilize forests for defence and security purposes, improvement of communication in these areas was almost a must. The then Prime Minister Sri Jawaharlal Nehru having developed deep sympathy for the tribal people laid down the foundation of new policy and called for its vigorous implementation. He stated that development in various fields, such as communications, medical facilities, education and better agriculture, should be pursued to the STs. And he added that, we should try to encourage them, particularly in their own traditional arts and culture. Tribal rights on land and forest should be respected. We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes.

Growth of Tribal Population in India : In India, the percentage of tribal population to total population has increased over time. According to 1881 census there were 16 million ST people in India, constituting 7 per cent of the total population. The percentage of ST population to total has increased by 1 per cent during the last century. The ST population was 84.3 millions in 2001, representing 8.2 per cent of the country's total population. The decennial growth rate of ST population during 1901-2001 was 26 per cent as compared to 23 per cent in general population. Thus, we can say that population growth is higher among Scheduled Tribes when compared to the general population and there is an immediate need to control population growth among scheduled tribes.

The share of the Scheduled Tribe population in urban areas is a meager 2.4%. Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujrat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Karnataka are the State having larger number of Scheduled Tribes. These states account for 83.2% of the total Scheduled Tribe population of the country. Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Jammu & Kashmir, Tripura, Mizoram, Bihar, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, account for another 15.3% of the total Scheduled Tribe population. The share of the remaining states / Uts is negligible. Total population of Scheduled Tribes is 84,326,240 as per the Census 2001 which accounts for 8.2% of the total population of country. Majority of the Scheduled tribe population live in rural areas and their population is 10.4 % of the total rural population of the country.

Percentage Scheduled Tribe Population in Districts, Villages, And UAs / Towns - India.			
Proportion of ST population (%)	Scheduled tribes		
	No. of Districts	No. of villages	No. of UAs/towns
nil	50**	323,487	1,090
Upto 4.9%	278	68,189	2,420
5.0%-9.9	56	23,742	387
10.0%-19.9%	69	28,662	264
20.0%-49.9%	65	44,240	160
50.0%-74.9%	35	26,788	15
75.0% or above	40	78,507	42
Total	593	593,615	4,378

Source : Primary Census Abstract, Census of India 2001.

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Action Points For Development Of Scheduled Tribes: A review may be undertaken immediately to see whether Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha seats are reserved for STs in proportion to their population in States/UTs.

- In order to enable STs to vote for Lok Sabha, State Assembly and Panchayati Raj elections in a fair and fearless environment, which is desirable to attain social democracy, the polling booths should be located in Bastis/Mohallas predominantly inhabited by these communities.

- Machinery to effectively enforce provisions of Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 would need to be made more stringent at grassroots level i.e. Police Stations by creating a separate cell to be manned by SC/ST officials for dealing such cases.
- Section 4 of the Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, which relates to 'Punishment for neglect of duties' needs to be amended to include public servants belonging to SCs & STs.
- The outcome of 50 years of working of reservation orders reveals that 'qualitative' representation is still short of the prescribed quota. The reservation policy in services for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has been instrumental in enhancing social and economic justice to them and at the same time its role in socially desirable better management of the affairs of the government cannot be ruled out. As long as caste-based social and economic disparities exist reservation in services must be continued.

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