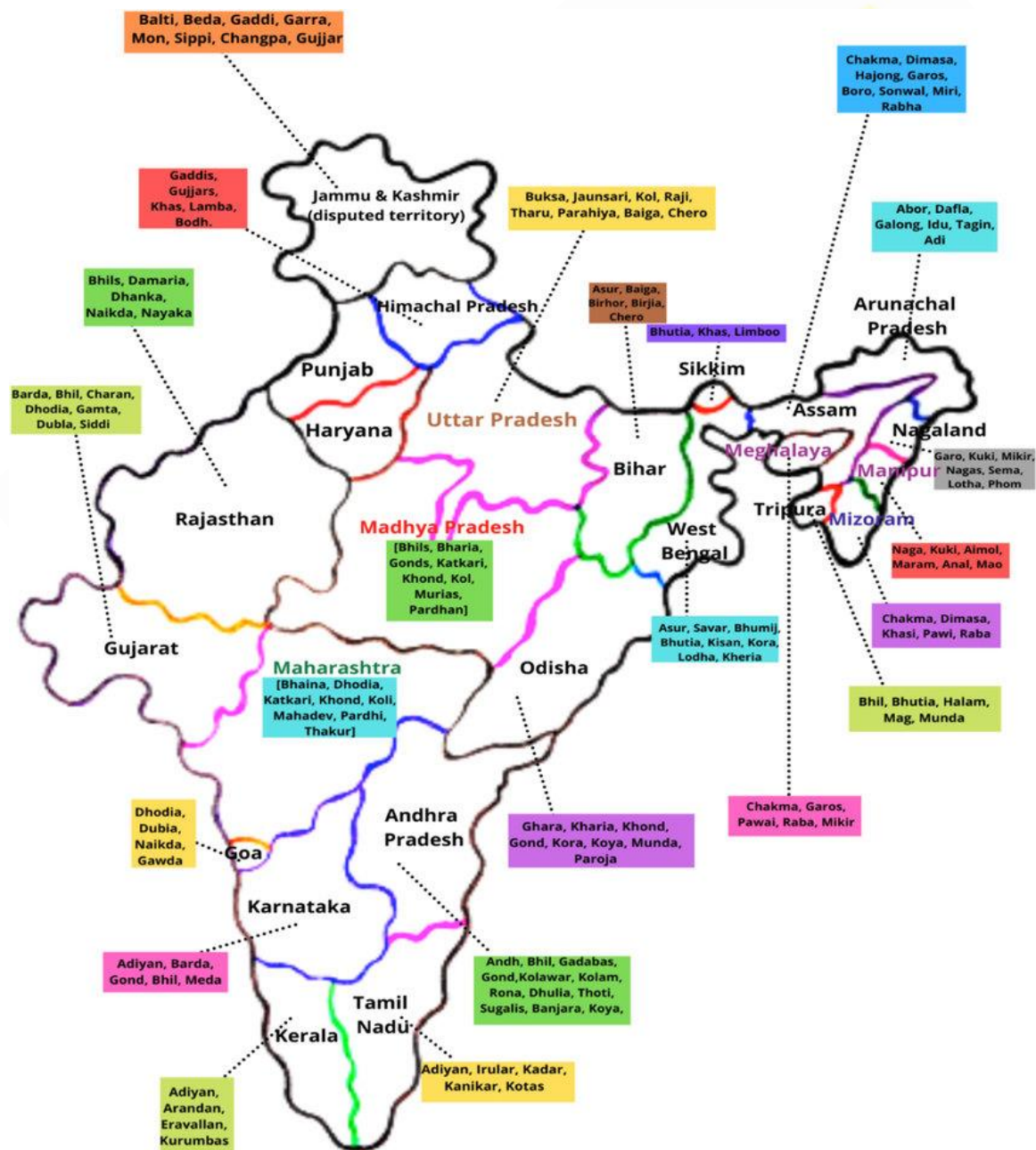


## TRIBAL INDIA

### WHO ARE TRIBES?

The word 'tribe' is derived from the Latin root, the Middle English Term 'Tribuz' meaning the three divisions into which the early Romans were grouped, which ultimately evolved into the modern English term which stood for a political division. The Greeks seem to have equated it sometimes with fraternities, while at others with geographical divisions.

In Irish History, however, the term meant families or communities of persons having the same surname. In certain other areas of the western world and in certain periods of history, it stood for division of territory allotted to a family or community. Today with the anthropologists and sociologists of western origin the term means, according to the Oxford Dictionary, "a race of people; now applied especially to a primary aggregate of people in a primitive or barbarous condition under a headman or chief."



The Constitution of India gives recognition to a category of people designated as the Scheduled Tribes and makes special provisions for their political representation and their economic and social welfare. Anthropologists have since the time of Lewis Morgan argued about the definition of tribe but very little account has been taken of the tribal communities of India. 19th century scholars viewed tribal societies in the light of evolutionary theory.

This was true for the anthropologists like Lewis Morgan but also of historians like Fustel de Coulanges. Morgan sought to demonstrate the stages of social evolution by the comparison of contemporary primitive societies. Fustel reconstructed the transformation of Greek and Roman society from a primitive to an advanced type. In all of this the tribe represented a type of social organization as well as a **stage in social evolution**.

In India, the origin of the term **“tribe”** is connected with the rise of European colonialism. In 1885, the British in India first used the term “tribe” to enumerate certain social groups in India and it continued till 1931 census. Indeed, not until the British appeared on the stage of Indian History and consolidated their position in the country, was any stir felt and experienced in tribal societies. Quite early in the course of their colonial rule in India, British administrators felt the necessity of labelling certain ethnic groups as ‘tribes’ on the basis of an impressionistic characterization of their physical and socio-cultural isolation from the mainstream of caste bound Indian Society.

The Government of India Act 1935 used the term ‘Backward Tribe’ and later the Indian Constitution referred to the term “Scheduled” instead of the term “Backward”. But the Constitution of India has nowhere given the precise definition of the tribe. However, the term “adivasi” meaning “original inhabitants” was first used in the Chhota-Nagpur region of Bihar in 1930s and was extended to other regions in the 1940s by AV Thakkar, who worked among the tribals. The Gandhians popularised other polite equivalents such as ‘ranipaja’, ‘vanyajati’ and ‘giriyan’. The tribal people are differently known as Vanyajati (forest caste), Vanvasi (forest-inhabitants), Pahariya (hill men), Adimjati (primitive castes), Adivasi (origin settlers), Janajati (folk communities) and Anuschi Janajati (scheduled tribes).

With the passage of time, ‘in various international forums including those sponsored by UN, the word ‘tribe’ is being replaced by the word ‘indigenous. But the word indigenous is used in two senses. First, in the sense of autochthons of the land, and second in the normative sense, which combines two features, namely inherent egalitarian convivial world-view and also non-dominance and marginalization in the context of state system’.

For long solution to the problem of definition of a tribe has been colluding the administration. Anthropologists and sociologists have attempted different definitions.

**W.J. Perry** defines tribes as a group speaking a common dialect and inhabiting a common territory.

**Bogardus** defines tribes as a tribal group based on the need for protection, on ties of blood relationships and on the strength of a common religion.

**D.N. Majumdar** defines a tribes as a collection of families bearing a common name members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation and have developed a well assigned system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligation.

**Dictionary of Anthropology** defines a tribe as a social group usually with a social area, dialect, cultural homogeneity and unifying social organization. It may include several sub-groups such as Sibs or villages. The tribe ordinarily has a leader and may have a common ancestor, as well as a patron deity. The families or small communities making up the tribe are linked through economic, social, religious, family or blood ties.

**Imperial Gazetteer of India** defines Tribe as a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and which have been, if they are not, endogamous.

**Ralph Linton** says "In its simplest form the tribe is a group of bands 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 interest."

**Max Weber's** definition of the term 'tribe' includes these elements:

- a) A fixed territory
- b) Lack of occupational specialization
- c) Lack of social ranking with special reference to a larger community
- d) Presence of a political association
- e) Presence of exogamous sibs but no clear cut endogamy of the tribe as a whole; and
- f) Absence of commensality rules.

**L.P. Vidyarthi and Rai** (1976) identify the following as features of a tribe in India.

- (a) A definite territory
- (b) A common name
- (c) A common dialect
- (d) A common culture.
- (e) Endogamy
- (f) Common taboos
- (g) Distinctive social and political systems
- (h) Full faith in their leaders
- (i) Self-sufficiency in their distinct economy.

According to the anthropologist **Ghurye**, the common features possessed by all the tribal groups are as follows:

1. They live away from the civilised world in the inaccessible parts in the forests and hills.
2. They speak the same tribal dialect.
3. They belong either to one of the three stocks- Negritos, Austroloid or Mongoloids.
4. They profess primitive religion known as animism in which worship of ghosts and spirits is the most important element.
5. They follow primitive occupation such as gleanings, hunting and gathering of forest products.
6. They are largely carnivorous.
7. They lived either naked or semi naked.
8. They have nomadic habits and love for drink and dance.

According to **T. K. Naik**, seven criteria by which tribe can be recognized are:

1. functional interdependence within the community
2. economic backwardness.
3. geographical isolation.
4. common dialect
5. politically a unit under a common tribal authority

6. own traditional laws.
7. Members are averse to change.

According to **V. Xaxa**, considering complexity of tribal definition, tribe can be seen as a stage and type of society and thus constitute simple, illiterate(relatively), and backward society.

Thus, from the basket of definitions about the tribe which the social scientists, historians and theorists have proposed from time to time, what we can deduce is that the tribes are generally a homogeneous category who resides in a particular geographical territory and indulges in a traditional mode of living. As they lack any functional specialization they engage themselves in simple sustainable ways of livelihood. However, such traditional economic structure is found to be changing. While some semi-tribal communities are settled in rural areas and practice farming and agriculture for earning their livelihood while a chunk of tribals are seen to migrate to urban and semi-urban regions to work in factories and other modern places of employment. This results in the cultural contact of the tribals with the non-tribals and in most of the times it has been speculated that the latter imposes their 'cultural superiority' over the former. Such hegemonism and imposition of the non-tribals over the tribals makes them feeble, submissive, below-confident and ultimately results in their assimilation with the former.

According to the 2015-16 Annual Report of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs the population of the Scheduled Tribes in the country is 10.45 crore which as per 2011 census constitutes 8.6% of the total population.

## TRIBES vs INDIGENOUS

### Who are Indigenous People?

It is estimated that there are more than 370 million indigenous people spread across 70 countries worldwide. Practicing unique traditions, they retain social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. Spread across the world from the Arctic to the South Pacific, **they are the descendants - according to a common definition - of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived.** The new arrivals later became dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means.

Considering the diversity of indigenous peoples, **an official definition of "indigenous" has not been adopted by any UN-system body.** Instead the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following:

- Self- identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources
- Distinct social, economic or political systems
- Distinct language, culture and beliefs
- Form non-dominant groups of society
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.

### A question of identity:



- According to the UN the most fruitful approach is to identify, rather than define indigenous peoples. This is based on the fundamental criterion of self-identification as underlined in a number of human rights documents.

- The term “indigenous” has prevailed as a generic term for many years. In some countries, there may be preference for other terms including tribes, first peoples/nations, aboriginals, ethnic groups, adivasi, janajati. Occupational and geographical terms like hunter-gatherers, nomads, peasants, hill people, etc., also exist and for all practical purposes can be used interchangeably with “indigenous peoples”.

ILO Convention No. 169 takes a practical approach to the issue and provides objective and subjective criteria for identifying the peoples concerned (see Article 1 of the Convention ). These criteria can be summarized as:

	Subjective criteria	Objective criteria
Indigenous peoples	Self-identification as belonging to an indigenous people	<p>Descent from populations, who inhabited the country or geographical region at the time of conquest, colonisation or establishment of present state boundaries.</p> <p>They retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, irrespective of their legal status.</p>
Tribal peoples	Self-identification as belonging to a tribal people	<p>Their social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community.</p> <p>Their status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations.</p>

Indigenous and tribal peoples are often known by national terms such as native peoples, aboriginal peoples, first nations, adivasi, janajati, hunter-gatherers, or hill tribes. Given the diversity of peoples it aims at protecting, the Convention uses the inclusive terminology of “indigenous and tribal peoples” and ascribes the same set of rights to both groups.

**In the deliberations of the international agencies, the term was used for the first time in 1957** [Roy-Burman undated]. **It gained wide currency after 1993** with the declaration of the year 1993 as the international year of the indigenous people.

**In 1957 the general conference of the ILO adopted a convention concerning protection and integration of indigenous and other tribal and semi-tribal population in independent countries.** The convention framed general international standards for facilitating government actions towards **protecting and promoting progressive integration of these people into the respective national communities** (Convention No 107).

By 1985 the ILO felt the need to revise the convention on account of changes in attitudes and approaches towards these people worldwide. The ILO had earlier proposed integration as the desired objective but this was no longer being seen as appropriate. This was so because the international organisations and increasing number of governments were moving toward greater recognition of the rights of indigenous and tribal people to retain their specific identities and to participate fully in the planning and execution of the activities affecting their way of life. Accordingly, the ILO adopted a revised convention (No 169) in 1989 after the expert committee appointed by the ILO gave its recommendation and the same was passed in consultation with other international bodies.

The context of the discourse on the indigenous, initiated by the ILO and later accepted by the UNO thus basically hinged on the twin concepts of 'need right' and 'power right' of a certain social category of people all over the world. This category of people were progressively being marginalised and dispossessed from their sources of livelihood and were vulnerable to cultural shock and decimation of their collective identity.

The ILO convention speaks of the indigenous population as follows:

They are those tribal and semi-tribal population that are regarded as having their descent from the populations which inhabited the country or the geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of the conquest or colonisation by Europe. They are in addition also those who irrespective of their legal status live more in conformity with their social, economic and cultural institutions than with the institution of the nation to which they belong.

#### Tribes and Scheduled Tribes:

In the Roman context, the term 'tribe' was used to refer to a state of barbarism, but also to indicate a tributary relationship between a group and the imperial State, with whom gifts and tributes were exchanged. Tribe, therefore, referred to a particular relationship between centre and periphery, which was equally applicable to the tribal relationship with the Mughal Empire in India. One of the other early meanings of tribe was also that of a group claiming common ancestry. Later, the idea of the tribe as people living in 'primitive' conditions became dominant.

In India, the local equivalent of the term 'tribe' is often assumed to be 'jana' or 'communities of people' based on the usage of the term in ancient Buddhist and puranic texts. In this conception, the term jana was used in opposition to the term jati to indicate that these communities were outside the jati or hierarchical caste system of social organisation. This view, however, was not universally accepted, since other scholars point out that the categories of jana and jati do not neatly overlap with that of tribe and caste respectively in the present context.

Thus there are three aspects which are central to the conceptualisation of the indigenous people. **First**, the indigenous are those people who lived in the country to which they belong before colonisation or conquest by people from outside the country or the geographical region. **Secondly**, they have become marginalised as an aftermath of conquest and colonisation by the people from outside the region. **Thirdly**, such people govern their life more in terms of their own social, economic and the cultural institution than the laws applicable to the society or the country at large.

#### Tribe as indigenous

In the context of India as a whole identification of indigenous peoples is indeed problematic. The problem emanates from the fact that the population movements and experiences in India have been different from those of the new world.

**In India the movement of the population was somewhat different. Here different communities came to develop distinct and definite association with certain territories in the course of the history of their movement.**

#### **Arguments against**

The question that is of central importance here is (1) whether groups designated as tribes have been natives of India and non-tribes immigrants; and (2) if they have not been natives whether their settlement is prior to that of the arrival of the major social group, the Aryans. **Most of the scholars are of the view that tribes could hardly make legitimate claim that they are the only natives of India.**

- a) It is said that unlike in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand with a recent history of conquest, immigration and colonisation in India identification of indigenous people is not easy. Rather there have been in India waves of movement of populations with different language, race, culture, religion dating back centuries and millennia. Even groups or communities described as tribes have not been outside of this process. Given this, how far back should one go in history to determine people who are natives and who are immigrants. **Indeed any demarcation is going to be arbitrary and hence extremely contentious.**
- b) It is also maintained that the communities described as tribes have been living in close proximity with the nontribal people for over centuries leading to much acculturation and even assimilation into the larger Hindu society. The Indian experience, it is stated, is different from that of the new world where it was marked by conquest, subjugation and even decimation.
- c) **Hutton for example is of the view that only the Negritos may be considered as the original inhabitants of India** though they do not have any marked presence now. **He considers groups belonging to the Austric, Dravidian categories, etc, as much outsiders as the Aryans.** Guha is also cited for making similar observation in the context of Austric speaking people.
- d) It is said that there are tribes in India especially in the north-east whose settlement in the territories they inhabit today is an even later phenomenon than the settlement of many non-tribes in other parts of India. The Nagas for example are stated to have come to India around the middle of the first millennium BC first to Tibet and later to the territory where they live now, a period later than the coming of the Aryans. The Mizos are said to have settled in the territory where they live only in the 16th century. The Kuki settlement is considered even later than that of the Mizos. In contrast to this, the non-tribal groups like the Bengalis, Gujaratis, Oriyas, etc, have a much longer history of settlement than these tribes.
- e) **There is a need to make distinction between settlement in the context of country (India being the reference point here) as a whole and settlement within its parts or regions.**
- f) What this means is that people identified and described as tribals are not to be necessarily treated as indigenous and that there are tribal groups which could be treated as indigenous and others which could not. In contrast many groups and communities especially those belonging to the Dravidian language speaking group such as the Tamilians, Telugus, Malayalis, could stake a claim of being indigenous people by virtue of the fact they have been inhabitants of India prior to the coming of the Aryans. They are however not recognised as tribals and share few attributes in common with the tribals who stand dispossessed, exploited and marginalised.

#### **Arguments for:**

- a) They ask why tribals, whose ancestors lived here for some thousands of years prior to the Aryan invasion, a fact that can hardly be disputed, should not be considered indigenous people so that certain positive international instruments are made applicable to these marginalised and deprived social groups
- b) Pathy (1992:8), for example, writes that tribals in a way have been victims of conquest and colonisation and hence share all the attributes of the colonised people such as ethnic identity, loss of control over customary territorial resources, cultural annihilation and powerlessness.

- c) It is said that most of the studies of the history of Indian civilisation show that the growth and expansion of Hindu society was a prolonged and complex process of assimilation. And the nature of interaction between the two has been broadly described as one of peaceful coexistence rather than one of conquest and subjugation.

This means that the question of indigenous people could only be raised from the period of the arrival of the British and the sub-sequent process of colonisation and subjugation in India. If these processes are taken as the point of departure for demarcation of indigenous people, then the issue of original settlement that is so central to the notion of indigenous people becomes redundant in defining indigenous people.

- d) The use of the term indigenous people to refer to the tribal people is defended on yet another ground. It is argued that unlike antagonists who tend to take note of only historical realism, we have also to take note of critical realism. They state that irrespective of the place and time of origin or their occupation or their present habitat in India, there are certain communities, which until recently maintained practically autogenous sources of legitimisation of cultural and social processes and were accentuated by the ideology of a self-regulated economy and had only marginal articulation with the external political structures. Their indigenous identity cannot be brushed away by juxtaposition of non-meaningful occurrences in space and time in systemic terms [Roy- Burman 1992:241]
- e) In discussion of indigenous people in India it is important that we do not mix the problems obtaining at two levels. Often the problem at the level of the country is used to make case against tribes being indigenous at the regional/ local level and vice versa. Posing the question of tribes as the indigenous people in relation to territories within the country rather than the country as a whole indeed gives rise to problems of somewhat different nature.
- f) It may also happen, that the same group is indigenous and not indigenous at the same time. The Oraons, Mundas and many other tribes living in Jharkhand, for example, may have legitimate claim to be called the indigenous people in respect of their settlement in the country called India prior to that of the Aryans or even in respect of their settlement in Jharkhand, but it is not certain if they can claim to be indigenous in Assam or Bengal where they have moved in the course of last one century or so.

Whether those especially associated with a given territory are indigenous to the territory or area they live in is a question that will always be contested. What how-ever has come to be accepted that they have developed special relations with the territory in question. These territories, the communities in question have considered as their own as against those of other communities. They considered themselves to have prior and preferential if not exclusive rights over the territory where they lived either on account of their prior historical settlement or numerical and other dominance. Following this they aspired to promote and protect the interests and welfare of their community and confer on the members of their community special rights and privileges.

## TRIBE AS A COLONIAL CONSTRUCT

In India, the origin of the term “tribe” is connected with the rise of European colonialism. In 1885, the British in India first used the term “tribe” to enumerate certain social groups in India and it continued till 1931 census. Indeed, not until the British appeared on the stage of Indian History and consolidated their position in the country, was any stir felt and experienced in tribal societies. Quite early in the course of their colonial rule in India, British administrators felt the necessity of labelling certain ethnic groups as ‘tribes’ on the basis of an impressionistic characterisation of their physical and socio-cultural isolation from the mainstream of caste bound Indian Society.



It was largely following the various tribal rebellions during the colonial period that tribes came to be seen as the region's 'original inhabitants' who existed outside of the caste system and had been marginalised by the more advanced caste-Hindu society. The nineteenth-century ethnographic view of tribes argued that the term referred to both a particular type of society based on kinship ties and a stage of evolution

In the former view, standard definitions describe the tribe as a social group with a definite area, dialect, cultural homogeneity and unifying social organisation. An amalgam of the various traits ascribed to tribal groups include: relative egalitarianism within the group, the absence of complex political structures, strong and functional kinship bonds, cooperation, territorial integrity, cultural and linguistic distinctiveness, and lower levels of technology. In the case of the latter view, tribes are seen as 'primitive' societies in the sense of lacking all the traits of modern, Western society in that they are non-literate, 'uncivilised', non-industrial, rural, and so on.

The two views are connected in that tribes were seen as having primitive social organisation, implying that tribal people were at a lower stage in the evolutionary social hierarchy in terms of their socio-cultural characteristics, economy and political structures, often being described as simple as well as insulated from changes in the larger regional polity. Tribes in the Indian context have also been defined as groups remaining outside of the structures of State and civilisation. Each definition of tribes stresses on a particular aspect of tribal life – their relationship with the state, civilization and processes of development as well as specific features of their culture, livelihood, and economy.

The dominant conception of tribe that developed during colonial period revolved around notions of 'backwardness', indigeneity, and separation from the larger Hindu civilization. **Tribes were identified largely in terms of what they were not:** they did not practice Vedic Hinduism, they were not Muslim, their societies were marked by the relative absence of economic and ritual stratification, and they were not integrated into the "modern" economy or civilization

The Census of India has also played a critical role in shaping the modern understanding of tribe through its efforts at enumeration and classification. The proper delineation of tribes began with the colonial census in the late nineteenth century to provide detailed information about the population of the sub-continent. Through this exercise, certain communities were labelled as tribes although the criteria transformed over time.

In the 1881 census, the term used was 'forest tribes', a sub-category within the broader group of 'agricultural and pastoral castes'. In the 1901 census, tribes were identified as those who 'practiced animism' thus placing religious practices at the centre. Therefore, those practising Hinduism were viewed as castes, while those practising animism were labelled tribes.

In later censuses, additional references to territory were included, producing the label of 'hill and forest tribes' in 1921 and 'primitive tribes' a decade later. The new descriptions laid emphasis on the isolation of tribes within hill and forest areas as well as their 'primitive' way of life. One of the earliest attempts to create a list of tribes in the sub-continent was during the 1931 census which identified 'primitive tribes'. This was followed by a list of "backward tribes" for the provinces made under the Government of India Act, 1935. In the 1941 census, tribes were identified not in terms of their religion but according to their 'origin', that is, tribes were those who have a 'tribal origin'.

Subsequent ethnographers have contested these conceptualisations, arguing that tribes have constantly been in interaction with other social groups, and that, terms such as 'primitive' and 'backward' are based on the problematic assumption of social evolutionism.

Other scholars have argued that the conception of tribe as isolated was based on their emergent marginalisation through unjust forest policies, forced sedentarization and pacification during British colonial rule. Large segments of the tribal population were integrated into the market economy during this period through the appropriation of their lands as well as their labour in commercial forestry, mines and plantations.

In the post-colonial period, therefore, **certain anthropologists have tended to view the 'tribe' as a colonial construction, rendering fixed and rigid identities to those which were earlier relatively fluid and contextual.**

## SCHEDULED TRIBE

The Government of India Act 1935 used the term 'Backward Tribe' and latter the Indian Constitution referred to the term "Scheduled" instead of the term "Backward". Groups and communities identified and enumerated as tribes during British rule came to be re-classified as Scheduled Tribes after the Constitution was adopted in 1950.

The term **Scheduled Tribe itself is a politico-administrative category** that does not capture the enormous social complexity of the various tribes encompassed within its fold. The Constitution of India categorized certain sections of the population as Scheduled Tribes to make available special welfare provisions to them – even though this category was never properly defined. In a circular fashion, tribes are defined as those groups enumerated as tribes under the Indian Constitution. Thus, Article 366(25) of the Constitution defines Scheduled Tribes as follows:

*"Scheduled Tribes means such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this Constitution."*

The Constitution, as per Article 342, provided for the listing of these groups in the Schedule so that certain administrative and political concessions could be extended to them. **Thus, a distinction was drawn in the form of tribe as a social and cultural entity and tribe as a politico administrative category.**

The list of tribes drawn up by the colonial and post-colonial government was based on political and administrative considerations, given that State recognition could be translated into important protective and developmental benefits. However, **the identification of such groups** has been based on recommendations made by the officials of the **1931 Census**, the **First Backward Classes Commission 1955**, and the **Report of the Advisory Committee on the Revision of the Lists of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, 1965 (Lokur Committee)**.

The Constitution did not define the criteria for recognition of Scheduled Tribes and hence the Lokur Committee was set up to look into this issue. The Committee recommended five criteria for identification, namely, (1) **primitive traits** (2) **distinct culture**, (3) **geographical isolation**, (4) **shyness of contact with the community at large** and (5) **backwardness**. However, some of these criteria carry forward certain paternalistic and pejorative connotations from the colonial era.

On the question of enumeration, the Lokur Committee noted that in light of several Supreme Court rulings on the matter, it would be necessary for the government to list not simply the name of each tribe under the Schedule but to create a compendium of all local synonyms, phonetic variations and sub-tribes within each tribe in order to ensure that confusions over inclusion are avoided.

Until 1976, area restrictions were in operation with regard to recognition as a Scheduled Tribe. This meant that it was possible for X tribe to be recognized in district Y of a particular State but not in neighbouring district Z of the same State. Thus, ST status was linked to place, although the place itself need not be a Scheduled Area.

According to the Lokur Committee, these territorial restrictions acted as a barrier to spatial and social mobility, since moving out of the area in which their tribe is recognized would imply the loss of all benefits and privileges. Such restrictions were therefore, seen to be contrary to the goal of tribal integration which advocates the end to tribal 'isolation' and the inter-mingling of populations. Despite recognition of the often bizarre consequences of area restrictions, the Lokur Committee refrained from recommending changes in the same since inter-state movement of tribes was deemed to be negligible at the time. Their report also dismissed the idea of an all-India Scheduled Tribes list, since the Constitution provides for lists to be made only at the State or UT level.

In **1976, the Removal of Area Restrictions (Amendment) Act** was passed, which removed area restrictions on the recognition of Scheduled Tribes, making lists applicable to entire States rather than blocks and districts within States as was the case earlier. This led to a substantial increase in the tribal population as recorded in the census. Now, a tribe is included within the Scheduled Tribe list on a state-wide basis – although it is possible that the same tribe is not Scheduled Tribe in other states.

Despite efforts made by various governments, there continue to be several anomalies in the scheduling of tribes. The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has noted that cases involving inclusion of communities which are scheduled in one state and non-scheduled in a neighbouring state need to be given priority in order that members are not denied benefits any further.

The Banjaras, for example, are a recognised Scheduled Tribe settling in various parts of the country. However, the strong association between the idea of a tribe and that of rurality has led to the refusal of the Government of Delhi to list them as a Scheduled Tribe in the capital city – rather, they are included within the list of Scheduled Castes.

Another curious distinction in the state of Assam is that between plains tribals and hill tribals, so the Garos, Karbis, Hajongs, Dimasas, Mon-Tai speaking peoples, Singphos, Hmars, Nagas, hill tribals, lose their scheduled status once they come down to the plains and the Bodos, Lalungs, Mech-Kacharis, all plains tribals, lose their scheduled status if they go to the hills.

There are also other anomalies in the process of scheduling such as instances of increasing the communities within the Scheduled Tribes list in the state without simultaneously reserving electoral constituencies for STs. There is also the concern that some tribes classified under the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) have not yet been notified as Scheduled Tribes, a situation that the NCST has taken up.

In recent years, commentators have questioned the established criteria for inclusion as both outdated (since 'isolated existence' does not hold true for most communities today, even those living in remote forest areas) and derogatory to tribal groups (the idea of 'primitivism' is insulting to tribal culture and identity).