

Value Addition NOTES

Anthropology

UNIT 8.2 TRIBE AND NATION-STATE A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN INDIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES



UNIT 8.2 TRIBE AND NATION-STATE A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN INDIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

CONCEPT OF TRIBE:

A **tribe** is a social group generally characterized by:

- ❖ Common ancestry and kinship ties
- ❖ Distinct culture, language, and customs
- ❖ Political autonomy or limited integration with mainstream society
- ❖ A close relationship with the natural environment
- ❖ Shared territoriality

S.C. DUBE defines tribes as "a unit of social organization linked by ties of kinship, real or supposed, having a common dialect and culture, and occupying a specific geographical territory."

CONCEPT OF NATION-STATE:

A **nation-state** is a political entity where:

- ❖ A **nation** (people with a common identity, language, culture, and history)
- ❖ Coincides with the boundaries of a **state** (sovereign government)

As per **Benedict Anderson**, the nation is an "imagined community" — people may never meet but imagine themselves as part of a single entity.

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Description</u>
Defined Territory	Fixed geographical boundaries
Sovereignty	Full control over domestic and foreign matters
Common Identity	Shared language, culture, and history
Centralized Government	Bureaucracy governs laws and services
Legal Uniformity	One legal system for all citizens
National Symbols	Flag, anthem, constitution, holidays
Citizenship	Rights and duties granted to individuals
Monopoly on Force	The state alone can use or authorize violence
Economic Framework	Integrated national economy and market
International Recognition	Accepted as sovereign by other states and the UN

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRIBE AND NATION-STATE:

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Tribe</u>	<u>Nation-State</u>
Definition	A small, kin-based, culturally homogenous community	A sovereign political entity defined by shared national identity and territory
Social Organization	Based on kinship , clan, lineage, and age-sets	Based on citizenship , legal institutions, and bureaucratic governance
Territory	Occupies small, localized areas (often forests, hills, valleys)	Occupies a fixed and recognized geographical boundary

Political System	Informal or traditional leadership (chiefs, councils)	Formal and centralized government structure
Law and Justice	Customary and oral laws enforced by elders	Codified legal systems like civil, criminal, and constitutional law
Identity	Cultural identity based on tribal ancestry and tradition	National identity is based on language, history, and citizenship
Language	Often non-scripted, tribal languages or dialects	Usually promotes a dominant/national language
Economy	Subsistence-based (hunting, gathering, shifting cultivation)	Monetized and market-based economy
Sense of Belonging	Belonging to a kin group or tribe	Belonging to an “imagined community” (Benedict Anderson)
Use of Force	Conflict resolution through negotiation and compensation	Holds monopoly over legitimate violence (Max Weber)
Mobility	Traditionally semi-nomadic or localized	Generally, territorially fixed and governed by national borders
Symbols of Unity	Totems, rituals, oral epics, clan symbols	National symbols: flag, anthem, constitution, military
Examples	Gonds, Santhals, Bhils, Todas (India); Maasai (Africa)	India, France, USA, Japan

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRIBE AND NATION-STATE- (POINTS OF INTERACTION AND TENSION)

Historically, tribes have had an **autonomous existence** outside modern political structures. But with the rise of **modern nation-states**, especially post-colonial states like India, tribes became **subjects of integration and administration**.

1. Political Autonomy vs Centralized Governance

- Tribes traditionally have their own governance systems — often based on kinship, village councils, and customary laws. These systems emphasize consensus and collective decision-making.
- According to **F.G. Bailey**, tribal political systems are "segmentary and kin-based," which differ significantly from the bureaucratic and hierarchical systems of the modern state.
- **Case Study:** In **Nagaland**, the Nagas had long-standing tribal councils (e.g., Angami and Ao councils). The imposition of Indian political institutions and laws led to the rise of the **Naga nationalist movement**. The demand for greater autonomy or even secession stemmed from a sense of cultural-political alienation.

2. Cultural Identity vs National Integration

- The nation-state seeks to forge a homogenous national identity, often through language, education, and media. This can suppress tribal cultural expressions.
- **T.B. Naik** noted that such integration policies lead to "acculturation without absorption," creating confusion and identity crisis among tribals. **Verrier Elwin** warned against forced assimilation, advocating for the preservation of tribal cultures.
- **Case Study:** In **Jharkhand**, traditional tribal festivals like **Sarhul** were once considered backward but have now become tools of identity assertion in response to cultural marginalization.

3. Customary Law vs Civil/Criminal Codes

- Tribes often resolve disputes through customary mechanisms such as village elders, oath-taking, and restitution. The nation-state imposes codified laws (e.g., IPC and CrPC), which may not be relevant or accessible.
- **N.K. Bose** emphasized that Indian tribes have their own legal systems rooted in oral traditions and communal values, which are undermined by formal legal institutions.
- **Case Study: The Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act (1949)** in Jharkhand recognized some customary laws. However, the subsequent imposition of civil laws created confusion and disenfranchisement in land disputes.

4. Resource Rights and Displacement

- Tribes view land as sacred and communal. Modern development projects see land as a resource for exploitation, leading to alienation and displacement.
- **Walter Fernandes** argued that development-induced displacement has disproportionately affected tribes, calling them “development refugees.” **Xaxa Committee (2014)** pointed out that 40% of those displaced by development projects are from Scheduled Tribes.
- **Case Study: The Narmada Bachao Andolan** highlighted how the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam displaced thousands of tribals, especially Bhils and Vasavas, without proper rehabilitation

5. Citizenship and Bureaucratization

- Tribal people often lack access to formal documentation (birth certificates, land titles), leading to exclusion from welfare and rights.
- **Verrier Elwin** highlighted that tribals get entangled in an unfamiliar bureaucracy. Their lack of “paper identity” renders them invisible to the nation-state.
- **Case Study: In Assam**, many tribal communities (especially Adivasis) were excluded from the NRC (National Register of Citizens), as they lacked acceptable documentary proof.

6. Education and Language Policy

- Nation-states enforce formal education in standard languages, often sidelining tribal languages and oral traditions. This creates linguistic alienation.
- **G.N. Devy**, through the People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI), demonstrated how over 200 tribal languages are endangered due to state neglect and educational policy.
- **Case Study: In Odisha**, children from the **Kui-speaking Kandha tribe** were forced to learn in Odia, leading to poor performance and dropouts. The **Multilingual Education Program** later sought to teach in the mother tongues.

7. Militarization and Policing

- Tribal areas, especially in border or insurgency-prone regions, are heavily militarized. This creates mistrust, surveillance, and human rights abuses.
- **Ajay Dandekar** observed that state violence in tribal regions often frames tribal resistance as “anti-national” rather than legitimate dissent.
- **Case Study: In Bastar (Chhattisgarh)**, tribal areas are caught between Maoist insurgents and CRPF. Innocent tribals, including women and children, have been subjected to violence and false charges.

8. Legal Safeguards and Special Provisions

- Constitutional provisions like the 5th and 6th Schedules aim to protect tribal autonomy and culture. However, implementation is weak or bypassed through legal loopholes.
- **Virginus Xaxa** emphasized that protective laws often exist on paper but are diluted by bureaucratic inefficiency and political manipulation.
- **Case Study:** The **PESA Act (1996)** mandates Gram Sabha control over tribal lands and forests. Yet in states like Jharkhand and Odisha, land acquisition continued without proper tribal consent

9. Economic Integration and Market Penetration

- Tribes traditionally follow subsistence economies. Market penetration introduces wage labor, cash cropping, and consumerism, disrupting their sustainable lifestyles.
- **David Hardiman** argued that market forces result in the “pauperization of tribals” by converting them into cheap labor and consumers without assets.
- **Case Study:** The **Dongria Kondh** tribe in Odisha resisted Vedanta’s bauxite mining project, which threatened their forests and economy. Their victory at the Supreme Court affirmed tribal consent as essential.

10. Identity Movements and Assertion

- As a response to marginalization, tribes organize movements to demand autonomy, statehood, or recognition of cultural identity.
- **Stuart Corbridge** and **Alpa Shah** view tribal identity movements as both a critique of state failure and a search for dignity and empowerment.
- **Case Study:** The demand for a separate **Jharkhand state** was driven by Munda, Oraon, and Ho tribal leaders who argued that integration into Bihar suppressed their voice. In 2000, Jharkhand was formed — a case of tribal assertion within the nation-state framework.

○○○○

