



Tribes in India: The regional analysis

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Abstract

The tribes constituting 8.61 percent of total population of India in 2011 are the most deprived population group in India. The centuries old physico-socio-psychological isolation has been responsible for backwardness of tribes. The tribal groups are still at different stages of pre-capitalist with dependent on subsistence economy. The fear of disintegration, mass poverty, ignorance about modern education and exploitation by money lenders has been responsible for low standard of living. Low literacy among scheduled tribes is result of inadequate facilities, illiterate home environment and non recognition of tribal languages. Although, many steps have been taken for their development, still their position is not satisfactory. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the spatial distribution of tribes indicating their problems with some solutions.

Keywords: tribes, literacy, exploitations, policies, development

Introduction

Conventional anthropology treated all people as tribes who were backward in one sense or another, lived in the remote inaccessible areas and were pre literate. Tribes are the autochthonous people who are believed to be earlier settlers of Indian of Indian Peninsula. They are also called adivasi. Under article 347, of the constitution of India certain tribes have been identified as Scheduled tribes. The necessary conditions for a community to be treated as scheduled tribes are distinctive culture, primitive traits, hesitation in contact to public, geographical isolation and social and economic backwardness. Most of tribal areas are hilly, undulating plateau, and forested areas. The lifestyle of tribal people is matched by ecosystem. Most tribal population inhabit in remote areas having low density of population, and lack basic amenities of education, health, employment opportunities.

Growth of tribes

At the time of partition of India, the tribal population was 225

lakh in 1951 census. In 1956, modification was done and some tribal groups were added and it reached to 302 lakh in 1961 census with accounting 6.87 % of total population of country. In 1971 census, the number of ST population reached to 380 lakh accounting for 6.94 % of total tribal population. In 1976, another amendment was done and ST population reached to 538 lakh in 1981 census (Table 1). As per 1991 census, scheduled tribe population was 678 lakh accounting for 8.08 % of tribal population. The tribal population of India reached to 843 lakh in 2001 and 1043 lakh in 2011 census. About 89.97 % live in rural areas and 10.03 % in urban areas (Khullar, 2014) ^[5]. The decadal population growth rate of tribes is 17.69 % during 2001-11. Tribal sex ratio has increased from 978 to 990 females per thousand males in 2001-2011. Work force is also low among scheduled tribes in comparison to general population. In spite of 68.9 % of total workers in general population, work force is 55.6 % among scheduled tribes with 55.6 % of total male workers and 44.4 % female workers.

Table 1: Growth of scheduled tribe in India, 2011

Census year	Total ST Population (Lakh)	% of ST to Total Population
1951	225	6.23
1961	302	6.87
1971	380	6.94
1981	538	7.58
1991	678	8.08
2001	843	8.20
2011	1,043	8.61

Source: Census of India, 2011

The scheduled tribe population constitutes about 8.61 percent of total population of India in 2011 census. The highest proportion of scheduled tribe is found in Lakshadweep (94.79%), followed by Mizoram (94.43%), Nagaland (86.47%), Meghalaya (86.14%), Arunachal Pradesh (94.43%) and Dadra

and Nagar Haveli (51.95%). In these states and union territories, scheduled tribe population constitute more than half of total population (Table 2). Haryana, Punjab, Delhi Chandigarh and Puducherry have no ST population. Lowest scheduled tribe population is found in Uttar Pradesh (0.56%)

followed by Tamil Nadu (1.10%), Bihar (1.28%), Kerala (1.45%), Uttarakhand (2.89%).

Table 2: India: Scheduled Tribe Population, 2011

	State/Union Territory	Scheduled tribe (%)	Total ST Population (Thousand)
1	Lakshadweep	94.79	61
2	Mizoram	94.43	1,036
3	Nagaland	86.47	1,710
4	Meghalaya	86.14	2,556
5	Arunachal Pradesh	68.78	951
6	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	51.95	179
7	Manipur	35.12	903
8	Sikkim	33.79	206
9	Tripura	31.75	1,167
10	Chhattisgarh	30.62	7,823
11	Jharkhand	26.20	8,645
12	Odisha	22.85	9,591
13	Madhya Pradesh	21.08	15,317
14	Gujarat	14.75	8,917
15	Rajasthan	13.47	9,238
16	Assam	12.44	3,884
17	Jammu and Kashmir	11.21	1,493
18	Goa	10.23	149
19	Maharashtra	9.35	10,510
20	Andaman and Nicobar Inland	7.49	28
21	Andhra Pradesh	6.99	5,918
22	Karnataka	6.95	4,249
23	Daman and Diu	6.31	15
24	West Bengal	5.80	5,297
25	Himachal Pradesh	5.71	392
26	Uttarakhand	2.89	291
27	Kerala	1.45	485
28	Bihar	1.28	1336
29	Tamil Nadu	1.10	795
30	Uttar Pradesh	0.56	1134

Source: Census of India, 2011.

There are 75 primitive tribal groups having pre agricultural technology, stagnant or declining population and low level of literacy. Most of the tribal live in relatively less accessible areas with low resource potential. They have been pushed back to these areas by the groups that came later and had a better technology.

Spatial Distribution

Tribes are found living in hilly and forested areas of central and southern India. These are extended in entire Satpura extending south of central plateau on the eastern boundary of Gujarat and Vindhya Mountain. Tribes can be divided into three main areas:

- 1. Northern and north eastern region:** This region includes the hilly areas of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Manipur. And main tribes are Garo, Naga, Khasi, Amor, Miri, Lushai and Mikir. Kharia, Munda, Birhor, Santhal, Asur and Birja tribes live in West Bengal, Bihar and Sikkim. Bhotia, Tharu and Birkol tribes live in Uttarakhand.
- 2. Central Region:** This is another major belt of tribes extending between valleys of Narmada and Godavari. This zone separates north India from southern peninsula. This belt includes tribes of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar,

Jharkhand and Odisha. Main tribes are Birhor, Oraon, Bhil, Santhal, Munda, Toda, Meo, Rawat and Maria etc.

- 3. Southern Region:** Tribes inhabiting in peninsula fall in this belt. Toda, Gond, Pajra, Lambari, Sumali and Puniyan tribes of this belt live in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu.

Tribal Economy

The tribal people depends mainly primary activities for their livelihood. Some important economies are:

- 1. Shifting Agriculture:** Shifting agriculture is common among north eastern tribes known as jhum. In this a piece of forest area is cut down and then crops are grown there. After some time, the area becomes unfertile and they leave it for some time and clear another piece of land.
- 2. Lumbering:** It is the process of taking wood from forest. Tribal people use forest wood to keep them warm and in other household activities.
- 3. Hunting and fishing:** Many tribes live in forest areas and do economic activities of hunting, gathering and fishing. They take fruits, nuts, honey, and edible roots from forest. Reddi, Garasia, Koya, Kharia, Birhor, Korwa, Kuki, Naga tribes are involved in these activities.
- 4. Sedentary cultivation and animal husbandry:** In sedentary agriculture, farmer grows crops for his own

family requirement and does not sell the surplus in market. Animal husbandry is the rearing of animals for domestic requirements. Khasa, Bhotia, Santhal Munda, Gond, Bhil, Barali, Koli tribes do these activities.

Tribal Problems

Earlier tribes lived in hilly and forested areas without any contact with other people. In 19th and 29th century due to fast population growth and modern means of transport and communication, the peasants of plain invaded the sparsely populated tribal region of middle and south India. These conditions created a lot of problems for tribal population. Some important problems are:

1. **Less means of communication:** Tribal live in remote and inaccessible areas and there is a lack of means of communication. For their upliftment, means of communication are necessary to their interaction with outer people of outer world. Mass media and transportation facilities should be developed.
2. **Less health facilities:** In tribal areas, due to lack of safe drinking water supply, many water borne diseases like diarrhea, dysentery, worm cholera are common among tribes. Goiter caused by deficiency of iodine is common in Himalayan. Due to less production, nutritional deficiency is common in tribes. They are not ready for medical treatment and depend on local remedies in spite of medical facilities.
3. **Lack of education:** In 2011, literacy rate is very low (58.96%) among scheduled tribes. The low level of education among tribes is due to non recognition of tribal languages, lack of infrastructural facilities and shortage of schools, fear of cultural disintegration and general ignorance about utility of modern education also responsible for low literacy (Chandna, 2011) [2]. Tribal villages are widely dispersed and children have to go to a far distant for their education.
4. **Land alienation:** Land alienation within tribes is a serious problem resulting from the unsatisfactory state of land records Due to low agricultural production, tribes have to purchase a lot of things from market. They also need many for various day to day life necessities. This leads to land alienation. Alienation of land deprives several tribal communities of their livelihood. There should be special protection for preventing land alienation from lesser-developed tribes, and equal distribution of land.
5. **Forest policy:** Tribes depend on forests to get food, fruits, herbs, edible roots. They are known as forest dwellers. The govt. forest policies to exploiting timber and minerals from forest area, the tribal's are being exploited by forest officials, revenue officers and private contractors. Some forested should be reserved for their livelihood as their economy is forest based. Strict laws should be imposed on contractors.
6. **Alcoholism:** Alcoholism is common among tribes. They use liquor prepared from fermentation of rice and millets on the occasion of festivals, marriages and other ceremonies. Later, distilled liquor was used under license that increased their indebtedness.
7. **Poverty:** The most serious problem among tribes is

poverty: The main reasons for their indebtedness are poor and primitive mode of agriculture, ignorance, low production, poverty, deficit economy, loss of tribal right over land and forest, expenditure beyond their means. These factors makes them easy victims for money lenders to take their land permanently. So, tribal should be educated enough to be aware about their resources and their proper utilization.

8. **Fear of extinction:** Jarawas, Onges tribes of Andaman and Nicobar are going to be extinct. The main factors for extinction are poverty, indebtedness, forest policy, scarcity, fear of nature, less productivity, lack of safe drinking water and many diseases (Singh, 1972) [6]. Special policies should be developed for such tribal groups to bring them in the mainstream.
9. **Shifting Agriculture:** It is a practice of agriculture in hilly areas inhabited by tribes. In this, large forest area is cut down and burn to clear the land for agriculture. It is also called slash and burn or jhuming agriculture. About 2.6 million tribal people practice shifting agriculture. This causes damage to forest and loss of fertility. People should be made aware about ill effects of shifting agriculture and a proper monitoring system should be implemented. Special policies should be developed for such tribal groups

Programmes for tribal development

After independence, many steps have been taken for tribal development. The Tribal Advisory and District Councils established for their development (Article, 46). Governments have started many provisions such as financial incentives in form of scholarships, free books, boarding facilities, facility of ration and reservation quota in educational institutions. Integrated Tribal Development Blocks (ITDB) was introduced to solve problems of illiteracy, drought, famine, indebtedness and exploitation. Adivasi Mahila Sashastikaran Yojna was started for tribal women. The Christian missionaries have played an important role in development of tribes. The PESA (The Panchayat Extension to scheduled areas) Act, 1996 directed state governments to make special provisions for the tribal people. Now the tribal population has been exposed to the process of modernization with urbanization and industrialization. Consequently, they have shown progress in education and other fields of life.

Conclusion

The scheduled tribes known as adivasi constitutes about 8.61 percent of total population of India in 2011 census having distinctive culture, primitive traits, hesitation in contact to public, geographical isolation and social and economic backwardness. Most of tribal areas live in hilly, undulating plateau, and forested areas having low density of population, and lack basic amenities of education, health, employment opportunities. In Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Dadra and Nagar Haveli, the scheduled tribe population constitutes more than half of total population. Lowest scheduled tribe population is found in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Kerala, and Uttarakhand. The physical infrastructure is inadequate in tribal areas due to economic non viability, high cost, difficulty in maintenance. There is a

need to allocate more funds for developing infrastructural facilities in tribal areas.

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