



Notion of Indian Tribe—Triableness in Academic Discourse (A Journey from Colonial Legacy)

AMITABHA SARKAR^{*1} AND SAMIRA DASGUPTA²

¹*Retd. Superintending anthropologist, Anthropological Survey of India, AG-44. Salt Lake, Sector-2, Kolkata. E-mail: bhabbinimay@yahoo.com*

²*Retd. Assistant Anthropologist, Anthropological Survey of India. AG-44. Salt Lake, Sector-2, Kolkata. E-mail: bhabbinimay@yahoo.com*

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Abstract: Indian subcontinent is composed of cultural mosaic of different ethnic groups with their distinct cultural identities. After the passage of 79 years of independence, the Indian society is still blighted with some age-old problems of social stigma. People of India are differentiated as high, low, scheduled, non-scheduled, untouchables etc. and the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes continue to occupy the lower and tail end of social ranking and economic strata.

India is home to a rich tapestry of tribal communities, collectively known as *Adivasis*, representing a significant portion of the country's population. These communities, recognized as Scheduled Tribes (STs) under the Indian Constitution, have distinct cultures, traditions, and languages, often residing in geographical isolation. While they contribute significantly to India's cultural diversity, they also face unique challenges in their livelihood pattern; but political party in our country use their view like caste identity or religious or other diverse identities to muster votes. Under this backdrop in the present treatise we try to understand the notion of Indian Tribes in the present social scenario of globalised open-market economy where the traditional value system is feeble. The Indian Tribal groups, who are marginalised, placed in one end of continuum while other end is modern-urban society; both the groups having a wide socio-cultural diversity. With the extensive empirical studies among different tribal groups the present authors identified some cultural markers, chiefly applicable among PVTGs for inclusion in the list of tribe. Since Indian tribal situation is completely different from western world therefore, our interest is to find out indigenous way of identifying a group bring clarity in the conception of tribe through our personal empirical studies as well as with the help of cultural categories or attributes for identify a group constitute as a tribe and become included in the ST list or not.

Keywords: Tribal, Continuum, Grind of Consumerism, Evolutionary Scale, Particularistic aspect, Mode of Production

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I. Introduction

Unity and Diversity in India as two ends of a continuum, the two concepts retain both their distinctiveness and inter-linkages. A deft management of diversity is a continuous process or part of a ceaseless effort that goes on, in a plural society to achieve a harmonious interdependent coexistence amongst communities instating on maintaining the distinctiveness of their identity (Mehra, 2000).

Kothari (1988) crisply describes the historical process that beaded India's socio-cultural diversity into a thread of unity. He says, the striking thing about India's historical culture is the great variety of heterogeneity that it has encompassed and preserved. This is owing to many reasons—the diversity of ethnic and religious groups that have come in succession and settled down.

Another significant feature of socio-cultural diversity in India as observed by Kothari (1998) is that, “highly differentiated social system that has brought functional hierarchies, spatial distinctions and ritual distance into a manifold frame of identification and interdependence”. The existence of ‘a manifold frame of identification’, or layers of diverse identification, at times overlapping with and cutting across each other blunt the edges of any singular frame of identification. Competition amongst communities and their demands for a just or a larger share in the national economic cake from the Indian state, apparently creates conflict, sometimes violent ones, but in the long run it has developed their stake in the unity of the nation.

Under this backdrop in the present treatise we try to understand the notion of Indian Tribes in the present social scenario of globalised open-market economy where the traditional value system is feeble. The Indian Tribal groups, who are marginalised, placed in one end of continuum while other end is modern-urban society; both the groups having a wide socio-cultural diversity but political party in our country use their view like caste identity or religious or other diverse identities to muster votes (Kothari, 1970).

II. Notion of Tribe by Commoners

India is home to a rich tapestry of tribal communities, collectively known as Adivasis, representing a significant portion of the country's population. These communities, recognized as Scheduled Tribes (STs) under the Indian Constitution, have distinct cultures, traditions, and languages, often residing in geographical isolation. While they contribute significantly to India's cultural diversity, they also face unique challenges related to social, economic, and environmental issues.

The need to concentrate on tribal became serious after 1950 when Indian Constitution brought out a new set of value where emphasized was given for the integration of tribal into the national mainstream. It was not possible to boost only high caste people to progressive level by chaining the tribal.

It is reported that there was a gale of academic discourse during Indian Anthropological Congress (INCAA Conference), 2025 at Salt Lake , Kolkata on a consensus discussion for identifying a distinct scale of difference between tribe and caste of India. During such roundtable ardent discussion on such issue before the reputed scholars of Indian Anthropology but unable to reach any conclusive point (Sahay, 2025).

Though tribe is never a part of Caste system; but often caste and tribe are used synonymously in India. It is to put an end to this myth of putting caste and tribe together that the constitution of India created a unified Commission for SC and STs though , theoretically caste is different.

In order to understand the concept of Tribe in the present socio-cultural context of the country we have canvassed this question among some common people of varied professions in order to understand the dichotomy of view on 'Tribe' by a group of people whose life and action are around materialistic world of possession and acquiring of wealth and lead a luxurious life. The most touchy as well as sensitive answer we got from a Young Rising Business Entrepreneurs'- 'Sayan', having a degree of Graduate Engineer from Manipal Institute of Technology (Karnataka) and MBA from SVKM's Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies (NMIMS), attached with a multi-national company (EXL) - located at USA; he narrated his view on Indian Tribe as – tribe is a group of people who dress in similar clothing which are not conventional as per the modern world, they use clothing as a form of identity. They are driven by a deeper cause or simply by the pursuit of life in its purest, most unfiltered form –free from the grind of consumerism and the illusion of modern success. Tribe would focus more on existing and enjoying life at its purest form; while they seem different from the modern concept of Man, a tribe is usually more unified through Nature, Music, Belief System or physical attributes, with a highly enhanced perception of life and often tend to personify these attributes around them.

For example, a tribe in the forest would talk to the air, worship non-living forms and consider water as a living being. Similarly, a tribe like Banjara could consider music as a living deity and worship.

When we asked “how you consider water as a living being?”

Answer : My personal exposure with forest, hills and the inhabitants there – 'tribes have considered water, as a living being because of its might, the sound it makes and

the way it nurtures other life forms. There are instances where things like lightening's have been considered as a powerful force which can turn evil floods if not prayed against or worshipped.

Hence, some modern concepts of conservation can also be drawn parallels from tribes or tribal people protecting or conserving natural resources (in abundance) through their belief system.

Informant 'Sayan', 31 years -being a member of urban gentry, enmeshed with modern materialistic world in his livelihood and placed one end of continuum while the feeling of marginalised community of our country—the other end of continuum, is very thought provoking as we feel being anthropologists.

Actually, the notion of tribe does not have its origin in India. It is in all respect, a colonial construct. It is usually associated with a specific geographical territory, a distinct dialect with a common name. According to Nihar ranjan Ray (1972), a historian, “with the rise and growth of nationalism in Europe, the term ‘tribe’ came to be used in denotation of particular state of socio-political evolution of a community of people within a given territory and language area. Class, tribe, nation etc, thus came to denote the various successive stages in the progressive march of people aspiring towards nationhood”.

In continuation of Ray's notion which applicable to European nation, the foreign anthropologists, worked in India , had in mind was alike to Europe. The British Anthropologists like Hunter, Risley, Russell, O'Malley etc, had a feeling that if the British had to settle in India, then they had to bring the Indian tribal, living in remote corners, into the mainstream for the sake of their dynasty and for the execution of the equal polity.

This apart, the Indian tribal may be viewed as a group of people passing through a period of socio-economic evolution. The groups which live in the plains placed higher in evolutionary scale because of their contacts and facilities they enjoy while, physical constraints due to geographical terrain, or a kind of isolation kept the tribal as backward, and put them into the evolutionary ladder at the bottom.

There are, therefore, a large number of factors which impinge on us to bring them at par with the lifestyle of mainstream population of our country; secondly, the historical and ethnic differences between the tribal society and caste society to be bridged; and thirdly, the tribal have to be adequately compensated for the injustice, exploitations and discrimination for which they are till date segregated.

III. View on Tribe : Foreign Anthropologists

Maurice Godlier (1978) –a Marxist anthropologist viewed 'tribe' on a universal plane, and understand tribe by a type of society which is different from other societies.

“Anthropologists, when using the term ‘tribe’, refer to two realities; which are different, but linked. A type of society having, one specific mode of social organisation which can be compared to other mode of organisation and differs from others. It also signals a stage of evolution in human society”. Infact according to Godlier, the mode of production determines the social organisation of a group and the mode of production of tribal are different from non-tribal. Here, Godlier applies Marxian framework of mode of production in the analysis of tribe.

According to Julian Steward (2009)-- who worked on evolution (doctrine of Multi-linear evolution and culture ecology) calls the concept of tribe as a “Holdall” concept. (Quoted from Doshi and Jain, 2009). It includes everything, and excludes nothing. Godlier concept of tribe is in a state of crisis both theoretically and ideologically. In India there are many people who argue that the safeties and securities given to tribals have created an ideological war between tribe and caste (Doshi and Jain, 2009).

According to Morgan (1997, Reprinted of 1871) the tribal forms of social organisation are specific. He says that in a tribal society kinship relations dominate all forms of relations. In these kinship relations, there is an integral logic and social anthropologist tries to identify the *internal logic*. This logic could be identified by the study of marriage rules and kinship terminologies, customary rules and laws. According to Morgan such social organisation having the following traits:

(a) it is not civilized, (b) it is not political society, (c) it is not a state, (d) it is a collection of clans, (e) it has name, (f) it has separate dialect, (g) it has a government.

While, Marshall Sahlins (1962) –an American anthropologist argues that tribe can be properly analysed if looked at from evolutionary and historical perspective. According to him there are four stages of the development of the concept of tribe, viz, (i) the band (ii) the tribe (iii) the chiefdom and (iv) the state. In his later work of 1968 he arranged these stages into three and eliminate the chiefdom stage. His definition of tribe “a tribe is of the order of a large collection of bands but it is not simply a collection of bandsthere is a kingdom also which co-ordinates economic, social and religious activities and redistributed a large part of the production of local community”.

Sahlins differs from Morgan. His thrust of definition is on the collection of bands. For a tribe some government is essential. This government co-ordinates other activities of the tribe. Thus it is clear that tribe is a collection of clans or bands; it has name, it is a kind of society having some specific mode of production and is at certain level of development stage.

According to Gillin and Gillin (1948) considers tribe as any collection of pre-literate local group that occupies a common general territory, speaks a common language and practices a common culture.

Lucy Philip Mair (1970) defines tribe as an independent political division of a population with a common culture.

However, “our understanding of a tribe is based on the European concept which is a universalistic perspective. Now with the particularistic approach the definition of tribe in Indian context may be discussed” (Doshi and Jain, 2003).

View on Tribe : Indian Scholars

Niharranjan Ray (1972) in a seminar (Seminar held on 1969) at the Indian Institute Advanced Study, Simla presented his view of tribe as “the so called tribals of India, are the indigenous, autochthonous people of the land, in the sense that they had been long settled in different parts of the country before the Aryan-speaking peoples penetrated India to settle down first in the Kabul and Indus valley and then within a millennium and a half to spread out over large parts of the country along with the plains and river valleys”. Ray explains the term ‘tribe’ from the historical point of view. He further pointed out that the tribals had an underdeveloped economy; they practice agriculture and animal husbandry.

Tribals in India are known as several names like—*Vanvasi, Girijan, Vanyajati, Adivasi, Janjati* etc. Before the promulgation of the Constitution social –cultural anthropologists in India made an attempt to define Indian tribes which are on historical perspective. With extensive field work among various tribal groups by some Indian Anthropologists developed to understand the concept of tribe as:-

According to Majumdar (1937) “a tribe is a social group with territorial affiliations, endogamous, with no specialisation of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditary, or otherwise, united in a language or dialect, recognizing social distance from the other tribes, following tribal traditions, beliefs and customs illiberal and naturalization of ideas from alien sources”.

According to Elwin (1943), ‘the tribals are the original settlers to this land. They lived with nature and their habits and way of life are conditioned by nature. When these tribals come in contact with the non-tribals, they are likely to shed their qualities of life. And that is their loss of nerve. They should be kept isolated from the mainline of civilization.

The proposition made by Elwin created a debate in India. According to Elwin isolation would keep them backward, ignorant, poor and illiterate. At a later stage Elwin proposed -*Public Park Theory*. According to this theory , the tribal area should be cordoned off from the main civilization. However, at the end of his life Elwin changed his theory and pressed for the integration of tribals on the basis of their genius.

G.S.Ghurye (1943) was against Elwin's '*Public Park Theory*'. He considers that "tribals are a part of Hindu society; they could be considered as backward caste Hindus. According to him tribals all over the country are increasingly assimilating themselves into Hindu castes".

N.K. Bose (2023, Reprinted) says that the tribals are original inhabitants of this country, but they are increasingly coming within the fold of Hinduism; while talking on Hindu method of Tribal absorption he also pleads for a secular model for integrating the tribals.

Bailey (1960) studied the Konds of Orissa. He studied Tribe, Caste and Nation and establishes their co-relation. He says that the Konds are a tribal group in the sense that they share a common culture and speak a common language- '*kui*'. From a linguistic point of view Bailey says that the tribe and caste have separate identities. He further pointed out that Kond politics based on agnatic kinship relationship. It has a segmentary system. For him tribal society is a segmentary society moving from its status of tribe to caste and finally nation.

As per Bhowmick (1980) "tribal in general have some common cultural patterns or ways of living through similarity of traits in material culture largely depends on ecology and geo-physical condition, lack of specialisation i.e. least functional interdependence can be considered as a basic criterion to differentiate a tribe from rest of the people. Again the tribal communities are found to cling to a crude economic state or organisation, i.e. primitiveness in technology and this may be considered as one of the important criterion. They must have a common dialect of their own and this enables them to make the group together. Homogeneity or lack of social stratification is another characteristics feature of tribal attribute. Prolonged isolation or being engulfed by the dominance of people of better economic status may in many cases, dilute the linguistic oneness as in the case of Lodhas of Midnapur, Oraon of Sundarban, West Bengal. But in their traditional songs and incantation, their original vocabulary can easily be identified".

L.P. Vidyarthi and Binay Kumar Rai (1985) published a major book on tribes and tribal life in India. In their book they discussed economic, social, political and religious organisations of Indian tribals. According to Vidyarthi and Rai, tribes of India live in forests, hills and isolated regions. They have been in continuous contact with neighbouring communities and live by farming and working in industries. Concept of Tribe till today they retain their tradition and custom. They form socially distinct communities in contrast to their neighbours. According to them it is these communities which have been designated tribes. Indian constitution listed the tribes in a schedule for special treatment.

According to Vidyarthi and Rai(1985) view ‘Tribal people of India’- divided into seven cultural markers, viz,

1. Forest Hunting Group—eg. Birhor, Korwa.
2. Primitive Hill Cultivation—eg. Birjia.
3. Plain Agricultural Type— eg. Oraon, Santal, Munda.
4. Simple Artisan Group—eg. Lohra, Karmali.
5. The Pastoral and Cattle Herders --eg. Toda.
6. Industrial.
7. Urban.

The criteria have been made on evolutionary scale with developmental perspectives.

In Andre Beteille’s view (1986, 2008), defining the concept of “tribe” is fraught with difficulties, both conceptually and empirically. He argues that while the idea of a tribe as a self-contained, distinct social unit with its own government and territory is useful, it doesn’t fully capture the complexities of tribal societies as they exist. Beteille emphasizes that tribal societies are not isolated entities but have often coexisted and interacted with other social formations, like caste-based societies, for extended periods.

Here’s a more detailed breakdown of Beteille’s perspective:

- **Challenges in Defining “Tribe”:** Beteille acknowledges that defining “tribe” is problematic because the term has been used in various ways throughout history and across different cultures.
- **Ideal Type vs. Empirical Reality:** He suggests that the idea of a tribe as a self-contained, isolated society with its own territory, government, and culture is an “ideal type” that may not accurately reflect the reality of many tribal groups.
- **Interactions with Other Social Formations:** Beteille highlights the historical and ongoing interactions between tribal societies and other social structures, particularly caste-based systems, in places like India. He points out that the British colonial administration played a role in defining and separating tribes from the broader Hindu society.
- **Multiple Criteria for Defining Tribes:** While acknowledging the difficulties, Beteille suggests that a definition of tribe might incorporate criteria such as language, culture, economy, kinship systems, and religious practices (like animism or totemism).

Beyond Ecological and Political Criteria:

- He argues that ecological and political factors alone are not sufficient to define a tribe, as tribal societies often exhibit diverse political organizations and interactions with their environment.
- **Tribe and Civilization:** Beteille emphasizes that the concept of “tribe” has often been contrasted with “civilization,” particularly in colonial contexts, where the former was sometimes seen as less developed or advanced than the latter.
- **Need for Empirical Research:** Beteille’s work underscores the importance of empirical research and nuanced understanding when studying tribal societies, rather than relying on simplistic or preconceived definitions.

According to K.S Singh, during the colonial period, tribals outside North-East closely integrated with the prevailing colonial system of economy and administration. Interaction of peasants and tribes led to the development of settled agriculture as the primary mode of subsistence in pre-colonial period. This process accentuated in the colonial period and helped tribal peasants (Singh, 1994).

While, Danda’s (1991) view on ‘ethnicity’, not specifically on ‘tribe’, is that ethnicity not as a fixed categorization but as a dynamic strategy of interest alliances emphasizing the multiplicity of identities and loyalties within India’s multicultural context. To him it changes with time and space. He emphasized the importance of boundaries in understanding ethnic dynamics and acknowledges the potential clash of cultural and political mechanism in maintaining these boundaries. Further, he moves away from western models that primarily focus on fixed criteria and the relationship between mainstream and minority groups. His views of ethnicity as a strategy of interest alliance, a state of dynamic equilibrium that shifts and changes based on individual or group experiences and stimuli.

According to Xaxa (2008) , the term “tribe” was used by British in more than one sense. In one sense the word denotes a group of people having a common ancestor. In another sense it refers to a group of people living in primitive conditions. To him, different criteria used by anthropologists to define tribe were not clear. To justify his argument he further says earlier tribes were distinguished from non-tribes on the basis of their religion, but religion could not become a satisfactory criterion to define a tribe when census officials found it difficult to separate animism from religion of lower strata of Hindu society. Consequently identity of tribes was changed from animists to backward Hindus. There is then something clumsy about the use of the

term tribe in describing Indian social reality. Virginius Xaxa (1999) defines tribes as indigenous people. According to him, there are three aspects, which are central to the conceptualisation of the indigenous people--

- 1) The indigenous people are those people who lived in the country to which they belong, before colonisation or conquest by people from outside the country or geographical region.
- 2) They have become marginalised as an aftermath of conquest and colonisation by the people from outside the region.
- 3) Indigenous people govern their life more in terms of their own social, economic and the cultural institutions than the laws applicable to the society or the country at large.

IV. Government Definition

The term 'Scheduled Tribes' first appeared in the Constitution of India. Article 366 (25) defined scheduled tribes as "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". Article 342, which is reproduced below, prescribes procedure to be followed in the matter of specification of scheduled tribes.

Constitution Article 342

The President may, with respect to any State or Union territory, and where it is a state, after consultation with the Governor there of by public notification, specify the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which shall, for the purposes of this constitution, be deemed to be scheduled tribes in relation to that state or Union Territory, as the case may be.

Parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of Scheduled tribes specified in a notification issued under clause (1) any tribe or tribal community or part of or group within any tribe or tribal community, but save as aforesaid, a notification issued under the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification.

Thus, the first specification of Scheduled Tribes in relation to a particular State/ Union Territory is by a notified order of the President, after consultation with the State governments concerned. These orders can be modified subsequently only through an Act of Parliament. The above Article also provides for listing of scheduled tribes State/ Union Territory wise and not on an all India basis.

The criterion followed for specification of a community, as scheduled tribes are indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness. This criterion is not spelt out in the Constitution but has become well established. It subsumes the definitions contained in 1931 Census, the reports of first Backward Classes Commission 1955, the Advisory Committee (Kalelkar), on Revision of SC/ST lists (Lokur Committee), 1965 and the Joint Committee of Parliament on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes orders (Amendment) Bill 1967 (Chanda Committee), 1969.

In exercise of the powers conferred by Clause (1) of Article 342 of the Constitution of India, the President, after Consultation with the State Governments concerned have promulgated so far 9 orders specifying the Scheduled Tribes in relation to the state and union territories. Out of these, eight are in operation at present in their original or amended form. One order namely the Constitution (Goa, Daman & Diu) Scheduled Tribes order 1968 has become defunct on account of reorganization of Goa, Daman & Diu in 1987. Under the Goa, Daman & Diu reorganization Act 1987 (18 of 1987) the list of Scheduled Tribes of Goa has been transferred to part XIX of the Schedule to the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 and that of Daman & Diu II of the Schedule of the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) (Union Territories) Order, 1951.

Table 1: Date of Notification of Government Order state wise

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Name Of Order</i>	<i>Date of Notification</i>	<i>Name Of States/ Ut(S) For Which Applicable</i>
1	The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order 1950 (C.O.22)	6-9-1950	Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura And West Bengal.
2	The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) (Union Territories) Order, 1951 (C.O.33)	20-9-1951	Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep
3	The Constitution (Andaman and Nicobar Islands) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1959 (C.O. 58)	31-3-1959	Andaman And Nicobar Islands
4	The Constitution (Dadra & Nagar Haveli) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1962 (C.O. 65)	30-6-1962	Dadra & Nagar Haveli
5	The Constitution (Uttar Pradesh) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1967 (C.O. 78)	24-6-1967	Uttar Pradesh
6	The Constitution (Nagaland) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1970 (C.O.88)	23-7-1970	Nagaland

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Name Of Order</i>	<i>Date of Notification</i>	<i>Name Of States/ Ut(S) For Which Applicable</i>
7	The Constitution (Sikkim) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1978 (C.O.111)	22-6-1978	Sikkim
8	The Constitution Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Act, 1987	09.12.1987	Meghalaya
9	The Constitution (Jammu & Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1989 (C.O. 142)	7-10-1989	Jammu & Kashmir
10	The Constitution Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Act, 1991	17.09.1991	Jammu & Kashmir
11	The Constitution Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Act, 2002	03.06.2002	Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra
12	The Constitution Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Act, 2002	07.01.2003	Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Goa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Mizoram, Orissa, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal
13	The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, 2003	19.09. 2003	Assam
14	The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, 2006	12.12. 2006	Bihar
15	The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, 2008	01.04. 2008	Arunachal Pradesh
16	The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, 2013	18.09.2013	Kerala and Chhattisgarh
17	The Constitution (Puducherry) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1989 (C.O. 268)	22.12.2016	Puducherry

No community has been specified as Scheduled Tribe in relation to the State of Haryana and Punjab and Union Territories of Chandigarh, Delhi and Puducherry.

Article 342 provides for specification of tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which are deemed to be for the purposes of the Constitution the Scheduled Tribes in relation to that State or Union Territory. In pursuance of these provisions, the list of Scheduled Tribes are notified for each State or Union Territory and are valid only within the jurisdiction of that State or Union Territory and not outside.

The list of Scheduled Tribes is State/UT specific and a community declared as a Scheduled Tribe in a State need not be so in another State. The inclusion of a community as a Scheduled Tribe is an on-going process.

The essential characteristics of these communities are :

- Primitive traits
- Geographical isolation
- Distinct culture
- Shy of contact with community at large
- Economically backward

Tribal communities live, in various ecological and geo-climatic 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 certain Scheduled Tribes, 75 in number known as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), who are characterised by

- pre-agriculture level of technology
- stagnant or declining population
- extremely low literacy
- subsistence level of economy

The Scheduled Tribes are notified in 30 States / UTs and the number of individual ethnic groups, etc. notified as Scheduled Tribes is 705. The tribal population of the country, as per 2011 census, is 10.43 crore, constituting 8.6% of the total population. 89.97% of them live in rural areas and 10.03% in urban areas. The decadal population growth of the tribal's from Census 2001 to 2011 has been 23.66% against the 17.69% of the entire population. The sex ratio for the overall population is 940 females per 1000 males and that of Scheduled Tribes 990 females per thousand males.

Broadly the STs inhabit two distinct geographical areas – the Central India and the North- Eastern Area. More than half of the Scheduled Tribe population is concentrated in Central India, i.e., Madhya Pradesh (14.69%), Chhattisgarh (7.5%), Jharkhand (8.29%), Andhra Pradesh (5.7%), Maharashtra (10.08%), Orissa (9.2%), Gujarat (8.55%) and Rajasthan (8.86%). The other distinct area is the North East (Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh).

More than two-third of the ST population is concentrated only in the seven States of the country, viz. Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan,

Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. There is no ST population in 3 States (Delhi NCR, Punjab and Haryana) and 2 UTs (Puducherry and Chandigarh), as no Scheduled Tribe is notified.

Literacy rate

Table 2: The Progress over the Years on the Literacy Front

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total literate population	24%	29.4%	36.2%	52.2%	64.84%	73.00%
Scheduled Tribes (STs) population	8.5%	11.3%	16.3%	29.6%	47.10%	59.00%
Total female population	12.9%	18.6%	29.8	39.3%	53.67%	64.60%
Total Scheduled Tribes (STs) female population	3.2%	4.8%	8.0%	18.2%	34.76%	49.40%

Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

(There is no Census Survey in 2021 yet).

From aforesaid discussion it appears that the universalistic definition of tribe is euro-centric which has the feudal and colonial background of 19th century Europe; while, particularistic aspect given on the historical background of our country. Indian anthropologists' views on tribe are not homogenous and vary from one anthropologist to another. Under this backdrop of confusing heterogeneity, the Indian constitution has made a way out. It has laid down a democratic procedure to identify the tribal. The tribal are officially defined as Scheduled Tribe.

V. Empirical Studies

We also carried out extensive field work for more than 40 Scheduled Tribal groups in 6 different states of our country during our association with Anthropological Survey of India from 1977 to 2013. A list of such studied ST's list are given below :

1. Gujarat ----- Dhodia, Dubla, Kokna, Varli / Worli, Vaghri / Vagri. (Total 5 ST's)
2. Rajasthan----Bhil, Garasia. (Total 2 ST's)
3. West Bengal—Toto, Mech, Lodha, Bhumij, Kora and Santal. (Total 6 STs)
4. Jharkhand –Mal Paharia, Sauria Paharia, Munda, Oraon, Lohra, Karmali, Birjia, Asur, Kisan, Korwa, Gorait, Kharia, Chero, Kharwar, Binjhia, Parhaiya, Birhor, Chik Baraik, Gond, Mahali, Santal. (Total 21 ST's).

5. Chhattishgarh—Abujh Maria, Muria, Maria (Bison Horn Maria / Dandami Madia), Dorla, Dhurwa, Bhatra, Halba. (Total 7 ST's).
6. Odisha--- Bondo, Didyai, Kond (Total 3 ST's).

Amongst such studied tribal groups we also covered intensive Participation Observation among 14 PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) like Asur, Birjia, Birhor, Hill Kharia, Korwa, Mal Paharia, Sauria Paharia and Parhaiya of Jharkhand; Abujh Maria of Chhattishgarh; Bondo, Didyai, Dongria Khond of Odisha; and Lodha and Toto of West Bengal.

After such huge extensive empirical study we feel in the modern light of globalisation where socio-economic sphere is drastically affected with technological innovation the following attributes are marker for identifying tribal groups,(who are in the other end of continuum with poor achievement in social evolution), though which are chiefly restricted and applicable among the PVTG groups only. Now also time has come to exclude a few group from the ST list as has been done by Government of India earlier when about 15* such groups were de-listed or excluded.

To our consideration following attributes are applicable especially among PVTGs for identifying and inclusion in the group:

1. Restricted in a specific geographical territory with a low population,
2. Distinct Dialect,
3. Animistic form of oral religious belief system which are nature- centric and are very functional in terms of sustenance and conservation of environment through totem and taboo; possess a folk taxonomy of such beliefs like—sacred area, sacred specialist, sacred rituals; and sacred specialists are again stratified based on nature of work.
4. Mode of production is around subsistence economy which also dictates the social organisation especially kinship ties (that is, either patrilineal descent¹ or matrilineal descent² or bilateral descent³ or bifurcate merging system⁴ or generation system⁵ or lineal system⁶.)
5. Traditional governance with strong in-group feelings of sovereignty and maintain endogamy,
6. They are segmentary society , i.e. no specialisation in economic pursuits, self-sufficient,
7. Deceased spirit are established in the room , close to hearth / store place to get blessings from them,
8. Having a notion of Purity – pollution concept for strengthen endogamy,

9. Shyness in contact with outsiders especially in the remote, hilly and forest area due to such significantly poor in literacy.

Conclusion

Now time has come to review all the enlisted tribal groups for extending the benefits as provided by our Constitution. According to empirical situation as we observed that the PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) are more suitable to enjoy all the facilities in the present day since they possess all the cultural markers mentioned above as mentioned in previous page which are product of our extensive field works. “There is no denial of the fact that though the craze of entitlements to ‘quota’ benefits cut-across space as well as socio-cultural boundaries, in reality they never come without a stigma” (Danda, 2016). The perception of tribe as such in the western sense of the term appears an uneasy relocate to the social and cultural realities of India; hence, a fresh review of enlisting of Scheduled Tribal groups is required.

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Notes

*: According to Ministry of Tribal Affairs Annual Report of 2002-03, there were some De-listed or excluded tribal groups from some specific states like in Gujarat –Koli of Kutch District (Sr.No. 11 of State wise List of ST’s in India) and Pardhi (Sr.No. 20) ; in Kerala –Konda Kapus (Sr.No.11 of State wise List of ST’s in India), Konda Reddi (Sr.No. 12), Kota (Sr.No. 14), Kammara (Sr.No.7), Marathi (in Hosdrug, Kasargod taluq of Cannanore [Kannur] District, Sr.No. 28); in Madhya Pradesh—Keer (in Bhopal, Raisena, Sehore Districts, Sr.No. 21), Mina (in Siranj Sub-division of Vidisha District, Sr.No. 32), Pardhi (in Bhopal , Raisena and Sehore Districts, Sr.NO. 39), in Maharashtra –Chodhara (Sr.No. 12), Thoti (in Aurangabad, Beed / Bhir, Nanded, Osmanabad and Parbani Districts, Sr.No. 45); in Bihar ---Bhumij (Sr.No.6); in Andhra Pradesh – Chenchwar (Sr.No. 4 of earlier list of 1971,Census of India). Therefore, it is clearly evident that there are some provisions in our Constitution, according to Article 342, to exclude some community after maintaining the existing guidelines and also to include by same procedures.

1. Patrilineal descent : affiliates the child exclusively with the consanguineal kin group of the father.
2. Matrilineal descent ; which assigns the child exclusively to his mother's kin group).
3. Bilateral Descent. - When a person is affiliated with a group of close relatives through both sexes ; it limits the number of close relatives by excluding some of both the father's kin group and mother's kin groups.
4. Bifurcate merging : Lineage system of descent groups tend to produce bifurcate-merging systems of terminology. Father's brother is merged with father, while both are distinguished from Mother's brother. Put in another way, father and paternal uncle are lumped, and maternal uncle is distinguished. Likewise, Mother and maternal aunt are lumped, and paternal aunt is distinguished. Members of the two descent groups are vigorously kept separate from each other.
5. Generation : The emphasis in this type of system is on merging of all relatives on a given generational level. Thus, mother mother's sister and father's sister are all lumped under a single kinship term. The same is true of Father, father's brother and mother's brother).
6. Lineal: This system emphasizes the distinction between direct ascendant and descendant relatives as separate from mother's sister, and father's sister, who are merged as in English Aunt. The same holds for father and his collaterals, who are merged as in English Uncle. Lineal systems are also associated with bilateral system of descent groups.

Note : On the basis of our empirical studies among different tribal groups in various states ,we expressed our conclusive observations for consideration following attributes which are applicable especially among PVTGs for identifying and inclusion in the group. A list of those Books is listed below:

1. 1993. *TOTO: Society And Change (A Sub-Himalayan Tribe of West Bengal)* Calcutta: Firma KLM Pvt.Ltd.
2. 1993. *DHODIA:Industrialisation and Change in a Primitive Community*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.
3. 1994. Birjia: Society and Culture(A Study in Cultural Ecological Perspective), Calcutta:Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd
4. 1995. *In Search of Alternatives: Tribal Women in Desert Scenario*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.
5. 1996. *Spectrum of Tribal Bastar*, Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, (Co-author).
6. 1996. *Frontiers of Social Anthropology*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, (Co-author).

7. 1996. Fundamentals of Social-Cultural Anthropology, Calcutta: Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd.
8. 2000. Ethno-Ecology of Indian Tribes: Diversity in Cultural Adaptation, Jaipur: Rawat Publications, (Co-author).
9. 2005. Reflection of Ethno-Science: study on the Abujh Maria, Delhi: Mittal Publications.
10. 2009. Heritage Tourism: An Anthropological Journey to Bishnupur, New Delhi: Mittal Publication.
11. 2010. Religious belief and Practices (A Portrayal of the Integrative process), New Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan.
12. 2011. Mal Paharia Culture at the Crossroad, New Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan.
13. 2012. Rhythm of Tribal Culture--an Unveil Saga, Germany : Lambert Academic Publishing.
14. 2012. *Traditional Knowledge in Indian Society*, (ed.), Amitabha Sarkar, A.V. Arakeri, Suresh Patil, Kolkata : Anthropological Survey of India,
15. 2013. *Traditional Wisdom and Sustainable Living : A Study on the Indian Tribal Societies*. (ed.) by H.R. Mandal and Amitabha Sarkar, New Delhi and Kolkata , Anthropological Survey of India. and Gyan Publishing House.
16. 2014. The Fuming Forest : an analytical Critique, New Delhi: Mittal Publication
17. 2016. Indigenous People: In Search of Identity (A Quest for Social Identity of Pano or Kui Domanga), New Delhi :Mittal Publications
18. 2024. Bastar : The Polity of Sub-alterns in the State System, , Delhi : Agam Kala Prakashan. [This apart, both the authors has contributed total 66 write-ups on various communities including SC and ST of Jharkhand of Bihar in Bihar Volume (Part one and two) in view of "People of India" project being associated with Anthropological Survey of India, Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India.
People of India : Bihar including Jharkhand, Vol. XVI (Part – One and Two), ((ed.),), K.S. Singh, Calcutta : Anthropological Survey of India and Seagull Books, 2008].

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