

Tribes: An indispensable stratification in the society

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Abstract:

My Article will essentially be dealing with the importance of categorization of tribe in India. There has been confusion with tribe, Caste system and religion. There are instances like tribals are considered as Dalits in the society. Whereas Dalits comes under the caste categorization of Hinduism and the tribals are of an ethnic group. Also, on the other hand there is this confusion based on religion. Tribals who change their believe from their current believe to the other believe are still tribals. There should be no misunderstanding about this because religion and ethnicity are of both very different categorization in the society.

The discussion on the importance of tribal community and their identity can be considered as the need of the hour, especially for the tribals in particular and at large the nation. With the advent of the colonization, one can see the impact on the identity of the tribals. Although, one cannot complete discard the positive impact the has been imparted by the colonizers but, there has been some significant adverse effect as well like changing the land ownership policy. This let to impact on the tribal mindset in the society. The tribals considers land as their source of cultural manifestations.

The impact on the identity imposed on the tribals by the colonizers are still prevalent even after 75th year of Independence, which we have recently celebrated with great pride and joy. Therefore, it is essential for the tribals to learn about their rights and educated the populous both the tribals as well as their counter-part to respect each other's uniqueness. As India is known for its diversity of different ethnicities, cultures, races etc. Most importantly, in order to protect and safeguard their identity and their culture, the tribals must also be more involved in legislative process.

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Introduction

In this study I would be dealing with the importance of categorization of different social groups based on the area, language, customs, culture, religion, racial characteristics, and other factors etc. There are many divisions and sub-division in the society in India, among them are tribes, caste, class etc. But, in this paper I will especially be dealing with the tribe categorization. Although, division of society with different categorization have many negative impacts on the society, but with it also comes with many positive impacts as well.

Categorization in the society as "tribe" plays a very vital role, it in fact can be considered as the pedestal on which the society stands on. It adds diversity to the society and not only that through it each tribe has their own sense of identity, without which they will

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have no identity, history of their-selves. Each tribe has their own unique characteristics based on the geographical area that they hail from, language, customs, culture, religion, racial characteristics, and other factors etc.

There have been many attempts, made by different Anthropologist in defining the term ‘Tribe’. But unfortunately, those attempts did not produce a concrete consensus on defining characteristics. The term ‘Tribe’ was derived from a Latin term “tribus” originated in ancient Rome, which means a division within a state. According to the Century Dictionary, this term refers to "a division of a barbarous race of people, usually distinguishable in some way from their congeners, united into a community under a recognized head or chief," but it can also be used more broadly to refer to any collection of people of a particular kind.

There are more than 370 million tribals and indigenous people found in more than 70 countries around the world. The tribals and the indigenous people are considered to have their own cultures, institutions, languages and customs. Their practices and believes are different from those settlers in the urbanized areas. There are no concrete definitions or explanations of the term ‘Tribe’ but the best suited categorization of the tribal section can be found in the Article 1 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) convention No. 169.

Objective of the study

India having the second largest concentration of tribal population in the world. My objectives of these study are to disseminate the understanding on the importance of the tribal and indigenous society structure in India, which is one of the fundamental issues concerning the identity of the tribal and indigenous society. With the growing globalization, it has been creating a confusion in the society, due to various reasons, mass media being one of the cardinal factors.

In order to retain our diverse and unique culture. As, contemporary generation is going through a situation of identity crisis. This study is not only applicable for the Indian tribal and Indigenous society but this study is also applicable for the tribals and indigenous people across the globe.

Methodology

My study will essentially be based on mostly secondary sources such as books, journals, newspapers, websites, government records etc. which are collected from different collections. I would also be using a constructivist methodology to derive some implication at the end of the paper.

Tribes in India: A Definition

Most tribal groups are rather tiny and reside in remote areas of the bush. They have no concept of written language, live in abject poverty, go about their days without covering their chests, tend to be of a dark, weak appearance, and are obsessed with nothing outside of their own culture. Traditional tribal diets often consist of roasted animals and a variety of wild plants, including roots, shoots, and fruits. In addition, they fight against any progress made in their direction. Tribes are "a group of families possessing a similar name, speaking a same dialect, inhabiting or purporting to occupy a common region and is not generally endogamous though initially it could have been so," according to the Imperial Gazetteer of India (1911).

Tribes in India vary from one another in appearance, language, culture, religion, and other defining features. The people of a certain tribe often have their own language and set of customs that set them apart from others. An older sense of the word "tribe" predated the modern use of the term in both the West and India.

In 1965, the Lokur Committee was established to investigate the many defining features of a tribal society. According to the committee's recommendations, it should display characteristics indicative of its primitive nature, such as a unique culture, a lack of interaction with the outside world, and a reluctance to stand out. The committee has also decided that tribes whose members have intermarried with non-tribal people are not qualified to be included on the list of Scheduled Tribes.

In India, the word "tribe" has never been adequately defined. Up until 1919, Native American communities were classified as the "backward class" and "depressed class." In the 1931 census, the indigenous people of India were classified as "primitive tribes," in the 1941 census they were classified as "tribes," and in the 1951 census they were classified as "scheduled tribes." "Schedule Tribes" is the legal term used for these communities under the Indian Constitution. Anusuchit Janjati is the Hindi name for "Schedule Tribe," which is synonymous with the terms Adivasi, Vanavasi, and Adimjati.

In India, the names used to refer to the country's indigenous peoples each have their own unique significance. The indigenous people of India are known by many different names, including "adivasi" (original settlers), "Scheduled tribes" (Anusuchit Janajati), "tribes," "Janajati" (folk communities), "Girijan" (hill dwellers), "Vanvasi" (forest dwellers), "Vanyajati" (forest caste), "Adimjati" (primitive caste) Article 366(25) and Article 342 of the Indian Constitution both refer to the indigenous peoples. Adivasi is the preferred self-designation of India's original inhabitants (original inhabitants). Adi means "original" or "from the beginning of time,"

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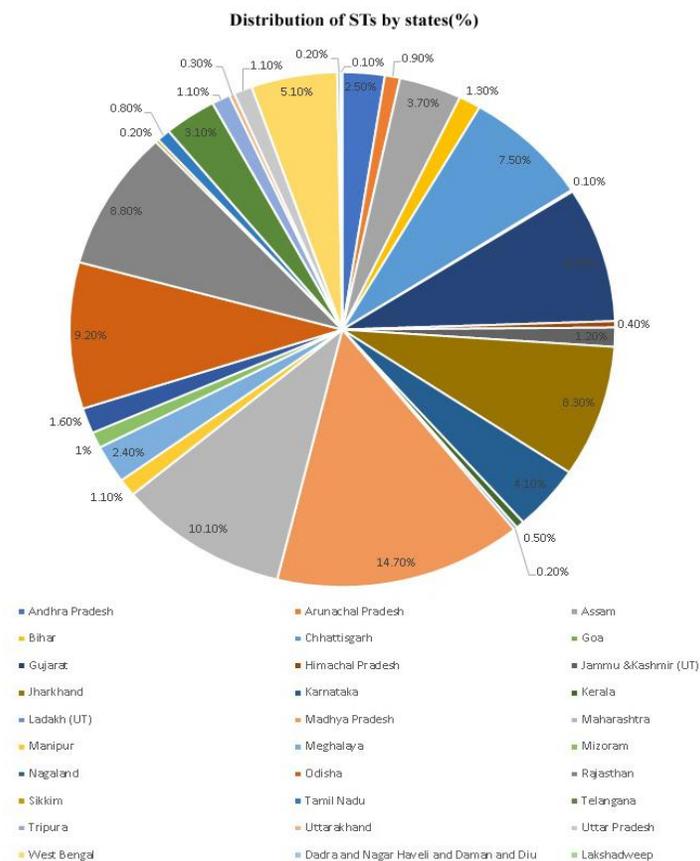
whereas Vasi means "dweller," "inhabitant," and "resident of." This identification with the term "Adivasi" is congruent with the modern conception of indigenous people.

Tribes in India

According to the Indian census report of 2011, the total population of the tribals in the country was 8.6% of the total population of the country, which is 10,42,81,034 persons. There are 705 Scheduled Tribes (both 'major' and 'minor') which have been recognized in accordance with Article 342 of the Indian Constitution, and they are dispersed across the nation's States and Union Territories. Most of the tribes can be found in more than a single state due to various reasons such as migration, trade, marriage, services etc. 89.97% of them live in rural areas and 10.03% in urban areas. The decadal population growth of the tribals from Census 2001 to 2011 has been 23.66% against the 17.69% of the entire population.

The state of Orissa has the highest concentration of scheduled tribes (i.e. 62). Some of the major tribes in India consist of Gonds, Santhals, Khasis, Angamis, Bhils, Bhutias, and Great Andamanese. Each of these tribes has its own culture, tradition, language, and way of life. Such tribes, which reside outside of the nation's centre, are numerous and widespread. However, there are a lot of more ethnic groups that are not recognized by the government who would be eligible for Scheduled Tribe designation. Find the percentage of STs in India from the report of ministry of tribal affairs, 2021-22 from the figure below.

Figure: State-wise distribution of STs (as per the 2011 census)



Source: - report of ministry of tribal affairs, 2021-22.

Tribes as a Cardinal Structure of the society

Identity can be understood as a composition of distinctive traits through which a person or a thing can be defined. The term identity can be applied to a singular thing or a multitude clustered together and forming a whole. Every individual has multiple identities of their own, as one is associated with different sets of groups or organizations such as tribes, languages, caste, class, etc. A person can be defined with different identities, as when someone is associated with any group, society, community, or any other associations one may be in, they adapt to those associations.

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Identity is always in the process of its evolution and it cannot be considered as permanent, depending on the influence on it. An individual can be identified with a particular identity or with multiple identities at a time depending on the situation one is in.

Indian society is very diverse in nature as it constitutes of different language, caste, religion and tribes. Tribes are communities. Although, the tribals are considered as the minority or the marginalized community in India. As every individual citizen of the country not only has the right in pursuing what is best for their communities but it also allows them safeguard and protect their identity. Despite being the marginalized community, they are still not neglected by the government and it has a special provision for the tribals in the Indian constitution.

Tribes play a very critical role in the social structure of the society. Since, every member of the tribals belongs to one or the other tribe and they are identified with that tribe. Just as every citizen of the country who don't belong to any tribal community but are member of other general community in the country are identified with their associated community.

In India, the tribal community established their identity through the natural resources surrounding them. The cultural, economic and social practices are major pillar of the identity the tribes present in India. The tribals has established a harmonious relationship between them and their natural surroundings comprising of not only the flora and fauna but also everything present in their surroundings. For the tribals in India land is not only the source of their sustenance, but it is the manifestation of their cultural Identity and their existence.

Before, the areas where the tribal people were settled were considered as 'rural' areas. But with the passage of time and the recognition from the government of India, those areas are called tribal areas. Although, most of the tribal areas are still under 'rural' areas but some of it has become urban, in particular the North-Eastern part of India. There are some tribal areas where there is limited to almost no contact with the tribal population of that area such in the Sentinelese in the Northern Sentinel Island.in the Bay of Bengal.

Amalgamation of tribal identity

There are many possibilities as to how there could be amalgamation of the tribal identity, as it is exposed to other identities. The amalgamation of tribal identity could lead to confusion of tribal identity. Due to which, it leads to multiple identity of an individual creating a delusion for the individual. The individual splits his identity into multiple identities and losses his real identity, which makes him alien to his original identity.

The state of confusion of identity is very much viable for the tribal of India as well. The tribals were address with different labels by the colonials and also in the census reports of India such as "Backward class", "depressed class", "primitive tribe" and "Schedule tribe" etc. This kind of labeling of has also contributed in the amalgamation of the tribal identity. It does have toll on the tribals in the long run. The confused identity is imposed on by external factors and it becomes an incoherent with the actual identity of the tribals.

There are many causes for the amalgamation of the tribal identity, one of which is based on land owner ship. Before the colonization, the Khuntkatti/Bhuinhari lands were considered as scared to the tribals. According to the tribals these lands were not supposed to be sold or bought but with British colonization, this changed and private ownership of the lands were introduced. This let to impact on the tribal mindset in the society. The tribals considers land as their source of cultural manifestations.

This has been done in order to keep up with the growth of the colonizers. Although, there is no doubt that the tribals as well has gained from this process. The lands were acquired by the colonizers, since the lands where the tribals were settled usually had huge deposits of minerals and natural resources. These natural resources were exploited with intend of making benefits without the concern for over exploitation, which may lead to jeopardizing the environmental. At present, the Indian constitution has a special provision not only for the protection of Tribal land but also its culture and their rights under the fifth Schedule of the Indian constitution.

One of the pivotal issues regarding the confusion of the tribal identity with other groups or communities is that they are sometimes considered as Dalits or the converts are considered non-tribals. Since, Dalits comes under the caste categorization of Hinduism and the tribals are of an ethnic group. On the other hand, tribals who change their believe from their current believe to the other believe are still tribals. There should be no misunderstanding about this because religion and ethnicity are of both very different categorization in the society.

Although, both religion and ethnicity are both identities of an individual. One fundamental difference between this category would be ethnic identity is always inherited from our past generation, while on the other hand religion is sometimes carried down through generations as well but one can choose one's own religion based on what one believes.

Conclusion

Although, India having the second largest concentration of tribal population in the world only after Africa. The tribal community are the marginalized group in the society, with which entails many problems faced by the tribals. There are some special provisions

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which has been created particularly for the tribal people by the Government of India under the Fifth Schedule of the Indian constitution. It does not always benefit the tribals, as these provisions are prone to manipulation. Since most of the tribals are not educated at par with their counter-part communities in order to be able to know their own rights.

It is essential to disseminate the understanding on the importance of the tribal and indigenous society structure in India, which is one of the fundamental issues concerning the identity of the tribal and indigenous society. It is also not only necessary for the tribals to be educated about their rights but it is equally important for their counter-parts as well to learn about the tribals and respect their cultural differences. This can begin from the tribal local areas, through the leaders being made aware by the literate section of the group. After which the leaders can further disseminate the knowledge imparted on them by the literate section of the society to the local community and creating a ripple effect on the whole community and nation at large.

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